

Nivedini

A Sri Lankan Feminist Journal

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Women,
Under the "Jam Fruit Tree"
Within Tecawalamai
Sinhala Buddhist Womenhood
Women's Space and Power
in Sri Lanka
Sex Trafficking in Asia

Women's Education and Research Centre

Our Objectives

■ To study and research the various aspects of women's subordination in Sri Lanka in order to sensitize men and women on gender issues.

■ To establish a forum for women to express themselves as writers, researchers, poets, and novelists; to publish their works in Sinhala, Tamil and English.

■ To disseminate information relating to women and create awareness and increase consciousness on feminist issues.

■ To strengthen the women's network locally and internationally.

■ To extend co-operation to and solidarity with other oppressed and marginalised groups in Sri Lanka (such as refugees, unemployed and slum dwellers) with projects for rehabilitation and general upgrading of their lives.

■ To serve as a resource and documentation centre in Sri Lanka that will become part of the network of research and study centres on Women's Studies in the Third World.

What does 'Nivedini' mean?

Nivedini derives from a Sanskrit verb. It could mean either, that which is placed before you ritually and reverentially, or a carrier of knowledge with a female gender suffix 'ni' (derived from the verb *vid*, to know.) We use it with the second meaning.



Women's Education and Research Centre

WERC

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Towards Beijing

The women's movement in Sri Lanka is gearing itself up for the UN World Conference and NGO Forum on Women in Beijing in September 1995. Some of the Women's NGOs in Colombo have come together to work on common strategies. Calling themselves SLWNGOF in the contemporary jargon of acronyms, (Sri Lankan Women's Non Governmental Organisation Forum) they are busy formulating a joint programme of activities. While the World Conference on Women is an official UN affair, mostly for government and inter-governmental agencies, the NGO Forum is open to all NGOs.

While a series of activities are being planned and implemented towards improving the status of women both at national and international levels, one becomes more and more sceptical about the situation on the ground. The unprecedented incidence of violence against women in Sri Lanka for example, deserves extensive investigation. There will be attempts to submerge the phenomenon of violence against women as part of the general trends of violence in Sri Lanka. What we are concerned with is the selective gender perspective in this phenomenon of violence. It is all the more disturbing that when 1994 is declared by the UN as the Year of the Family, and when the Sri Lankan state and the media project the family as a "haven ■■■ in a heartless world' and as a hallowed Asian institution, violence takes place increasingly **within the family**. That a young child of six years in Elpitiya was sexually molested, having been kidnapped from her home by a relative and killed, and her body thrown in the cemetery, was a startling piece of news. This was followed by an equally frightening news item where a father in Panadura had dashed a few month old baby on the ground and killed it because his wife had not given his food on time. While the first incident illustrates the vulnerability of female sexuality even of a young child of six years, the other is typical of the phenomenon of domestic violence. However, both are results of a patriarchal value system which treats women and girls as objects of sex and as objects to be raped, ill-treated, beaten and murdered. The latter was expressed through the

cultural role assigned to the women/wife that she should cook and have the meals ready when her husband the lord comes home. It is assumed by others and internally justified by him that he has the right to beat her if the lunch is not ready. But in this instance he misdirected his anger towards the child. Unfortunately, there will be some among us who will find fault with the wife for not having the food ready and for having provoked him into such violence.

Now the wife is without the child. Would she under the circumstances, like to live with the man - the husband - who has murdered her child. If she was given the option to express her views, she would express her hatred and repulsion and her unwillingness to continue to live with him. We do not know whether she did that, but lack of independence, strength of character and financial dependence on the husband usually deter women from taking a correct course of action. We are now confronted with two equally important aspects of a women's impulse towards liberation, the ideology and structures of patriarchy. Both constantly threaten women who live the lives of subordination and oppression. Their sufferings need to be tackled at different levels. While the whole of society - men and women - need to be conscientized, women should be prepared to tackle the problems they face within the institution of the family as well. They need to be armed - with knowledge with strategies and specific awareness to question our cultural norms and expectations. They need to be given the skills and training to earn an income. They should have the, courage and wisdom to take recourse to available legal action that would lead to remedial situations. These are some of the activities which have special and specific terminologies such as counselling, legal literacy, economic empowerment, consciousness raising, solidarity with oppressed women, programmes for education and training, awareness programmes and gender sensitization. However, even after all these activities and programmes, we feel that our task is tremendous and we need to work harder on these issues. This indeed is a paradoxical situation. We feel that despite the various activities on the agenda of the women's organizations, the problems have increased. We are forced to ask the question "where did we go wrong"?

Another interesting development in the women's movement is the shift in terminological emphasis, from Women in Development, to Gender and development. This was because the early developmental programmes lacked a focus on women and women's entry into the developmental process was taken for granted in the seventies. Hence the Women in Development (WID) concept was invented. This phrase from the seventies to the early eighties had two focuses: an equality approach which implied discovery of the unequal status of women, and the recognition of the economic contribution of women. Therefore emphasis was laid on training and education. Within these paradigms came the concept of empowerment. Empowerment basically meant empowering women with tools to raise their levels economically, socially and psychologically. Within this framework, however, an increasing emphasis was placed on the grass root women. At this juncture, the "women" took a conceptual shift to "gender" so as to include both men and women. The argument forcefully takes into account the fact that women being "developed" does not lead to social transformation. Hence, the gender and development approach which is new differs from the "add woman and stir" approach of the early developmentalists. More importantly, the GAD approach takes existing socio-economic differences into account and emphasises areas of differences based on caste, class and ethnicity.

GAD by itself is not a totalizing concept in its operation. Unfortunately gender is not taken into account in the developmental plans and programmes. Gender remains merely a cosmetic terminology. The focus of development continues to be on production of goods and services and the family and the households are still treated as private realm. Development is concentrated on the public issues. Questions like sexual division of labour, child rearing responsibility, the double burden on women, and women's sexuality are still outside the realm of development despite the inclusion of gender as a concept.

Is the NGO Forum on Women going to take up these issues? Availability of creches, daycare centres and packed lunches which will reduce the load of work on women of the middle class and working class women should be treated not as

concession but as the right of women. Women's working hours within the family should be regulated and reduced. Our experience has shown that many women with talent and creativity cannot harness their talents towards fulfillment because of the so called familial duties that change them into drudges and routinal task performers.

Women have reached out to us to talk about their problems which they say have no solutions. Uneducated, unemployed and non-trained women who suffer beatings are forced to continue their miserable existence because they are financially dependant. Even when they are prepared to break social taboos and seek their freedom, the reality of their situation prevents them from achieving that freedom. Ours is not a state that provides social security. Arming such women with gender sensitization programmes and giving them lessons in legal literacy to seek legal redress, are only partial solutions. Together with these the need to be trained in income generation as well is a good suggestion. But who takes care of her and her children until such time as she gets the training and employment? The fear that the future is not going to be any better keeps many a woman inactive. Such inertia need to be understood and not dismissed as weakness or incapacity of the women. Homes for battered women and other women who have family problems have become a necessity. What we are arguing for are comprehensive programmes which would take care simultaneously of the various problems that confront women. Sporadic and piece meal activities do not lead to total solutions.

Hence NGOs, state and international agencies such as the UN, ILO, FAO should think or rethink strategies towards structural empowerment, which should lead to challenging the ideology of patriarchy. In Sri Lanka the Women's Bureau and the Ministry of Women's Affairs should also rethink and reformulate their strategies.

Movement and Theory

Apart from the above raised issues, we are often confronted with other questions. Why are only a few women,

NGOs, engaged in research? What is the connection between research and women's liberation?

Implied in these questions is a suggestion that research has become a pastime for middle class intellectual women. We cannot deny the fact that knowledge is essential for any alternative movement whether political or social. In fact it was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) which inspired many women into an action-oriented women's movement. The above question hinges on another question; what use is theory for a movement? Research can be based on surveys, interviews, and oral history, or the collection of statistical data. They usually become the basis on which a programme of action is planned and then implemented. When research data is used for programmes for the alleviation of women's specific problems it becomes meaningful. The data gathered through a research by W.E.R.C conducted in Palenda in the Kalutara district. On The Impact of Janasaviya Trust Fund on the Poverty Alleviation of Women became the basis for a subsequent income generation programme for women in that area. This programme is significant because it has in built components of training and education, gender sensitization and credit management linked to the state services. Hence theory and research can become a part of the women's movement if used judiciously. Conscious linkages between the research process and consciousness raising can also be made with the women who are involved in the research process. Moreover, the creation of a discipline within the social science called Women's Studies is an achievement of the women's movement. Out of the experiences of women's oppression and subordination many theories have evolved which significantly challenge core assumptions of social science theories within sociology, anthropology and history.

Theories are analytical tools to comprehend certain processes which have made woman what she is. While saying this we are not denying that these intellectual exercises are also very stimulating as any other intellectual discourses are and we, women should not feel guilty about theory. In fact the discovery that women per se do not belong to one category of women but have problems and deprivations based on ethnicity, race and

class is something borne not only out of experience, but also out of the various theories of ethnicity, race and class.

Women's Rise to Power as Functionaries

Sri Lankans can be proud of the recent appointment of Radhika Coomaraswamy as the **Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women by the Chairman of the U.N. Human Rights Commission.**

This appointment was in pursuance of a resolution adopted at the 50th session of the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva. It is important to realise that this resolution followed the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Conference which called for the elimination of gender-based violence and all forms of sexual harassment. This appointment, besides being a landmark for Sri Lanka, is also a milestone in the recognition of the phenomenon of violence against women universally.

We are also happy that this appointment coincides with the appointment of the first woman Superintendent of Police, Premila Divakara in Sri Lanka. We congratulate both these women and wish them success in carrying out their tasks.

WERC is happy that many people are reaching out to us both locally and internationally for cooperation and interaction.

We take this opportunity to thank our many friends who have written for Nivedini and others who have encouraged us with letters and calls congratulating us on the quality of our first Nivedini. We should also mention here with gratitude the excellent editorial assistance rendered by Mr. Krishantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta. Thanks are also due to the WERC staff, Surangani Dayaratne, Siro Gopallawa, Thilaka Dissanayake and Bhawani Loganathan, who tried hard to keep to the dead lines set for typing and formatting.

Letters

27 May 1994

Dear Editor

I contributed an article, entitled The Voice of the Oppressed Woman: Three Works of Harriet Jacobs, Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison in the first issue of the journal Nivedini published by Women's Education and Research Centre. Due to an oversight on my part, I inadvertently left out an acknowledgment which ought to have been inserted into my article. In order to rectify this oversight, I would be most grateful if you will publish this letter in the next issue of Nivedini with the following:

I am indebted to several people who helped me to put together this material. I am particularly grateful to Dr. Arjuna Parakrama for his insightful discussions and comments on this subject and for encouraging me to publish my material. I have benefited enormously from his input while I was a student and Assistant Lecturer in Colombo.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Sgnd.

Neluka Silva

Liberation is not Six Yards of Cloth

Janaki Nair

Once more, a tocsin has been sounded for upholding ancient "tradition." Once more, there is extraordinary irony in the fact that the "tradition" that is being upheld is of fairly recent origin. However, of the many blows that have recently been struck for the defence of tradition, the latest is interesting because it emerges from the heartland of revolutionary practice, Calcutta. The recent insistence by the principal of a college in Calcutta to women students to revert to wearing saris instead of the salwar kameez would only be one of a piece with the rightward cultural shift in India, had it not come from someone whose sympathies otherwise lie with the official Left.

Large numbers of male columnist ranging from Chidananda Das Gupta to K. Govindan Kutty have periodically expressed their desire to see women return to the sari in the name of "tradition." In this kind of intervention, we must point out, the central issue is not the privileging of one cultural practice over another, but of the imposition of a code on sections of society. This is where the official Left has not distinguished itself from other patriarchies, such as that of the Jesuit heads of institutions. Indeed most left wing demonstrations, while they certainly encourage the participation of women in very large numbers, insist (especially in states like West Bengal and Karnataka) that the women are dressed in saris, though appropriately tinged with red.

