

Metamorphoses of Media in Tamil Politics

BY

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FRIDAY, MARCH 31, 2017 ♦ 12 noon to 1:30 p.m. at CASI
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FRANCIS CODY is an Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology and Asian Institute at the University of Toronto. His research focuses on language and politics in southern India. He first brought these interests to bear on a study of citizenship, literacy, and social movement politics in rural Tamil Nadu. This work was published as a book called *The Light of Knowledge* (Cornell 2013), winner of the 2014 Edward Sapir Book Prize awarded by the Society for Linguistic Anthropology. Dr. Cody's more recent research traces the emergence of populism and transformations of political publicity through Tamil and English news media. This work explores questions of law, technology, and violence in claims to representing popular sovereignty. Taken as a whole, his work contributes to the

transdisciplinary project of elaborating critical social theories of mass mediation and politics in the postcolonial world.

About the Lecture:

This lecture examines how the changing mediascape in Tamil Nadu enables new forms of political leadership to emerge. The state assembly elections of 2016 marked what is likely to be the final chapter in a politics dominated by the cinema star ethos of an era defined by single-screen movie theaters. Dr. Cody analyzes this style of political leadership, which has dominated Tamil politics since the rise of the DMK in the 1960s, and pays special attention to the role of the political body as a mass commodity image through a study of widely used defamation laws. The lecture then turns to once subterranean forms of political leadership organized around caste, that have now become more visible as varieties of networked media enable the rise of a new class of political entrepreneurs. Through the study of a murderer-turned-caste-hero, Dr. Cody argues that mass news media, once defined by cinema and Dravidian nationalism, are increasingly dependent on the very forms of social media and political entrepreneurship that are sounding the death knell of these older political forms.

About CASI

Founded in 1992, the Center for the Advanced Study of India (CASI) at Penn is the first research institution in the U.S. dedicated to the study of contemporary India. The Center's key goals are to nurture a new generation of scholars across disciplines and to provide a forum for dialogue among the academic, business, and foreign policy communities.

