

Friday Seminar

Karma and Grace: Religious Politics, Media & Pluralism in Sri Lanka

Neena Mahadev, Yale-NUS College



Based on her book, *Karma and Grace: Religious Difference in Millennial Sri Lanka* (Columbia University Press, 2023), Neena Mahadev will discuss the fraught politics of Buddhist-Christian conversion, religious media(tion), and pluralism. Her ethnography contributes dually to the anthropology of Christianity, and the anthropology of Buddhism. She characterizes her theory and method a “multicameral” approach to the study of pluralism. Her presentation will discuss the resurgence of inter-religious conflicts with the arrival of relatively new Pentecostal Christian styles of publicizing the “Good News,” as well as the receptivity and nativist resistances to it. The ethnography illuminates how aspects of Buddhist-Christian difference associated with mediation and media—the press, money, charity, secular aid, political-economic ideologies, miracles, gods, and “demons”—are not only vehicles for religious transmission, and nodes of conflict as Buddhism and Pentecostalism competes and rhetorically clashes for religious grounding. But also, these are sites of religious innovation. Further still, beyond the impasses and limited structural affordances for pluralism, Mahadev will discuss how, Sri Lankans navigate religious difference through experimentation, indeterminacy, and occasional leniency, in ways that lends to the plurality of everyday life.



Oct 25
1:00 - 2:30PM
NAH 114



Neena Mahadev is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Yale-NUS College. Her expertise is in anthropology of religion, political economy, theopolitics, pluralism, Theravāda Buddhism and Christianity in Southern Asia. Her book *Karma and Grace: Religious Difference in Millennial Sri Lanka* (Columbia UP, 2023), was awarded the 2021 Claremont Prize in Religion from the Institute of Religion, Culture, and Public Life of Columbia University. Dr. Mahadev teaches courses on Religion and Media, Political Theologies in Asian Lifeworlds, Anthropology of Violence, Christianities in Cross-cultural Perspective, and Modern Social Thought. She is trained in postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and inter-Asian cultural studies.