There is more to this than an expression of horror at the increased visibility of women in public life, and the freedoms that a new and strident consumerism affords. All post colonial societies that have not undergone thorough going cultural revolutions have expressed an anxiety to preserve the figure of women as the epitome of all that was pure and uncolonised. In India, the massive mobilisation of women in public political life was ennobled in the Gandhian period without upsetting notions

of "femininity." Indeed the middle class women satyagrahi embodied respectability by wearing sari as an obvious marker of her pure uncolonised essence even as she undertook new responsibilities beyond the home.

Let us get one thing straight. The nationalised form of sari usage today is more recent than we think. A Syrian Christian woman still recalls the shame she felt 40 years ago at having to wear a sari when, as a young bride, she set sail with her husband who worked abroad: she finally brought herself to change out of her traditional clothes only when she reached Aden. I still recall the embarrassment with which I negotiated having a mother who wore a simple mundu/veshti rather than the sari like other mothers.

In other words, the nationalisation of the sari is a 20th century phenomenon. Even more recent is the nationalisation of the salwar kameez, chosen by women not merely for the sheer conveniences it affords in terms of care and mobility. The emergence of an increasingly homogenous national market, as well as the gradual dissemination of North Indian/Hindi culture through the electronic media have made the salwar an acceptable mode even in regions traditionally hostile to North Indian cultural hegemony, such as Tamil Nadu, where the pavadai has been driven into obscurity at least in urban areas.

At the same time, there is no real congruence between the modes of dress and the consciousness of the wearer. The gradual dissemination of western clothes, particularly the use of trousers by women, has not necessarily corresponded to forms of progressive thinking. The blue jeans, rather than symbolising rebellion, have become the unmistakable markers of unquestioned privilege. Young, middle class, the thoroughly westernised yuppies have been among some of the most vociferous supporters of the destruction and carnage in the past few years in the name of Hindu revivalism.

Although the middle class consumerism is thoroughly undemocratic, urging consumption on some at the expense of the basic needs of others, its effects are not entirely unambiguous. What the bicycle did not do, the two wheeler has accomplished

in about 10 years, giving large numbers of working women a degree of mobility and independence.

On the other hand, the language of "freedom," even "liberation" is cynically invoked in advertisements which want to sell several kinds of consumer goods. Yet even the woman who is airborne (therefore "free") as a result of pressing a switch to wash clothes, as in a current advertisement for a brand of washing machine, is sari-clad, suggesting that what is lost in the anonymity of consumption is somehow recovered through the use of saris. Exhorting women to wear the markers of "uncolonisation" even as they are being invited to "liberation" by buying a washing machine is part of the paradoxical process through which the "modern" is being defined in India today.

Despite its particular meaning in the Indian context, the imposition of dress codes is by no means uniquely Indian. As unwritten and unenforced dress code is nevertheless strictly adhered to in that supposed democratic haven of North America. There is probably not single US male Senator who is bearded or wears anything other than a dark suit. Professional women rarely get away with wearing trousers: Indian women have shown no hesitation in observing this dress when they begin work in the U.S. The argument there is not made in terms of "tradition" but in terms of "femininity."

The principal of the Calcutta college may be dismayed to find that his actions are clubbed along with the ways in which North American patriarchy works. We must nevertheless insist that the issue he has raised is not about specific forms of clothes but about the imposition of a code. We must then ask why such codes are periodically imposed, especially on women by groups ranging from the Akalis to the JKLF, the head of institutions and political leaders.

One of the strongest arguments for the women being marked off as the bearers of "tradition" and placed on some pedestal even when they are occupying non-traditional spaces today is so that she may be offered "protection." Yet what is the guarantee of such protection? Wearing the sari has certainly not prevented wage earning women from exploitation, wives from domestic violence, nor working women from harassment at

work. The wolves have not kept a worshipful distance from the sari clad woman. If it is the "tradition" of the epics that is being upheld and advocated, there is little that is encouraging even there. Our Puranic women were offered little protection even when they were swathed in yards of cloth: we know only too well the fate of the Sitas, Kausalyas and Draupadis.

One aspect of our current crisis in India is that there is no democratic cultural alternative which holds appeal to younger generations. One of the significant failures of the Left movement in India has been its inability to forge such an alternative to well worn cliches of "tradition," especially when it comes to women. On even such a simple question as dress, the Left movement has been unable to set itself off from other patriarchies which somehow like to conceive of the woman as a fish-like creature, who must keep the dreadful fact of having two separate lower limbs concealed from the popular male gaze. Forms of female dress, ranging from the kimono to the full length evening gown, have attempted variations on this theme. Its effect universally has been to constitute women as objects, whether objects of desire, objects of worship or embodiments of the "nation."

About three years ago, the Janawadi Mahila Samiti of Delhi fought a spirited campaign against the imposition of the trousered uniform of policewomen in Delhi, arguing that the salwar kameez posed no hinderance to their functioning as police. The police women had complained that they were often teased in the neighbourhood when they went back from work. In supporting the demand, JMS clearly was unwilling to challenge local patriarchies, but were willing to defend the right of the policewomen to a choice.

It is clear from such instances, that imposing codes in the absence of consultation about the choice of women (or men) themselves, is a critical issue. Choice here is not used in its commonsensical sense as choice in the capitalist market place, but in its most democratic sense. Indian women will continue to wear saris, but when they choose to do so, and not as a result of some mandate. Meanwhile, they will continue to refuse the pedestal of "tradition" that is being upheld in codes such as

these. Indian women need such traditions about as much as a fish needs a bicycle.

Courtesy:

The Hindu

SHE IN MEDIA

She is Mother, Daughter or Sister.

Achieving marital status is her prime target.

As wife she is perfect, faithful, efficient, ever-ready submissive and supportive.

In the relation to men she is passive, dependent, sacrificing, and extremely kind, almost foolish. Even the lover who rejects her is unchangingly loved for ever.

Her life is controlled by outside forces vis-a-vis

she is an unintelligent, helpless victim, anxious and insecure.

In society at large, in which she is usually not gainfully employed or in the typical feminine occupations, her chief role is to stimulate a consumerist lifestyle, to be a-political yet ready to support the status quo, and to reinforce the feminine model.

This model prescribes her to be sentimental, irrational, timid, decorative, desirable and fashionable.

Sexually she has to be available, yet constrain herself, seductive, yet loyal and moral.

Her existence is primarily defined through her relation with men.

Solidarity among women is bound to lead to disaster.

If she does not fit the image, she is 'exceptional'.

If she emerges as a 'new woman', strong, powerful, liberated, she runs the risk of dissatisfaction and tragedy.

If she is the villain, her evil is limitless.

In any case, from her misfortune she can only be rescued by men.

Sex Trafficking in Asian Women

Address delivered by Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer on the occasion of the Asian Tribunal on Women's Human Rights, on 14th March 1994 in Japan.

Wrote Tolstoy poignantly long ago:

"The abolition of slavery has gone on for a long time. Rome abolished slavery. America abolished it, and we did, but only the words were abolished, not the thing."

One form of slavery, "the most unkindest cut of all," which defies law, defiles dignity, desecrates the precious treasure of womanhood and still prospers globally with governmental tacit complicity, is the nationally and internationally subterranean operation of trafficking in Asian women and the female flesh trade. This indelible stain and incurable wound on immaculate womanhood shall be stamped out, and we sit here to assess this macro-crime, identify the sex-exploitative mafia, propose potent penalties for the culprits en masse and recommend measures to halt this horrendous process which takes protean forms in diverse societies and cultures.

Since the dawn of human life, masculine domination has made the feminine sex vulnerable to subjection, sale and slavery. Progressive protests were voiced against this torture and indignity and gender-specific laws were made to liberate women from immoral trafficking.

No leniency is possible for atrocities against tortured girls of tender age. Trafficking in women for systematic sexual slavery and forced prostitution, when proved, must summon stern protest and toughest punitive sanctions. The pharmacopeia of sentences must innovate inescapable prescriptions. Gender

injustice must no longer be the vanishing point of jurisprudence, but become a global crime.

Millions of Koreans were conscripted by the Japanese during World War II which included about 200 thousand women as "comfort women" for the army. These sex slaves subjected to inhuman crimes are victims whom the State of Japan must compensate. It is a war crime and must be dealt with as such and human justice demands prophylactic and punitive measures. Such crimes on a himalayan scale with the connivance of the State on a then colonial population deserve deterrent sentences and compensatory awards. A then member of the House of Representatives and political leader remarked in his election campaign in November 1965: "14,200 Korean 'comfort women' died. Japanese soliers killed them after satisfying their sexual desires." Large scale genocidal operations with focus on women must be atoned duly if the international Justice Order is to be credible. No law of limitation can bar the bringing of such claims and one must agree with the view expressed by the D.P.R.K. Committee.

"Although the 'comfort women' case took place 50 years ago, it is not a matter for the past, but a matter for the present, because the evidence and the main culprit has been confirmed only recently."

The women victims whose honour has been outraged, whose human integrity were ravished, whose life in peace were blotted have a right to justice. Maybe a full scale investigation under the auspices of the United Nations and the World Court and the creation of a humanitarian fund by the crime-doing countries is necessary if human justice, human law and human consciences are to be vindicated. The jurisprudence relating to national-international immoral traffic is loaded in favour of the masculine gender. Justices, while justicing, must radically correct this distortion because it is within the proper nature of the judicial process and well-established judicial functions for national courts to have been incorporated into domestic law. Justice has no frontiers when crimes against humanity are under trial.

The most distressing and malignant violation derogatory to the dignity of women relates to forced marriages, fraudulent trafficking, forced prostitutions and denial of that basic purity and moral sanctity of personhood sans which womanhood becomes nothing but lascivious flesh, alive only for depraved military carnality. This savage sexuality and purchase of her person to be taken away and sold is the most offensive aspect of trafficking in women. If the person is a girl child and her young innocence forced into the flesh market the crime becomes all the more heinous. When the woman is taken away from her family, her social milieu and her ways of life into alien control and prostitution, the situation is the cruellest kind of violation of human rights. When terror, enticement and slavery are compounded together the offence is aggravated beyond extenuation. Sex tourism in Third World countries is a burning turpitude which is covered up as foreign exchange earner.

The various violations sometimes take the form of domestic helpers in other countries - a Filipino phenomenon - promoted by unscrupulous agencies. Sri Lankan migrant women workers go as housemaids and nannies to Middle East countries. Even Indonesian women have a similar fate, The end of their sojourn is rape, sexual harassment, torture, suicide and murder. There are pimping networks operating in this prostitutive trade. Bangladesh and Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and India also fall in this category used, among other things, as mail-ordered brides, brothel inmates, and sex sweeteners: We have evidence direct and indirect of these unspeakable inhumanities operated by sinister syndicates. When these dastardly delinquencies become a regular trade, what a shock and shame! Alas, the evidence and the literature placed before us haunts us with the feeling that this spectre of trafficking in women is too booming, brutal, global a business that each passing day is humanity's crime writ large.

Women are human and have equal title to all the rights, which belong to men as well.

Having heard the evidence, read the literature placed before us and reflected on the multi-continental dimension of the problem of trafficking in women in a borderless globe, we feel

convinced that the plight of the Asian female is in great peril. In our sinking century, gender slavery involving women, takes many forms. Asia is the most harsh hit with gross abuses of women's human rights including child prostitution, pornography, child labour, debt bondage and 'bride boloney.'

The materials placed before us as oral evidence, written testimony and studies on trafficking in women establish that womanhood's human dignity and honourable being are in peril in Asian countries. Nepal, India, Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Japan, where gender injustice through trafficking in women, exploitation and sex tourism and prostitutive processes are practiced, call for special action and mobilisation of public opinion and sensitization of states. People's movements, women activists and jurist on the alert are urgent.

Without discussing the details of the evidence here we proceed to make our recommendations.

Recommendations

Therefore, we strongly recommend:

- (a) A new comprehensive Covenant and Code which is Gender-specific, declaring a clear war on traffic in women and their servitude.
- (b) Creation of a monitoring and ombudsman system with heavy women's presence in the mechanism. Such a programme of action must be launched with penal teeth to bite and not mere moral mouth to bark.
- (c) An International Women's Commission with powers of investigation, entry into any country, and consisting only of women, should be set up which can take legal action against traffickers and other allied operators.

(d) Jurisdiction must be given to this International Commission with a jurisprudence of gender, broad and flexible.

(e) The present scenario vis a vis trafficking in women disturbs our conscience and compels us to plead for the creation of an Asian-specific Women's Rights Commissions. The recognition of women's rights to self-determination, eradication of stigmatisation and victimisation and empowerment and strategies to investigate and inflict punishment must be in the armoury of an anti-trafficking code.

(f) Since poverty and lack of social and economic emancipation are frequently the root causes of migratory compulsions leading to traumatic traffic and forced prostitution, strategies should be geared to providing a genuine alternative for life and work in both the country of origin and country of destination. The improvement of the social and economic situation of women in disadvantaged position will wipe out the vices of trafficking and other forms of exploitation linked to it.

(g) The cultural peril and lawless violence which now afflict womanhood must be arrested by the categorical imperative of a powerful gender protective code writ into every member state's corpus juris. Asia first, with an All-Women's Commission is the jurisprudential essence, allowing for flexible social relativity for each Asian nation on the texts and texture of the laws they make. Gender self-determination and defence of fundamental gender freedom are non-negotiable.

Jam Fruit Tree and Carl Muller's Construction of Women: Subversion or Reinforcement?

Ruvani Ranasinha

In his work of "fiction that sails close to fact", Muller describes a segment of the Burgher community of the nineteen-thirties in which women were expected to submit meekly to the dictates of a male-dominated society. Without suggesting that this is peculiar to this community or class, he simply shows how these women were confined to the domestic sphere and defined almost exclusively in terms of marriage and motherhood. The average expectation of fulfillment for such a woman was a life of "washing overalls, cooking and getting pregnant." Notions of male superiority and expectations of female subservience were prevalent. The text exposes the fallacy of these perceptions. It ultimately demonstrates that in reality, the idea of a subservient, passive woman was more a matter of form than one of substance.

This reality is largely exposed by the text's radical departure from convention: the uninhibited treatment of sexual activity is one example. The articulation of female sexuality and sexual assertiveness is the text's most progressive subversion of received notions of femininity, namely, the stereotypical image of the passive, submissive female. Furthermore the text uncovers some of the underlying causes of inequality and oppression by the insight it gives into the social construction of gender and into the strategy that women devise in order to survive within patriarchy. The purpose of this essay is to analyse these elements of radicalism and to examine to what extent, if any, they are undermined as the text unfolds. How far does the text mimic the patriarchal definition of women in order to subvert it? Or is it ultimately reinforcing it?

The text appears to use mimicry in the service of criticism of the chauvinist culture. Firstly, by echoing

chauvinistic utterances the narrator subjects the attitudes of the men he describes to irony. Simultaneously, the way gender roles are prescribed is shown. For example the novel opens with Cecilprins' observation that,

"women ...stay out of mischief when they are carrying."

The complacency of this observation is not confined to Cecilprins alone: other comments are more derogatory, extreme and deliberately provocative; Old Simmon's stock advice to Anna on her wedding night:

"Just keep your mouth shut and your legs open ...that's the only way to be a good wife."

The myth of male superiority is exposed by the text. Male utterances may define the community as being directed from the male centre, for example, Papa Werkmeister's advice to Cecilprins:

"You are the father. You must make the boy see sense."

Or Father Rommiel's expectation that Anna will have no say in her marriage:

"Once they marry he is the master. If he does not allow Anna to go to Church?"

However, the text reveals that in reality, the husbands and fathers are nominal heads of the household. Their position of authority is an abstract or theoretical one. Despite male assertions of power, it is the mothers and wives who emerge as the real source of strength and who bear active familial responsibility. Though confined to the domestic context where the main sphere of activity is inter-familial relationships, they take control of this entire sphere. This can be illustrated best in the portrayal of Maudiegirl. Though much is made of her superlative domestic capabilities (see the preparations for Anna's wedding for example) it is clear that these skills are far from being her only strength. It is Maudiegirl, as opposed to Cecilprins, who is defined as the backbone of the family. The centrality of her position is revealed by the vacuum felt on her death:

"Cecilprins stood, looking bleakly at his wife and not caring what he would do, for he could not imagine what it would be like with her gone."

Moreover, it is significantly Maudiegirl (and not Cecilprins) who confronts grim realities, who detects their children's true natures and accordingly plans their future. Witness her conversation with Cecilprins:

"And all the other girls also getting old. You want to put them in convents? And when I die, who will look after Dunnyboy? He a little mad, no? If children marry can give small room to Dunnyboy to stay."

The text repeatedly emphasises Maudiegirl's concern for the family profile and shows how her anticipation forestalls exposure on every possible occasion. At Anna's wedding she

"had her eyes everywhere ..had noted her son's (Dunnyboy) fascination with Mrs Colontota's beam end ...and wisely ensured that he was put out of action."

Thus with Maudiegirl bearing such difficulties virtually unaided, Cecilprins is revealed as a merely titular head. In this context, "siring a string of children" was indeed "child's play ..to the old reprobate." His wish to avoid conflict, even if it means an evasion of his familial responsibilities is exemplified when Papa Werkmeister comes to protest against Sonnaboy's desertion of his daughter Elaine:

"Cecilprins wondered if he could plead insanity or something in the face of the gathering storm."

His tendency towards escapism is contrasted implicitly with Maudiegirl's dynamism.

Far from playing a marginal role, the female protagonists emerge as vocal, assertive initiators of action. Many significant events are determined by their observations, comments and actions. The marriage between Anna and the Sinhalese Colontota is one example. Both fathers oppose the 'mixed' marriage because of prejudice and a fear of a consequent loss of status. It is Maudiegirl's "wisdombased on

pure logic" which convinces Cecilprins that his objections are irrational :

"So never mind. You thinking we are special or something? Good to go to top market buying Bombili from Sinhalese man. Good to get children's bicycle made by Sinhalese man. Good to eat rice and curry and stringhoppers like Sinhalese man.... All over people Sinhalese, no? Father telling in church love the neighbour. See will you, who neighbour is Sinhalese, no."

The acceptance of Colontota as a 'good man' who will look after Anna is a direct result of this comment.

Similarly, when Senior Colontota is affronted by the failure of his daughter-in-law to produce a grandchild, it is significantly Mrs. Colontota who uncompromisingly counteracts his unreason with good sense and tolerance:

"She is a good girl. And see how she is looking after him...If they are happy what do we care ?"

Her reasoning prevails :

"For what you wanting to be grandfather?' That stymied the man."

Throughout the text the women "talk sense". The text subverts the prescribed gender roles of the traditional dichotomous couple.

The female characters are shown to be far from incapable of autonomy, rationality and assertiveness, traditionally perceived as 'masculine' traits. In fact they emerge as the opposite of that which was traditionally identified as constituting feminine behaviour:- passive, acquiescent, timid and conventional.

However, the text's most radical subversion of the passive female stereotype is in its articulation of female sexuality: it is an aspect of women that is not often highlighted. Furthermore "The Jam Fruit Tree" does not romanticise female sexuality in any way. The female characters are insistently

characterised as 'lusty' and there are many incidents which emphasise their sexual assertiveness. For example when Leah nurses George after he is assaulted by Sonnaboy, we are told:

"she made a great show of tending on her poor martyr and seize the chance to take a close look at this man she was going to marry...She asked him where it hurt. 'There,' he said and she would feel the spot and venture lower down and say, 'Here also?' and he would nod and her hands would slip to his hips and 'Here also?' and soon she was squeezing his cock and exclaiming at its size and that it would do very nicely, thank you."

The female characters are not simply aware of their sexuality but take steps to try and ensure their needs are fulfilled. Elva, for example, rejects a suitor because she is "dissatisfied with a man who only wants to hold hands on the beach." In some cases we are made aware of a sexuality held in abeyance: Iris is not fulfilled by her alcoholic husband:

" Trouble is he bringing bottle to bed and when I get all ready and opening his trousers and all, he say one for the road and puts two more drinks and then he fall on top and going to sleep."

Each finds the best deal for herself, some within the institution of marriage, like Leah who found George "a bore...he did not make love. He practiced technique." And she "grew tired of his sexual posturing, yet, her own appetite needed to be met and so she made the best of these nightly encounters and felt that on the whole, her marriage was secure and that theirs was a mutually satisfying relationship."

Whereas Opel who also found 'going to bed with her man tiresome' and was not 'happy with these performances,' finds fulfillment outside marriage. Her initiative in starting an affair with Morrell is underlined: she 'invited him in for tea and confirmed that she was alone for most of the day.'

Thus the text demonstrates that these women want to exercise passion and are not content to be objects of male desire. Within the dynamics of a male controlled environment, each negotiates the best deal for herself, through overt or covert

means. Some are more successful than others: Beryl's extra-marital affair, unlike Opel's, rebounds very negatively on herself.

This is not to say that there is no exploitation of women and there are no passive victims. Elaine, for example, submits to Sonnyboy's 'advances' trusting that it will lead to marriage:

"I allow him because he going to marry me ..and now after all this he is saying he doesn't want to."

She 'never dreamed that he was just using her.' She was 'happy to oblige' in order to secure him:

"If I don't will start doing to some other girl."

This illustrates the existence of unequal power relations and double standards of behaviour. The impotence and vulnerability of Elaine's position are emphasised, as are the dim prospects of a future marriage now that she is considered to have been 'spoilt for other men.' Elaine's internalisation of this double standard is also significant.

The text gives an insight into the cultural pressures that have shaped or determined the characters of women and forced them into negative or passive roles. Maudiegirl's advice to Anna on how to act on her wedding night is an acknowledgement of the stratagems that women are compelled to resort to in order to survive within patriarchy:

"Just lie down and listen to what he says. Don't try to show you know all about it. Just do what he tells. And when he gets inside you cry and tell it paining, remember, because all these buggers the same. Telling love, love but very happy when hurt you. Thinking they big men if make wife suffer."

We witness the process of socialization: the conditioned mother inculcates the daughter to posture, to negate herself in order to fulfil male expectations of women. As in the case of Elaine, we see the extent to which women have been conditioned to co-operate in their own subordination.

However the very existence of a strategy implies that though they are practically enslaved, they are not psychologically so. By acting as they are expected to, they conceal the fact that this is a mask. The male is manipulated and understands only the aspect he sees. Just as in slave narratives the slave plays up to the expectations of the master and only reveals her real self to her own community: within their own company these women reveal that they are completely different from the stereotype. These women clearly derive support from the exchange of ideas and experiences that take place when they are in exclusively female company. The inner life they keep apart for themselves is in itself a show of strength. The stratagem becomes a weapon with which to counter the power play of the dominant group.

The text not only resists romanticising female sexuality, it does not weave any myths or fictions about the act of sex. A latent violence in heterosexuality is suggested in Maudiegirl's advice to Anna. It is vividly actualised in other parts of the narrative, notably in the graphic account of the consummation of Beryl and Sonnaboy's marriage, significantly revealed to us through Beryl's eyes :

"This was a rampage . Crammed stark naked into the narrow berth, with the thrum of the train..piercing the night she was penetrated with scant ceremony and bit her lip in pain as a huge shaft seemed to drive in and out and the weight of her husband made her gasp and want to cry halt. The pain stayed and throbbed even after he had spent himself and lay over her and stroked her hair and did not see the tear that trickled down her face...Beryl was trying to rise when he came out the toilet.. and pushed her down."

Even more striking is the passage where Sonnaboy punishes Beryl for her infidelity by raping her. The vocabulary of abuse and assault suggests the brutality of the act:

"He took savage satisfaction in assailing Beryl with his penis... he used it as a weapon on her..impregnating her."

Without recourse to outside help, to contraceptives, or abortion Beryl's predicament is terrifying. She tries to abort a child and is sent home to a 'murderously angry Sonnaboy' who

"dragged her into the bedroom, threw her across the bed and raped her. This was the nature of their relationship for many more years."

This plight was not confined to Beryl alone. This is illustrated in the conversation between the girls at Anna's wedding:

"Burgher boys, nice men. But when marry only want to drink and do. Can see, no? Even my mama say can't with Papa. Only last week telling that she tired of going to maternity home and papa don't know when to stop....."

'yes, men. And when coming home drunk won't even eat and sleep. Same thing at home... whole time squeezing his thing and saying where's your mother."

So far I have tried to show the ways in which the text foregrounds female stereotyping, by revealing chauvinistic perceptions of women, by subverting prescribed gender roles and by delineating the ways in which stereotypes are created and perpetuated by men and women. The text's subversion of stereotypes is however undermined by a tendency towards homogenization and essentialism. That is to say that 'the chronicler's' narrative purports to 'fix the Burgher society of the nineteen-thirties in a proper perspective' is at odds with the subversion of stereotypes. The very attempt to characterise the Burghers, and to distinguish them from other communities, has resulted in homogenization. In defining a group in a plural society, the emphasis falls on the characteristics that the members of the group have in common. The members however individualised embody a substantial number of distinguishing characteristics. In this way, Muller has compromised actuality to his genre: his characters do take on a representative, emblematic aura which is itself a form of stereotyping. He essentialises what it is to be Burgher. That is to be full of 'joie-de-vivre' and as "lusty as life itself" in implicit contrast to the 'ill-dispositioned' and 'morose' Sinhalese. He portrays these Burghers as being rebellious in their promiscuity, unlike the other communities who are more inhibited by social and religious taboos. In order to reinforce this notion the Burgher women are homogenised as

being 'robust, brawny and bawdy.' There is little differentiation. Generalisations creep into descriptions of individuals:

"..like any full-blooded Burgher girl, she had thought long and lustily about sex."

In the pervasive analogy between the Jam Fruit tree and the Burgher community, the narrator endorses a very traditional stereotype of women emphasising their fertility and being close to nature:

"The overbearing tree is like the stout Burgher women of the age, fruitful, tough, always in bloom and earthy. "

The homogenisation of the community leads to oversimplification of other issues, not only gender-related but political ones. For example in order to characterise the 'tolerance' of the Burghers, they are defined in contrast to

"those other guys who are going around throwing bombs and demanding separate states."

This is an oversimplification of the issue as it does not take into account the different socio-political dimensions of their problems.

There is another area of ambivalence in the portrayal of these women. Although the text subverts the classic passive, docile female stereotype, it virtually replaces it with its opposite extreme; namely Elsie, who is a depraved and sadistic 'dragon of a woman :'

"She, a, healthy, strapping woman with calves and upper arms bigger than his thigh.....who experienced deep sexual pleasure in watching Eric squirm, (hence) her slaps, her buffets and her viciousness."

Thus the female portraits are polarized into an antithetical pattern of victim or aggressor. There is little middle ground. Interestingly the only alternative presented to being dominated is to be wholly dominating. There is no positive role-model.

Thus the subversion of traditional stereotypes is somewhat weakened by the tendency towards essentialism and

homogenization, as well as by the substitution of one stereotype for another. However, overall, the lasting impression of the text is a vital image of a race, class and gender intersection actively attempting to assert itself, and forge an identity for itself within the dynamics of a male-controlled environment. The text convincingly portrays the plight of the oppressed female protagonists, without sentimentalizing them. In a progressive way, it demonstrates how gender is/was socially constructed and how its construction has enforced unequal relations of power. As a form of social history it challenges the reader to compare our past and present history, in order to examine how far we have transcended the inequality and patriarchy that is inbuilt in our society.

The following statement was drafted and issued at a regional workshop of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, Religion and Family Law, held from October 16-18 1992, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

We wish to express our concern regarding the manner in which the UN has declared 1994 as the year of the family.

In this respect we wish to bring to your attention the following concerns:

1. We fear that a specific paradigm of 'family' will be promoted in order to reinforce a particular hierarchial social and economic order. The reinforcement of the 'family' as a social institution will undoubtedly result in the state abdicating its social and economic obligations.
2. The promotion of the unit of the 'family' is to protect it as a haven for all those who are participants in it and negated the efforts of the women's movements globally to expose the historically oppresive aspects of this institution.
3. The very specific notion of 'the family' that is being promoted excludes and isolates all those other supportive relationships that exists outside the institutionalised family arrangement.

We affirm the above and wish to reiterate that the reasons for the breakdown of the family, the increasing incidence of child neglect and violence in the society are not due to women forsaking their duty by the family and downplaying their motherhood role and having taken up jobs, but rather due to lack of adjustments, and continued refusal of men, to grant women their share of the rights, and to take up their share of the duties in the family.

Women's Rights are Human Rights

Conceptualised against the background of post-war Europe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1946 defined a universal standard of human rights. However, written within the conceptual parameters of a patriarchal world view, human rights are defined in terms of a false dichotomy between the public and the private spheres. The relationship of the state with the individual's civil and political rights defines the public sphere. The male-dominated family defines the private sphere. Not surprisingly, the result is serious gaps and omissions in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Through the use of language in which the male is presented as the norm and the feminine is subsumed within its categories, women's rights have been allowed to subsist only in the margins of human rights discourse. Further, the definition of human rights as lying within the narrow parameters of the state versus the civil and political liberties of the individual, have placed the private sphere, and subsequently the violation of women's rights, outside the arena of human rights.

Given this context, all human rights documents particularly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, (ICCPR) need to be interpreted in the light of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Further the language must be changed to reflect the realities of women and the violations of their human rights.

Global and national economic structures and systems cannot be seen in isolation from human rights, especially in the South where women provide the cheapest labour for markets in the North. The advent of the New World Order, with its monolithic world view, threatens to further subjugate the South, both economically and culturally, by strengthening its control over the intellectual and technological resources of the world.

As women we claim the rights that are denied us under patriarchy. Our rights are inseparable and indistinguishable from the rights of men. We have the same rights to education, health and decision-making within society. Patriarchy and its structures - social, economic and discursive - are root cause of the marginalisation and subordination of women. Therefore, it should be prohibited and radical changes be initiated within its attendant philosophies and structures. This is especially true of discriminatory language use, which is in itself a violation of women's rights.

We refuse to accept the dichotomy between the public and private spheres of life, where only the public is accepted as the area where 'legitimate' human rights violations occur, and where the only violations acknowledged are those committed by the state against the individual. For the right to privacy is a basic human rights of all individuals, which neither the state nor any group or individual may violate, the individual's right to life and security is a prior right to privacy, and the state must take responsibility for individual acts that violate human rights, whether in the public or in the private sphere. The refusal to recognise domestic violence, incest, rape, prostitution and trafficking in women as human rights violations is a direct outcome of this false dichotomy.

All individuals, indigenous peoples and minorities have a right to their cultures. However, the rights to life, security of person, health and education are prior to that of culture, religion and ethnic identity, and in instances of conflict between the two, the universality of human rights will take precedence over cultural and other forms of diversity. Further, in instances of conflict between the customary laws of a group or people versus the state, the position which most clearly reflects the spirit of Universal Declaration of Human Rights should prevail.

Areas of Concerns

Questions are raised regarding the violation of women's human rights by or with the connivance of the state. While it was agreed that the rights to safety and life precedes the right of states to monopolise what is deemed as legitimate violence, the problem remains of whether and under what circumstances would the authority or intervention of a supra-state entity be acceptable. This led to further debate on the question of state sovereignty itself. Given today's context where the thrust is towards regional groupings (e.g. South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation), the traditional concept of the nation state itself is undergoing significant changes. Further more since women's human rights violations take place across national borders, this was not an easy issue to resolve.

While this was agreed that we should not glorify the state, the arbitrary interference of another state or group of states in the internal matters of a given country is also open to question. Therefore it was decided that these issues needed further discussion and that we should work with other Asian NGOs in the field. It was also agreed that the enforcement and investigative mechanisms should be strengthened for the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, the exact terms and conditions for such institutions need to be worked out.

The issue of what constitutes good governance was discussed. The concept of democracy needs to be expanded to include not merely 'political' democracy (elections, voting, representation) but also economic, cultural and social democracy which would entail participation in decision making at the community, national and international levels. In this context the right of all women to participate fully in decision-making at the level of basic social units and at the national level, along with their right to full and direct control over their reproductivity was discussed. The essential question is one of the extent of the decision making powers vested in the people, and not one of decentralisation. It is a basic human right of people to govern

themselves. Alternatives to existing structures need to be explored.

It is in the light of this perspective that the Women's Action Forum is recommending changes in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, at the World Human Rights Conference held in Vienna.

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Power and Women's Space in Sri Lanka

Geraldine Gamburd

Contempt for women

Sri Lankan women suffer the double put-downs of being admired for their beauty and respected for their hard work; they may also be spurned and cast out though there is little or no evidence of their being killed in dowry deaths as are their Indian sisters. While men and children are still sleeping before dawn, women begin their tasks of preparing food for the family. In the household in general, the rear outdoor and interior of the house is for women and their labor while the front verandah is for men and guests. Women's early morning work earns evening leisure for men. As women retire early so as to repeat the labour the next day, men are free to gather on verandahs to play cards and gamble for two or three hours. Given this "gift": of time, the men's, indeed the societal patriarchal, contemptuous treatment of women calls for explanation. We will consider whether that gift is voluntary or based on some kind of coercion: perhaps a coercion with varying degrees of subtlety, a coercion in the form of direct domination by men or denigration by ideology in which women do things that are advantageous to men. If this coercion is real we will be asking how women can reclaim advantages for themselves in this social space.

The Old Space: Voices of Dominance

The New Space: Resistance and Equality

To explain the ambiguity in women's space, the admiration for their gifts on the one hand and contempt on the other, we will give voice to Sri Lankans by using their religious texts, life stories collected in the late 1960s, and writings from the 1980s. We look, too, at theories about domination and the

effects of current social changes brought by multinational, aid and development corporations. Most importantly we look to ways in which women can carve out space for themselves in a patriarchal society. Earlier, people have not taken this multidimensional approach toward providing strategies for achieving equality.

A major form of domination is that which appears in the dominant/subordinant relationship between members at the top and bottom of a hierarchy. Here we emphasize that the point between those two extremes, is equality. We will use this dominant/ subordinant opposition to focus on gender roles, firstly, as they are depicted in Hindu and Buddhist religions, secondly as they appear in life-stories of two generations and thirdly as they are enacted today. More specifically we use the principles of postmodern feminism to inform our discussion of domination of women in particular. Post-modern feminism, emphasizing action, takes the study of domination one step further and tries to discover points of resistance and revolution against domination. It is this hope for positive change that inspired the title of this paper, Power and Women's Space in Sri Lanka.

To find and discuss that space and women's potential power we need to delineate clearly not only, the opposition between dominant/subordinant positions within a hierarchy, but also the additional opposition between the two opposing world views of hierarchy and equality. The ideal of hierarchy and the ideal of equality co-occur in both Sri Lanka and America and are enacted in religion, politics and gender roles.¹ I argue here that room for action lies in the gap between the two extremes of hierarchy and that equality resides in that space; it is precisely in this gap that we can create new structures and bring about change.

We will examine the experiences of Sri Lankan women along lines of this theoretical approach. In doing so we will emphasize especially *three specific aspects of the space between gender oppositions: discourse, subjectivity, and power*. Discourse is here taken to be what is said about men and women; subjectivity, what men and women say about themselves

(including their roles and identities),² and power, who is in control of people and resources. These aspects make visible the space for creative possibilities. They delineate the places and avenues of change. The importance of this space will be elaborated as we illuminate the old structures in search of potential for the new in the experiences of Sri Lankan women.

In Sri Lanka, from the voices of women, we discover their perception that caste, class and patriarchy suppress women in a world of elitest male design. Moreover, similarities of class and patriarchy, if not of caste, can be found worldwide. While those similarities in the ideologies of hierarchy and inequality, in particular those depicting male and female are manifested in very different ways, we will look for fundamental likenesses.

