Devotion to Tamil or ‘Tamil pattru’ has been of immense importance to the self fashioning and articulation of Tamil identity in Tamil Nadu and in the diaspora. Critics like Sumathi Ramasamy have looked at this via Tamil literature and the figure of the Tamil Thaai, however a contemporary account of “tamil pattru” through the site of popular culture has not yet been attempted.

In this paper, I would like to trace the trajectory that Tamil “pattru” has followed in the last decade through Tamil cinema. The emphasis on Tamil cinema, rather than literature or other creative arts is deliberate because of the persistence of the status of Tamil cinema as one of the most accessible mediums through which people of Tamil origin (regardless of gender, class or caste) around the world remain connected to their Tamil identity. Using examples from popular culture, I contend that this has particularly manifested itself in a peculiar nostalgia of the past (that is staunchly based and strengthened along gender constructs) and a futuristic fear of death or extinction. Finally, I conclude with the idea that for a constructive future that ensures a sustained growth of Tamil identity that is rooted in its global present, it is necessary that we indulge in a questioning of Tamil cultural constructs, particularly via platforms that engage the public sphere and academia.

Ms Vasugi Kailasam
PhD Candidate, National University of Singapore

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About the Speaker

Vasugi is a final year PhD candidate at the Department of English Literature at NUS. Her research focuses on literature written in English and Tamil in Sri Lanka from 2000-2009 and the ways in which reconciliation and articulations of the nation can be studied within this critical oeuvre.

Date: Wednesday, 12 March 2014
Time: 3.00pm to 4.30pm
Venue: Malay Studies Seminar Room, AS7 #04-13, Kent Ridge Campus, NUS

Please email sassec@nus.edu.sg to register