



## THE NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA

# Reclaiming the Past: The Problem with Colonial Cultural Objects

By

Dr. Naazima Kamardeen

The Monthly Lecture Series No: 178 of the National Trust

Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2026 at 6.00 pm

at the Auditorium of the College of Surgeons of Sri Lanka,

No. 6, Independence Avenue, Colombo 7.

(For those who join online: [https://www.youtube.com/live/v5xtBt\\_Hlhg](https://www.youtube.com/live/v5xtBt_Hlhg))

Debates over the restitution or return of cultural property looted during times of European colonial occupation have raised several legal and historical issues that we in the present time are grappling with. From a legal point of view, such takings are justified on the basis that they occurred during a period, and under a legal regime, that considered the taking as lawful — based either on the concept of jurisdiction over conquered states, or on the notion of the spoils of war in a battle between two sovereign nations. In modern times, ideas of historical injustice and postcolonial discourses have forced a rethinking of these bases. These arguments are supported by philosophical views on the legitimacy of war, concepts of public guardianship of such objects, and the uneven contribution of the modern Global South to the making of international law. This lecture proposes to examine each of these ideas in arriving at a position that can possibly reconcile these conflicting ideologies, helping source countries as well as host countries to make decisions on restitution and return in a spirit of cooperation and mutual respect.



Naazima Kamardeen, PhD, Attorney-at-Law, is Senior Professor and Chair of Commercial Law, and Head, Department of Commercial Law, at the Faculty of Law, University of Colombo. She is currently the recipient of a research grant from the Dutch Research Council for her project titled "Whose Law?", focusing on the legal issues surrounding cultural property taken from Sri Lanka during the Dutch colonial period. She has authored two books — *Global Trade and Sri Lanka: Which Way Forward?* (2016) and *Biopiracy's Forgotten Victims: Lessons from Sri Lanka* (2019) — in addition to numerous book chapters and scholarly articles.

**The National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts monthly lectures generally on the last working Thursday of each month. The lectures are open to the members and the general public.**

Further information can be obtained from the Trust Office Tel.0112682730/ 0719566929