Sri Lanka and The Garden of Eden

But first, before pursuing these ideologies, let us note some of the good things about living in Sri Lanka. The name Sri Lanka means blessed land. What is it that led to the suggestion that Sri Lanka is the "next best place to the Garden of Eden"? One of the Judeo-Christian myths about Adam's Peak notes that if our mythological forebears had to be thrown out of the garden, this surely was the next best place to be. Long before the arrival of Christians, Sri Lankans had named this same mountain Sri Pada, the place where the Buddha had left his footprint. Picturesque morning scenes tempt us to agree with both Buddhists and Christians: women walk along red sandy paths to the public well in the pre-dawn to wash the family laundry in a cool and quiet coconut garden; nearby others pound coconut fibres in a shady grove by the river. Walking while it is cool they shop at boutiques and carry water, they weave coconut fronds and prepare meals in the cool of the morning over the traditional three stone fireplace fed with coconut fronds. Voices of saffron clad Buddhist monks sing in the temple compound nearby while people worship. After dawn most men and children begin to rouse. Many women rise two hours before men to begin their work at these and other tasks like rope making, potwashing, drying coconut or purifying floors with cow dung. Most village

women retire early, while men spend leisure time in the evening hours often playing cards or gambling.

While all of this may seem idyllic, almost like a travel brochure of why you should come to Sri Lanka, the cultural ideologies of the past and the present have added a number of negative characteristics, especially for women. I present what might be construed as a contradiction to my argument to make clear the fact that the negative aspects of ideologies which I will be emphasizing are not the only distinguishing features of the Sri Lankan lifestyle. This description of predawn activities has omitted such negatives as how wearying it is for the women to carry the heavy, water soaked coconuts fronds and how savagely the mosquitoes attack in those hours. If we have painted labor in benign colors, we know too it carries with it various costs. The labor may not be entirely onerous but how does it compare with sleeping in or the social experiences that might be open to women if they were not filling their time with this labor instead? That is to say, how does it compare with the experiences of men? Upon re-examining this idyllic representation, one of the questions we will be asking is how this labor of women is received. If, for example, it is received as masters receive the labor of their servants it is not only unappreciated but worse, it is used as an instrument to demean them and to lower their dignity or rank.

Gender Roles: Ideology (Definitions and Ambiguity between Power and Altruism), Life Stories, the Media and Social Relations

In the context of postmodern feminist theory and this ambiguous setting, we now turn to a chronological statement of gender roles. We will focus on them first as they are depicted in the myths of Hindu and Buddhist ideology, second as they are seen through the lifestories of men and women in the early and middle 1900s, and thirdly as they are enacted today. Gender roles are the outgrowth of centuries of religious ideology. We cannot easily separate how men and women are portrayed today from the canonical texts of Buddhism and Hinduism.

When we ask how women were portrayed in this civilization which is over 2500 years old, there is of course some ambiguity. As stated above, they have been both admired and spurned. I argue that this is the case, first of all because Sri Lanka's values and ideals, though they are viewed and labelled as Buddhism, have roots in both Hinduism and Buddhism. It is instructive to unpack the syncretism of these two opposing principles. We will refer to Hinduism here rather than using the more laborious terminology, 'the Hinduist aspect of Buddhism'. Hinduism focuses on daily life and hierarchies that comprise it, Buddhism focuses on spiritual equality. Consequently, many have suggested that religion in Sri Lanka has a double focus, both worldly and otherworldly. I suggest that can be translated as being a focus on caste and daily life on the one hand and on anti-caste and spirituality on the other. Active power is part of the worldly focus, and passive purity, which is the relative withdrawal from the daily struggle for status and power, is part of the otherworldly focus.³

The significant features of this caste-anticaste opposition are revealed when we contrast Hinduism and Buddhism, which contain opposing definitions of purity, power, responsibility and generosity. In Hinduism these four features are reserved for the privileged few at the top of a hierarchy; virtue and caste are linked. In Buddhism the four features are supposed to belong to every human being in an egalitarian anti-caste fashion; virtue and spirituality are linked. In Hinduism, these features are connected to active concerns in this world; in Buddhism, to passive, mental, and perhaps even otherworldly concerns.

Chart A: Ideals of Caste Hinduism and Anticaste Buddhism

In Hinduism:

Purity is inherent in gods and in the privileged few at the top of the hierarchy.

Power is chiefly power and wealth ascribed to the pure ones of high caste birth. It is active in daily worldly affairs.

Responsibility belongs to the privileged few at the top of the hierarchy. It is the right to sacrifice to the gods and to receive sacrifice from the many.

Recipients of generosity are gods and a privileged few at the top of the hierarchy.

In Buddhism:

Purity is inherent in and achievable by every human being as purity of mind.

Power is enlightenment and wisdom achieved by asceticism. It is passive and spiritual, withdrawn from worldly affairs.

Responsibility belongs to everyone. Every human being is responsible for selfless action and asceticism.

Recipients of generosity are universal; all benefit from the interest of every human being in the welfare of every other.

Hinduism defines pollution organically as human bodily emissions. Buddhism defines it socially, as active power and the interest of the self or select few. *It is worth emphasizing that socially active power is considered polluting by Buddhism.* Purity and active power, equated in Hinduism, are viewed as opposed in Buddhism.

This double focus of religion in Sri Lanka on caste and anti-caste is mirrored by hierarchical male and egalitarian female

behavioral ideals.⁴ In male roles as in Hinduism, virtue and caste are linked. In contrast, female roles, like in Buddhism, link virtue and spirituality. It is helpful to set up the following contrastive pair:

Chart B: Gender Roles - Ideal Male and Female Behaviors

THIS WORLDLY LIFE STYLE: OTHER WORLDLY LIFE STYLE

active	passive
power	pure
hindu	buddhist
caste	anticaste
male behavior:	female behaviour:
decision makers	observers
status seekers	ascetic forgoers
active responsibility	passive onlookers
self interested generosity	interest in others

In this arena, the double definitions allow alternate possibilities, self interest and interest in others. These may overlap when both interests are the same or they may be in opposition when interest differ. These opposing definitions lead to ambiguity in behavior and create a large arena within which to bargain about women's space. Chart A and B highlight a similar double definition and ambiguity, in religion and gender relations.

Discourse of Caste, Violence and Male Dominance in Domestic and Political Life. Prescribed Roles for Women

Because Sri Lanka is known as a, if not the, Buddhist country where equality and non-violence are ideals, we ask what

data from myths and religion speak most directly to the values so opposite, caste hierarchies and violence. We begin with the data on gender hierarchy in Pattini goddess and Kataragama god myths which are celebrated during Esala (July-August) each year. The celebration ends with a game (An Keliya) where each of two sides has a hooked stick, one side represents the goddess, the other the god. If the goddess' side wins the game it is said to be inauspicious.

According to myths, consort relationships (spouses or partners) are auspicious when males are dominant and inauspicious when females are dominant. For the health and welfare of the community in the coming year it is important that the male side wins. It is significant that this kind of myth also occurs in India where Hinduism is predominant thus suggesting that, in Sri Lanka, this particular gender inequality stems from the Hinduistic caste aspects of religious concerns with gods and goddesses. In central India, among the Chhattisgarhi, it is explicitly stated that the ambiguous benevolent-malevolent nature of gods and goddesses depends on the relationship between consorts. If the male is dominant the pair is benevolent. If the female is dominant the pair is malevolent. (Babb 1975)

In terms of post modern feminism, this discourse is heavily weighted to justify male dominance. I am suggesting that these relationships of spouses or partners in myth justify and define a similar dominant-subordinant relationship in daily domestic family life. The relationship may be given definition and credibility by varying degrees of conscious-unconscious connection to the myth.

If we take the Hinduist Pattini and Kataragama myths as representing a preference for male dominance on the domestic level, we may look at the Buddhist series of origin myths of the settling of Sri Lanka as a kingdom as representing a preference for male dominance on the political level.

But first before turning to those origin myths we wish to note the caste-anticaste contradiction which appears in the annual round of the religious calendar. While Buddhism clearly affirms the ideal of anticaste, caste is equally clearly affirmed in Hinduist devotion to the deities. In the religious calendar, the

May and June festivals of Wesak and Poson celebrate Buddhism and spiritual anti-caste values. July-August festivals of Esala celebrate gods and goddesses of Hindu origin, patriarchy, and caste hierarchy. While Buddhist monks are relatively sequestered and inactive during the rainy seasons of Vas (July-October) the gods and active power are re-enthroned until the following May and June.

Now we return to the Buddhist series of origin myths in which the delineation of Buddhism as anti-caste seems less absolutely clear. The first king of Sri Lanka was Vijaya. Born of brother-sister parents, who in turn were parented by a wayward, amorous and shameful princess and a lion, Vijaya himself, the eldest of a series of 16 sets of twins, was so violent that he was banished from his home area in India. He and his followers, 700 men were so violent their heads were 1/2 shaven (meaning they were considered 1/2 slave) and were sent forth upon the sea. These references in the Mahavamsa,⁵ Sri Lanka's oldest religious document, suggest that violence was considered reprehensible enough to warrant banishment and also to warrant marking or setting apart violent individuals, in this case by the visible symbol of 1/2 shaven heads. This indicated they no longer had full status as citizens, perhaps even as human beings. Yet inspite of this dubious behavior and consequently dubious status of Vijaya and his companions, it was recorded, in this same Mahavamsa, that Vijaya landed in Sri Lanka, on the very day that The Buddha attained pari-nibbana (death). Through this connection was interwoven the ideas of "sihadipa", and "dhammadipa" that civilization began in Sri Lanka with the landing of Vijaya and the founding of the Sinhala race as guardians of the Buddha dhamma (the idea of "dhammadipa). How are we to reconcile this juxtaposition of violence and prime representor of a non-violent religion in one and the same person, the king, Vijaya? Vijaya would not represent Buddhism until after he perpetrated several other violent acts.

First, Kuvanna, a female indigenous princess, married Vijaya. By scheming, and deception, she betrayed her people into his hands and then Vijaya founded a city. He and his people were called Sinhala, people of the lion. However, for Vijaya to become a king, a maiden of a noble house must be consecrated

as queen. Consequently, Vijaya drove away Kuvanna and her two children. He sent for the daughter of a Pandu King. She and 100 others were brought, accompanied by elephants, "horses and wagons worthy of a king, and craftsmen and a thousand families of the 18 guilds, entrusted with a letter to the conqueror, Vijaya." (Geiger 1960:59). He ruled over Lanka in peace and righteousness thirty eight years.

Even if we don't ask how this violent conqueror, Vijaya was absolved to become a peaceful and righteous ruler, we note there are three types of women portrayed in the Mahavamsa: amorous and shameful (his grandmother), scheming and deceptive (Kuvanna, his aboriginee consort) and finally, the exemplary woman fit to be a queen (the young woman who brought a huge dowry from a Pandu family to become Vijaya's wife). Are we meant to assume that only women who bring wealth and whose marriages are arranged, and who do not try to take power into their own hands, are acceptable role models, while all others who bring shame, are defamed and eventually abandoned? For women, behaviors leading to acceptance or social death are very closely prescribed in these myths. Yet for the male, Vijaya, contact with two denigrated women is put aside and overlooked when he marries an exemplary woman. Exemplary women appear to have power.

In another mythological story, a fourth type of woman, the asexual woman exemplified by religious nuns, is the role model. This myth describes how Buddhism is brought to Sri Lanka⁶ Sanghamitta is the sister of Mahinda (the son of King Asoka), who brought to Sri Lanka, a branch of the Bodhi tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. Sanghamitta taught religious precepts to the queen Anula and her 500 maidens and 500 women of the royal harem, all living in a nunnery built by the King. As long as this attainment of purity is dependent upon passivity; the maidens and women must remain a part of the royal harem, the most insidious institution of patriarchy.

But what of queens who rule, those who are in a dominant position? Is dominance allowed to women on this

level of public life? A commentary on women who rule as queens begins with a tale of robbery and destruction.

