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“ILLUSIONS TO DISILLUSIONS:
SINHALA SONG AND POETRY IN THE AFTERMATH OF
SRI LANKA’S SOCIAL REVOLUTION, 1958–1964”

Thursday, September 15th
3:15 - 5:00pm
Monroe Hall, Room 116

Scholarship about Sri Lanka’s 1956 "social revolution" and its aftermath tends to focus on the realm of politics. Missing is attention to creative responses that individuals crafted in relation to these events. This paper attempts to fill this lacuna through the lens of Sinhala song and poetry created between 1958 and 1964. It focuses on the stylistic volte-face of the Sinhala poet Mahagama Sekara. I divide my presentation into two parts.

Part I, “Illusions,” investigates song and poetry that Sekera published between 1958 and 1963. Part II, “Disillusions,” turns to Sekera’s 180-degree stylistic shift. One reason Sekera’s switch from illusions to disillusions is significant for South Asian Studies is that it provides evidence that there was a voice of dissent within the Sinhalese intelligentsia at the moment in which Sinhala linguistic nationalism became the state’s dangerously divisive language policy.

Garrett Field is Assistant Professor of Ethnomusicology/Musicology in the School of Interdisciplinary Arts and School of Music at Ohio University. Field specializes in the history of Sinhala-language song and poetry in twentieth-century Sri Lanka. Dr. Field has received support for his research from Ohio University’s Baker Fund Award, the Fulbright-Hays Award, and two Sinhala Language Instruction Grants from the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies.