

The Edward C. Dimock Prize in the Indian Humanities has been awarded to Jessica Marie Falcone, for her manuscript, *Battling the Buddha of Love: A Cultural Biography of the Greatest Statue Never Built*.



Jessica Falcone

*Battling the Buddha of Love: A Cultural Biography of the Greatest Statue Never Built* examines the controversial plans and practices of the Maitreya Project, which has long endeavored to offer a multi-million dollar "gift" of the world's biggest statue to India. Due to the Maitreya Project's effort to forcibly acquire 750-acres of occupied land for their statue park in the Kushinagar area of Uttar Pradesh, the Buddhist statue planners have run into obstacle after obstacle, including a full-scale grassroots resistance movement working to "Save the Land." In telling the "life story" of the proposed statue, Professor Falcone sheds light on the aspirations, values and practices of both the Buddhists working to construct the statue, as well as the Indian farmer-activists who tirelessly protested against the Maitreya Project.

Since the majority of the supporters of the Maitreya Project are non-heritage converts to Tibetan Buddhism, the book narrates the spectacular collision of cultural values between small agriculturalists in rural India and transnational Buddhists hailing from Portland to Pretoria. Thus, an ethnography of a future statue of the Maitreya Buddha (himself the "future Buddha") quite unexpected became a story about divergent, competing visions of Kushinagar's potential futures. *Battling the Buddha of Love* traces power, faith and hope through the axes of globalization, transnational religion, and rural grassroots activism in South Asia.

The topic explored in *Battling the Buddha of Love* is timely insofar as it engages with a distinctive phenomenon that has emerged of late with immense political and emotional charge as gigantic devotional figures begin to dot the urban highways and mountaintops. The polished narrative will move and disarm readers with the author's own shifting perceptions and the unfolding of her personal investment and involvement in the project.

Jessica Marie Falcone is currently an assistant professor of Anthropology at Kansas State University, where she teaches anthropology courses about South Asia, religion, futurity, the arts and expressive cultures. Having obtained an undergraduate degree from New College of Florida and an MA in development anthropology from George Washington University, she received her doctorate in Anthropology from Cornell University in 2010. She has published ethnographic research about various dimensions of South Asian cultural experience: grassroots activism in India; notions of cultural citizenship in the Tibetan diaspora in India; collegiate Gujarati-American dance competitions; Hindutva summer camps in the United States; and Sikh-American activism in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. She is currently conducting research about Buddhist religious practice in virtual worlds, such as Second Life. Jessica Falcone was an AIIS junior fellow in India in 2005-2006.