"During the reign of his father Mahachula, Chora Naga wandered through the island leading the life of a robber; returning on the demise of the king he assumed the monarchy; and in the places which had denied him an asylum during his marauding career, he impiously destroyed the viharas [religious shrines]. After a reign of twelve years he was poisoned by his queen Anula, and regenerated in the Lokantarico hell"

"His son, King Kuda Tissa, was also poisoned by his mother, in order to clear her own way to the throne. The Sinhalese annals thus exhibit the unusual incident of a queen enrolled amongst the monarches of the great dynasty-a precedent which was followed in after times; Queen Sivalli having reigned in the succeeding century A.D.37, Queen Lilawati in A.D. 1197, and Queen Kalyanawati in A.D.1202. From the excessive vileness of her character, the first of the Singhalese women who attained to the honours of sovereignty is denounced in the Mahawansa as the "infamous Anula". In the enormity of her crimes and debauchery she was the Messalina of Ceylon; she raised to the throne a porter of the palace with whom she cohabited, descending herself to the subordinate rank of queen consort, and poisoned him to promote a carpenter instead. A carrier of firewood, a Brahman, and numerous other paramours followed in rapid succession, and shared a similar fate till the kingdom was at last relieved from the opprobrium by a son of Prince Tissa, who put the murderess to death, and restored the royal line in his own person." (Tennent: 321-322)

In a further story, illicit relations, murder and intrigue, called a "fury of impiety" by Tennent (p 322)⁸, also precede a woman being placed on the throne in 1197. The myth rides lightly over the fact of the preceding debauchery, but emphasizes the opprobrious behavior of the queen. In discourse, women as ruling queens are almost always (perhaps always)

associated with bad kingdoms; men as ruling kings are associated with the ideal of good kingdoms which uphold Buddhism. As in all people's stories, good and bad things happen but in the discourse of the Mahavamsa the bad things more often associated with active women, the good things with active men. Bad men can become good and righteous rulers. Bad women, it appears, cannot redeem themselves unless they relinquish their dominance. While it is assumed that a king will have a harem and the rank of the women is not differentiated and certainly has no effect on the status of the king, every sexual relationship of the queen is tied up with rank. Active women are perceived as a threat to both the law and caste, both the kingdom and the domestic sphere.

Goal to Achieve Egalitarian Discourse, Positive Self Images (subjectivity) and Equal Human Roles (power)

Women's identities and roles in the discourse of ancient myths and legends are an arena for defamation and, subsequently, subordination. This discourse does still have authority/influence today as proved in the life-stories of men and women presented below. *Post modern feminists would like to disclose the prejudicial agenda of these myths and lifestories in order to create a discourse for resistance and revolution. They hope to create a discourse to challenge these negative role models and identities and to replace them once more with equal roles.* After examining the life stories we will see that voices of women in the 1980s are resisting the old discourse and are beginning to create a new, more egalitarian, discourse addressed to achieving status and earthly well being for women.

Above and in Table 1 we have delineated discourse, subjectivity and power as three aspects of space where people can act. Applied to patriarchy I argue we must alter current discourse, subjectivity and power roles away from describing dominant men/subordinate women toward creating equal human roles. What is said about us and what we say about ourselves (story telling) and who controls resources, information and who

makes decisions must clearly be altered if we are to achieve equality.

Self Images of Power (Respect, Responsibility, Land Status) and Altruism (Give Respect as Relatively Powerless Observers). Relation to Ideology.

Life stories of men and women on the South West Coast of Sri Lanka from 1920-1970 reveal a setting similar to that of archaic days, that is to say, a setting of village caste relations within an overarching anti-caste ideal of Buddhism. Caste ideals appear in devotion to deities, astrology and magical practices which address immediate realities of the social order, such as secular success, relative status and curing of illnesses. Curing rites are significant because bodily illnesses are an analogue for social ills. Spirits, demons and gods/goddesses deal with the ideal of caste and earthly well being. The anti-caste ideal is about the more removed and long range other-worldly Buddhist goal of attaining Nibbana (Sanskrit: Nirvana).

In short, contrast between life stories of men and women in the 20th century reveal that men seek worldly well-being and secular success, while women prefer social service and withdraw from decision-making and from confrontation in public life. Life stories of two men and two women reveal very different roles and opportunities available to them. The summary of the life story of a man whom we call Armond and conclusions drawn from stories of his son, and from the stories of a mother and daughter illustrate the kind of data which led to these conclusions.

The life story of Armond as told on 8/28/68 begins with the location of his village of birth and the story of his family, beginning with his mother's and father's parents. Educated to be a school teacher, Armond's father went into business because school masters received only ten rupees per month in those days; (in 1968, ten rupees was equal to less than two dollars; in 1993 it was worth less than twenty-five cents). Armond's father was a man of sudden anger if people did 'wrong things'. He was alienated from all his relatives, both his own and his wife's.

Armond's mother kept peace with her own family. Her father educated Armond while he lived with him. Armond's own father brought him back home. Born in 1911, he entered school in 1916. He was a good student, first in his class; in fact, the first to pass a qualifying exam in his school in the forty-five years it had been given. He became an assistant teacher at fifteen receiving twenty-five rupees per month. During his teaching days, he taught many who now have important positions at Peradeniya University, in the Ceylon Embassy of China, or as Medical doctors. "I was the only one teaching science at that time. The children of big people, proctors and doctors went there. When I was a teacher there I could get good favors from them. I was there fourteen years."

He has sent his sisters to training college and has helped them to get married. He gave his father's earnings which had been left to him to his younger brother. "I had fifty proposals but I refused them all. My mother said: "If you don't get married I am going to die. I will jump into the sea or on the railway track." So my mother forced me to get married, soon.... I don't like married life." He likes games and cards; nevertheless he came to his wife's home village, where he lives now. He refused gifts (dowry) except for gold ornaments. He got his wife a teacher's post. "We earned the money to buy this property and to build these two homes. I didn't have anything from my father or wife's parents. What we have, we earned." He was a gambler. "I have lost about 14,000 Rupees (about \$2300 in 1968 and \$300 in 1993) in all the time I have played cards. My wife..... stopped... what I liked very much."

He helped send his wife's three sisters to training college or find jobs or arrange marriages. He gave gifts and helped his relatives' children enter Dharmasoka College. He had trouble with his father and mother-in-law so he refused to go to their house. "I helped everybody in both families but nobody will help me. They always keep away from me. But I am spending a good life."

The life story of Armond centers on the ideals of privilege and status; he has active power, and leisure time to gamble and values generosity. These ideals are illustrated by the

importance placed on generosity for gaining status. Generosity towards kin, in-laws, powerful people and also political connections are important for gaining status. A broad range of statuses and roles are described as being available.

The life story of Armond's son, Rithi, was gathered on May 18, November 28, and December 2, 1969. On the first occasion he described his early school career. Because his parents were both teachers he was pampered and received favors from other teachers and school children alike. Although other children were caned for the disobedience, the school masters were likely to overlook his own bending of the rules. "From the 3rd standard I went to Dharmasoka primary school.... Those were very important days of my life.... (I learned) how to wear trousers.... a long sleeved shirt and fountain pen there." They were status symbols. When his father came to teach at Dharmasoka, the other teachers gave him special attention. When he did well in his studies he was rewarded at home with special school supplies and new clothes. It was a status symbol to attend Dharma Asoka, a private school, where children were not caned by the teachers

After he passed the GCE Ordinary Level examination people began to grant him respect and responsibility. He participated in family weddings and funerals, and supervised workers in their gardens. "They talked to me like to my father." He went to Colombo, the capital city, to study for the Advanced Level examination which assures entrance into the University. While there his family continued to favor him with money and wrist watches and other goods.

To explain his slide from such a favored status he describes how he "was third in class in English even though I came from village area. The teacher advised me to go to Ceylon Cadet Corps, [instead] I thought to take one more year, pass high and continue in medicine. My father wanted me to sit for the exams... I passed only three subjects, so I gave up everything." At this point his life begins to change though the slide to a less advantaged status does not really become marked until six or so years later. He explains his failure on the exams as being due to the fact that every two years they change the syllabus. "The trick

is to get through in two years. If they change the syllabus it is hard to try the exam the next time."

Because of his knowledge of chemistry and physics he got a job in a chemical firm for five and one half years. When he didn't receive pay increases comparable to the increasingly responsible work he was given, he complained. The owner said he "didn't want a Halagama because you can't control them" (Both the owner and Rithi are Halagama.) Rithi says, they "wanted a palace system inside the factory. I said Sir to the Director but not Hamuduruwo - honorable one."

After he left that position, he "worked here and there... that period I started to drink badly... I had a girl connection in Madombe... for eight months I had a hard time." His girl connection" was to someone of lower status than his family so his father tried to advise him against it as well as against drinking so heavily. When he didn't accept the advice, his father finally beat him so badly he had to go to the hospital. There he comments "all my relations came but father didn't come." He signed himself out of the hospital in the evening and drank a very potent local moonshine called arrack. A relative found him on the side of the road at 6.45 in the morning, and took him back to the hospital. Then his parents came for him and took him home. There he worked but was given no money. Another time "father was angry at troubles I caused between villagers by calling them names. He beat me. He said, "I'm sorry I can't blame the villagers and can't blame your grandmother [who had joined him in the name calling]. He took cross ties to a coconut tree and placed 6 cages of red ants by me for 1/2 hour. But if I am angry no one can stop me."⁷

Rithi, hopes to gain respect, responsibility and land status. Doubts enter in as he meets with temporary failures and obstacles to his moving toward the top in the local patron-client hierarchy. He is bitter when he is blocked in reaching that status. He has fallen into a jobless, moneyless, friendless state; he has been beaten by his father for straying from an upward path; but in Rithi's own words, "If I am angry no one can stop me."

Antagonism is a dominant mode in these relationships. In his full life story Rithi makes it clear that his own greatest

worry is status, his greatest goal is to be generous. "I had a rough time mentally as a child: Will I become like father or Linton" [a very capable young man in a very low caste status]. When I asked him, "What is the most important thing you can do?", he responded, "If you can give something to a person, if you can help that man, that is the thing I like. The happiest thing is to help at home to bear a good respect and help. To help like that you have to have finance and be trusted."

In an adult woman's story, Nameli, who was born in 1909, focuses on family events: weddings, births, illnesses (due to typhoid, malaria, pneumonia and charmings) and deaths (of 7 siblings, only 3 lived beyond the age of 25). She describes living in a home with a middle compound surrounded by four houses. Her father's status as a district manager of lands and water control (vidane arachchi) is important to her family's choice of residence and opportunities. Even though girls' and boys' schools were separate, she was sent to the boys' school for the first three years because "the headmaster was a friend of [her] father." Yet when she was recommended for a pupil teacher her "father didn't like [her] being employed." Instead, she learned needlework and embroidery.

Near the end of the interview her husband interjected: 'Because women of the area are confined to their homes there is hardly anything in their lives that is significant to say.' Her daughter added: 'Her relations live in Colombo, so they could have sent her there but they were afraid she would be Westernized after learning English. We had highly connected relations with the English from the beginning: the boys learned English but the girls stayed home.' Lola's mother then said of her restricted opportunities: "I regret it, I regret it. I am sorry because all the conveniences were available and couldn't get them, Lola and her sister are the first two girls to be sent for English education.'

Nameli's life story shows that women are kept in the home and not allowed access to extra-domestic sources of privilege, power and responsibility. When asked the question, what have you been most pleased with in life? She replied: "I was very happy to see that the two of my daughters could be

educated. The happiest day, the day Lola got through her degree exam. At that time just a few were selected for the varsity, and Lola was the first from this area."

Lola's own life story reveals the development of a somewhat better opportunity for women born in the 1930's. Because she represents a new generation in Sri Lanka, we present more of her life story. In contrast to her mother, Lola is a professional English-speaking teacher who has a Bachelor's Degree from Peradeniya University, considered to be the top university in the Island. Nevertheless, relationships with men show her grandfather's control over her early welfare. "I was admitted to school at the age of 6 in 1940. I was too small for my age so grandfather did not want to send me to school too soon." Even though she "was first in her class" non-family males had a negative effect on her education. She took Pali, which is to Sinhalese as Latin is to Italian. In "Pali, a very unhappy incident occurred. There was a priest in my class (Senior scholar Certificate (SSC) prep class). In a promotion test for the SSC form, I scored the highest mark for Pali. I wasn't so much interested in Pali; they gave an unseen reading and I knew it so I got a good mark. The others bullied the priest because he didn't get highest. So he got angry and he said perhaps I copied from a book. Because that is a thing I never do, I got dead wild and I gave up Pali." She studied Civics instead. A somewhat similar incident occurred when her math teacher asked her to give a formula. After she gave it, "he said why did you refer to the book".... I didn't look at the book. I didn't say anything. I thought I shouldn't do math. He said: "Have you decided to drop maths? I said yes. Father was not at home then. He was in Jaffna. I never told anything to my home people, I did the work as I wanted." Innuendos about her integrity led Lola to withdraw from at least two classes. Later during the vacation the math and English masters conducted extra classes. "They were unmarried male teachers so they said if girls came, they should come with a chaperone. Some girls went without chaperones but one other girl and I missed the classes. The teacher said he couldn't take responsibility for it and couldn't help us any extra ... Then we had the withdrawal test. He played a trick; on the application test, the teacher gave all the sums they had done that summer." She became second in arithmetic anyway. "It is only now that I

realise the fault is in the teacher, not in me. I always thought the fault must be me."

In spite of inuendos from male students, handicaps by teachers and even by home people, Lola "sat for the exam and got 3 credit passes (Buddhism, Arithmetic and Sinhalese Lit). I got through in 6 subjects." Although she withdraws from most overt confrontations, she perseveres in the long run.

She went to Dharmasoka for her University Entrance training. In most of the subjects she had to start from the beginning so she had to work hard. "I wouldn't have done so much of work if it was like SSC, but here it is competitive. More than 3000 take up the exam and only 300 are taken in. So there I had to study for 3 years. There is an application test. I couldn't go for it because there was a strike [Hartall] in 1953. So there weren't any vehicles to go and a curfew order was passed between 6 pm and 6 am because there was so much trouble. Our principal conducted classes ... there were no railcars, so I walked 7 miles. When I came home my legs got swollen. The next day my parents wanted to send me in a car because it was essential to come for the test. The car driver was afraid of the strikers... So then I couldn't go for the other papers and like me there were other girls who couldn't come. So we weren't allowed to take the exam that year. The following year I took the exam and passed."

In her interview Lola said that she does not get exceptionally excited and her calm demeanor reflects the accuracy of this. Her stated interest in what she calls "non-interfering games" such as ping-pong, suggests avoidance of direct competition. At the same time she was forbidden from playing active sports because her parents believed that she was too delicate. We need to note here her comment that while in college one of her favorite activities was social service. In addition in the 1960s she co-founded a local social service group in her home area. We have left out of the account much that is of interest - Lola's stories center on marriage and caste status; the disowning of sons and the inheritance of the land; religious decision to share equally; male dominance in decision-making about land owned by women; and unfairness in sharing proceeds

from lands. These family and domestic matters are covered in some detail and reflect societal inequities. She also mentions that her father did not force his daughters to get married. When she received proposals from a good journalist and a young man connected to a high class who served in an embassy abroad as a civil servant she did not consider either of these offers of marriage. "In fact I am not very keen on married life. I think I have the freedom to move as I wish. My sister says [being married] is a necessity. When we are old we will need someone. I had no disappointment either. I don't say a married life is bad, but for myself I prefer a free life as this." Her own ideals and lifestyle are illuminated by her choice of a bird as a favourite creature. "A bird is innocent, and leads a harmless life. I always prefer a harmless and simple life."

Lola competes when it is important to do so (for gaining entrance into the university) and she also recognises and values the freedom of unmarried life. While she internalizes anger and blame, she also notes "I did the work as I wanted." We may conjecture that Lola's behavior is partially assertive and partially withdrawn. Her assertive behavior shows in her gaining university entrance and maintaining her single status. Her withdrawn behavior is confirmed by her preference for "non-interfering games" and her emphasis on social service. In this context we should mention also her stated interest in drama (which may perhaps be viewed as a chance to play at involvement in lieu of real involvement).

In the life stories of this male teacher and his son, favoritism, disputes, transfers, political manoeuvring and other interpersonal struggles in the extra-domestic work sphere are described. These are not alluded to in the autobiographical sketches of women. Perhaps, in fact, the handicaps meted out to women preclude this kind of political manoeuvring. Even in domestic affairs, male decisions about marriage, careers and property are clearly evident. Because of different kinds of opportunities and obstacles for women and men, different personalities emerge. The samples suggest that the personalities of men are assertive and those of women are detached and withdrawn, or at least acquiescent. In some ways Lola is an exception here, but her assertiveness is clearly limited to her

own career and lifestyle. She has not been allowed, or presumably even considered trying, to make decisions for others. The statements of social space corroborate the idea that men are more assertive, for when visitors (strangers at least) approach a verandah, the women are expected to withdraw into the interior of the house. Two comments, one by the nineteen year old male and the other by Lola, suggest a similar vacillation between assertive and detached behavior. Rithi said, "If I am angry no one can stop me" while Lola on the other hand said, "The point is that I don't take the initiative. If they put me to something, I continue." Lola's stated interest in religion might lead us to assume that detached, withdrawn behavior and working for the benefit of others coincide with Buddhist ideals. She says, "From my childhood I was very religious minded because of the influence of grandfather as well as uncle who was a priest. In the University, I joined the Social Service League."

We have already noted that religious texts enact certain ideologies. They distinguish between active and passive values and associate these values with caste and anti-caste ideals. Analysis of these life stories suggest a similar contrast that runs along gender lines.

In the category of power, men discuss affairs as decision makers in family matters. In the category of purity, men actively seek a high status by means of antagonism, friendship, and/or patronage. This is purity by the Hindu definition. Women talk of giving love and respect. They bear the brunt of, rather than engage in, situations of rivalry; in this sense they are foregoers or ascetics. They retreat in the face of misrepresentation and accusations just as they retreat into the center of the house. 'Protection' is a way to keep women from competing and interacting equally, as seen in the case of the 'wavering' need for a chaperone when attending class sessions. Women are kept in a passive role. Their purity is the Buddhist kind of passive purity. Successful careers for men are discussed in terms of wealth, prestige, and the ability to give; today, medicine and law are seen as the surest avenues to success. Women struggle, whether domestic or extra-domestic; again in a sense they are detached ascetics. Lola's story suggests this when she observes, as already mentioned above, 'If they put me to something I continue. The

point is I didn't take the initiative'. I suggest this shows that, in the broadest perspective, women do not have control over the direction of their lives. This mirrors the Buddhist passive power of asceticism.

In the category of generosity the highest ideal for men is "big man generosity". This term refers to the practice of men helping others through giving. Moreover, this is less altruistic than it is an attempt to win obligations, a kind of one upmanship. In contrast, when women participate in extra-domestic affairs they serve in selfless and powerless capacities; they enter social service, study religion or write drama. They give for the benefit of others, whether it be by choice or perforce. By choice, some men (especially some monks) also give up power-seeking to gain religious merit and goodwill. While self-interested generosity is self-serving in that the giver gains power and control, selfless generosity benefits the recipient more than the giver who gains merit toward the next life for altruistic behavior. Buddhist ideals so clearly promote selfless generosity that men are ambivalent and shift their stance from Hinduist power-seeking to Buddhist altruistic behavior. Predominantly, though, laymen fall into the Hindu definition and women into the Buddhist definition.

In men's autobiographies, we learn from an actor's view about hope, fear and response to despair. In women's autobiographies we are confronted with people whose conceptions of themselves are built around themselves as observers rather than as participants. That is not to say that happiness, personal tragedies, sadnesses and disappointments are not also stated from the women's personal point of view; nevertheless, in social relations women are taking on a role to which they are socially relegated.

From these life stories a series of dualities have emerged. It is tempting to call them two worlds, the worlds of men and women, even though there are both men and women who occasionally cross the line of demarcation. These are the worlds of dynamic decision-makers and passive observers; active status seekers and ascetic foregoers; those who are allowed responsibility and those who are not. These two worlds

lead to two types of generosity: the male type, which is the helping of others with the immediate goal of gaining power (in self interest) and the female type, which is the helping of others with the more distant goal of gaining merit - insight (interest in others).

These dual worlds of men and women reflect the contradiction between caste and anti-caste. Alternating use of Hindu and Buddhist definition of purity, power, responsibility and generosity in daily lives explains the dual worlds. The emotional and structural connections among most men are tied to those of caste; men are concerned with getting to the top of the patron-client hierarchy where power and plenty are equated with purity. Their emphasis on generosity, however, suggests ambivalence about whether active this-worldly power-seeking is really pure; such activity comes into conflict with the Buddhist definitions in which power and hierarchy are rejected, and in which merit and insight embrace poverty and passive power (asceticism) as purity.

Pragmatic Potential of Altruism and Responsibility

Historically, the founder of Buddhism rejected active power and hierarchy to live as a propertyless, passive follower of the Middle Path. When Sinhalese villagers enact the ideals of this founder they deal with the opposites of power and purity indirectly in terms of self interest (power) and interest of others (purity). Asceticism equals purity and every person is responsible for attaining it some time. It could be argued that a society with the ideal of responsibility being given to everyone is the only society which has the potential for an order which could be good for everyone. The ideals of asceticism and individual responsibility for the interest of others are central to attaining a society which is good for everyone.

Buddhism's application to social events becomes visible from time to time. The most recent example of an attempt to apply the ideal of equality to the social sphere appeared in the insurgency of 1971, or at least in its inception. The insurgents were described as giving moral lectures on rich estate owners

while they gathered up the guns from the estates. They lectured about the unfairness of a few having so much. At that time they did not kill their opponents, even though later the movement degenerated. Even the current tragic civil war is defined by the Tamil Tiger insurgents as a struggle for liberation and freedom, as resistance by an oppressed people to injustice and military oppression by a ruling class (Lanka Guardian Nov 15, 1991). Buddhism is an anti-caste ideal with pragmatic potential. The life stories excerpted above suggest that women have already adhered to this ideal by their responsibility for the interest of others and by their asceticism. They stand only to gain by its implementation.

**Awareness and Resistance: Changing the Discourse,
Subjectivity and Power Relations. Current Practice
and Preferred Changes in Images of Women and
Actions of Men**

It is most important for women to be aware of when they are trapped in a subordinate position within the hierarchical models of caste, class, and patriarchy; they might redefine their position in accordance with the egalitarian models of ideal Buddhism, models that take the form of classless and genderless societies. They must stop accomodating themselves to authoritarian models to achieve the semblance of peaceful relations. Rather, they must insist on an egalitarian model in order to achieve the reality of peaceful relations.

There is space for a discourse of resistance and revolution, a discourse which moves toward more equality for everyone. There is space for changing what is said about men and women in the discourse; there is space for changing what men and women say about themselves, what identities and roles they assume. Moreover, there is space to change who controls resources and people. Weedon (1987:174-5) puts the possibility of change quite eloquently when she says "We need not take established meanings, values and power relations for granted. It is possible to (show) where they come from, whose interests they support, how they maintain sovereignty and where they are

susceptible to specific pressures for change... and use (them)in the fight for change"

With this in mind, we explore current practice and, at the same time, the kind of practice that can bring about this positive change in social arrangements. The archaic discourse was predominantly males talking with each other. In the modern discourse women talk with each other and with males.

One place in which we find women talking is in journals. To assure giving voice to the women of Sri Lanka, I am presenting arguments from two journals, Voice of Women and Lanka Guardian. Each text presents examples of offensive behavior - that is, of behavior that benefits men over women, or one caste or class over another. Women not only comment on that behavior, but explore ways in which our articulation of it can become a discourse of resistance.

Information was gathered in the 1980s by a group of women who published Voice of Women: A Sri Lanka Journal for Women's Liberation. The record includes a survey of negative stereotypes of women in the media (films, newspapers, radio and magazines), reports of sexual harassment, and data regarding political and economic injustice. In the editor's introduction to a 1983 issue of Voice of Women we are told women have been continually urging change in the portrayal of women in the mass media. Yet, in spite of women being prime ministers, professionals, diplomats, space explorers, decision makers, and office and factory managers, media images portray women in inferior roles. The editorial notes the media tells us women "are less articulate than men, are irrational, inactive, indecisive, and subservient". We are also predominantly seen as sex objects.

In a survey of five women's weekly newspapers in Sri Lanka, R. Weerasinghe found that the cover photos emphasize personal appearance. The women on the magazine covers conformed to either traditional Sri Lankan or Westernized notions of beauty. This emphasis on beauty enslaves women "as a marketable commodity to be used...[in] the degrading competition for males that exist among women in society today". (Voice of Women: p23) Stories of marriage and love

affairs, usually emphasizing lost love and tears, occupied most of the space in three women's weekly newspapers surveyed. From the point of view of R. Weerasinghe, in economic terms men benefit and women lose from heterosexual relationships and marriage. Women give lifelong service in return for board and lodging. "About 80% of the photographs that appeared in the women's weeklies portrayed women engaging in service work such as cooking and sewing... modelling... clothing... as brides" (Voice of Women, p.24) and as childcare attendants. While there was one report on the protest movement launched by Muslim women in Pakistan against proposed repressive reforms, that protest ended in even more oppression, as these courageous women were brutally repressed, raped and sexually assaulted. Even in the face of this note of brutal reality, the rest of the newspapers were filled with romance and fantasy.

Today, in Sri Lankan films, two images still predominate: women are either seductive prostitutes or are virtuous wives. This dovetails with the archaic discourse. "A virtuous woman is modest, submissive, inactive, indecisive, timid, and bewildered, at situations. A whore is vicious, scheming, seductive, destructive, frivolous, easily tempted, she traps helpless men and monks equally and drives them crazy." (Voice of Women, Selvy Thiruchandran, Survey of Sri Lankan films produced in the year 1981, p.13) Ms. Thiruchandran asserts that articulate women in the roles of politicians, social workers, educationists, researchers, critics, doctors and lawyers must be represented in films; when men are portrayed as having rights and women as having duties, the secondary status of women in wider society is reinforced.

All India Radio ads also reinforce sexist stereotypes. K. Bhasin and B. Agarwal of India tell us that women are depicted only as housewives and mothers, as superstitious and stupid. The ads "perpetuate a negative and derogatory image of women, and strengthen anti-women prejudices." (Voice of Women p.15) Further, women assert that alternative programmes, material must be created; we must demand changes; we must control the media or it will control us.

Sri Lankan women suggest that women who work for magazines, newspapers, films, and radio should analyse these sexist images and highlight the offending practices. All women must protest to create an awareness of the problem of the use of negative stereotypes in the media. They should also create an alternative media system in which women are granted self-respect, dignity, personality and individuality. New images must replace old stereotypes.

McGraw-Hill Book Company published a brochure, Guidelines for Equal Treatment of the Sexes, for use by its authors and editors. Voice of Women quoted it at length as an example in how to resist media subordination of women. (pp 18 and 19) We present excerpts here.

"Members of both sexes should be represented as whole human beings with human strengths and weaknesses, not masculine or feminine ones..."

Characteristics that have been traditionally praised in males such as boldness, initiative, and assertiveness - should also be praised in females. Characteristics praised in females such as gentleness, compassion and sensitivity should also be praised in males."

Women "should appear as logical thinkers, problem solvers, and decision makers. They should be shown as interested in their work, pursuing a variety of career goals, and both deserving of and receiving public recognition for their accomplishments."

"Sometimes men should be shown as quiet and passive, or fearful and indecisive, or illogical and immature. Similarly, women should sometimes be shown as tough, aggressive, and insensitive. Stereotypes of the logical, objective male and the emotional subjective female are to be avoided."

"Women should be spoken of as participants in the action not as possessions of the men... women should be recognized for their own achievements. Intelligent, daring and innovative women both in history and in fiction should be provided as role models for girls and

leaders in the fight for women's rights and should be honoured and respected, not mocked or ignored."

McGraw Hill's call for reform addresses the realm of representation. If one is tempted to view discrimination as existing only in that realm, then an examination of actual cases of sexual harassment makes it clear, the crisis facing Sri Lankan women is at both the representational and social interaction levels.

We present one case of harassment of a Sri Lankan woman and one of a western woman. Voice of Women (1983 Vol 11 Issue 2 p.13) reports an account of a young house maid who, upon her return from the Middle East, suffered a mental breakdown that led her to sing for several hours at the Customs examination hall. When questioned, she could not remember her home address but complained that she was beaten by her employer. The newspaper account was entitled: "She regaled Customs with her song". To add insult to injury, she was made a laughing stock for all. "No responsible person with a little bit of kindness and consideration extended a helping hand...(in addition) the reporting was totally insensitive to national values, totally destructive of our cultural heritage and absolutely detrimental to social norms of humanity." Sri Lankan feminists conclude: "Journalism has a tremendous responsibility to mankind and womankind. Journalists should exercise an acute sensitivity to rights and wrongs in their reporting and in their assessments and interpretations." It is important to note however, that the issue is larger than one of journalistic responsibility. Patriarchal ideology causes us to ignore this woman's complaint entirely, thus blinding us to what triggered her hysteria in the first place. Instead of blaming the employer for beating her, we blame her for her hysterical response.

In yet another case of sexual harassment, when Susan Eckstein, a young British woman visiting Sri Lanka, wished to walk home alone in the evening, she was harassed by men. Yet, if she took a taxi, she was propositioned by the driver. When she complained to men she knew they would say, "Ah well, you see, it's because our girls don't go out alone at night". Susan wondered if we women are to assume that we should all stay at

home in the evening. She concluded that these are dangerous assumptions because women then "compromise and make allowances for the irresponsible behavior of men". Rather, she suggests, we should realise that it is the men "who have created the intolerable situation whereby women cannot go out alone without being harassed." (Voice of Women pp 2 and 3) We must change these assumptions about women and resist the unfair restriction on our freedom of movement; we must especially criticize the denigrating assaults on our dignity and integrity that are assumed to be acceptable behavior by all men.

These are not isolated cases; rather, these and other forms of sexual harassment seem to be the rule, as we learn from Kantha Handa, the Sinhala Magazine of the same group of women who publish the English Voice of Women and Tamil Pennin Kural. Kantha Handa tells us that they "intend to highlight the many forms of violence against women which includes (sic) harassment in public transport and in public places, wife beating, molestation, rape and many other forms of terrorisation of women not forgetting what has been called 'verbal violence' namely shouting obscenities that all women are subject to in patriarchal societies" The organization also intends to set up homes for battered women because there is an "urgent need for such an institution in Sri Lanka."

Triple Burden: Caste, Patriarchy and Class.
Connections between them:
Each Contains Extremes of Hierarchy
(dominance and submission)
and the Potential Space Between-Equality.

Sexual harassment and negative stereotypes in the media are examples of the burdens of caste as well as patriarchy because the traditional expectations of caste which seclude women in the center of the home and house, punish and other behavior. Currently class is added to these traditional burdens of patriarchy and caste. The Lanka Guardian and other journals report gross political and economic injustice which takes the form of class inequality and is perhaps best exemplified in the

October and November 1989 issues of Lanka Guardian, where Asoka Bandarage discusses the relation between women and capitalist development from 1977-87. When she details the results of a World Bank-funded irrigation scheme, she describes some devastating consequences: one third of the money has been lost to graft; the ecological balance is threatened; rapid class differentiation has arisen because of political patronage and caste and class politics; and land has been leased to transnational corporations to cultivate tobacco. These effects counteract the World Bank's alleged commitment to self-sufficiency and support for small holders. Under the guise of interest in the plight of everyone, the self-interest of a few is served. Control over people and resources is increasingly more concentrated in the hands of upper class males.

Women especially have been adversely affected by Westernization. Their lifestyles have been transformed in new ways which exacerbate existing, and create new, inequalities. Bandarage tells us that traditionally women could hold land. In the Mahaweli Development Program, only men receive land and only land holders can get credit and membership in farmer's cooperatives. Women's co-producer roles are ignored by agricultural planners and administrators. Traditionally male relatives farmed adjacent inherited plots and shared labor. The Mahaweli Program has separated these kinship units. This has compelled women "to take on some customarily-male heavy work such as jungle clearing, land preparation, and watering and harvesting paddy. Since this work is considered family labor women receive no wages for it. The earnings from the family farm generally go to the male head of the household and property owner. When women work for outsiders, they are paid the usual low and unequal female wages". Just as male labor sharing networks are broken, so, too are female networks of mutual aid and daily support lost as women move from their traditional family kinship networks to these new settings. Women are more isolated and exploited. "Agribusiness expansion, the lack of social services, and the sharpening class and gender disparities make the outlook for women in these areas quite grim." In short, the Westernization of Sri Lankan industry further marginalizes a group already marginalized by tradition.

Despite the above, there are small symbolic ways in which women convert these oppressive situations to their own advantage. However, while we laud the young women who pedal bicycles, drive tractors, operate spraying machines, and join educational programs to get certificates to improve their job potential, we must press for the kind of larger system-wide changes suggested by Ms. Bandarage. "What is urgently required is not more low-paying female jobs for women, but changes in property laws, wage rates and cultural norms that keep women subordinate". It is clear that these changes must be made to improve power and women's space in Sri Lanka.

In the Free Trade Zone, economic injustice and sexual harassment are combined. Women work 67 hours per week on average. There is a great deal of sexual harassment and, to receive a promotion women may have to perform sexual favours. Living conditions in boarding houses are deplorable. Women receive \$1.00 to \$1.10 (47 to 52 Rs) per day. Ill health and fatigue mean they must leave their jobs after very few years. Yet there are some rays of hope and resistance. A Catholic nun did lead a successful strike to end sexual harassment of women when they left for home after the night shift. In this particular case these women won the right to a union.

As with the Mahaweli Development Program and the FTZ, labor export to the Middle East and tourism have also been defined in ways that are detrimental to women. Rising military expenditures and the consequent cutbacks in state welfare provisions have effected women and the poor in negative ways. These are patterns of capitalist development and gender subordination in peripheral countries. There is need for an alternative model of development that empowers rather than victimizes women (Lanka Guardian Oct.1989 p.25-27).⁹

To show how this alternative model might work, Chart C illustrates two conflicting models of development: the current one based on ideals of dominance, hierarchy and class, and, in contrast, the suggested alternative one based on equality. As shown below two different definitions freedom, access, responsibility, power, generosity and pollution emerge.

Chart C: Ideals of Class and (anti-class) Equality

Ideals of Class	Ideals of Equality
Freedom: the right of unlimited accumulation of wealth on a world wide level (World Bank, MNC) Institutions of private property, rent, interest, wages	The right to wide distribution of access to income, land, resources on a local grass roots level
Restricted access to information, decision making, resources & benefits	Unrestricted access to information, decision making, resources & benefits
Responsibility: Top/down Power: authority	Grass roots self-reliance (access to resources)
Recipients of generosity: military and elites	All citizens receive goods and services
Pollution: peace making	war making
Purity: A strong defense force	peace making

Finally, with the depiction of these two contrasting models of class and equality, the connections between caste, patriarchy and class become obvious. In short, the values of gender, responsibility and power benefit the dominant group while women and other marginalized groups are disadvantaged. When generosity or freedom means personal benefits to the men of the high caste and upper class, to the women and members of the lower castes and classes, it means disadvantages. Thus hierarchy in whatever form has similar relative disadvantages, unequal consequences, advantages for a select few and disadvantages for the many.

The three charts show how the dominant extreme of hierarchy remains constant in providing advantages to an elite few whether it defines Hindu caste, ideal male gender roles or world wide class. By comparing the definitions of purity, power,

responsibility, and generosity in each case, these similarities become strikingly clear. On chart C generosity becomes freedom to accumulate at one extreme and willingness to distribute at the other. Though we have not spelled out in the charts, the subordinate extreme of disempowerment in terms of these same four features, the text has provided abundant illustrations of how subordination is the necessary accompaniment to dominance and selective empowerment. We wish to call attention to the significance of this obvious point because it is too often ignored or denied.

It is important to emphasize, too, that this schematic of the economic organization of the West put upon Sri Lanka echoes that of the traditional organization of caste and patriarchy. It is often tempting to say that Westernization is the imposition of a class based society upon a society that has equality as its predominant value. However, it is very clear that while both the U.S. and Sri Lanka pay lip service to equality for all, each of these societies is built upon inequalities along the lines of gender, class and caste. By comparing charts A, B and C above, we see analogous structures between caste, patriarchy and class. Finally, when we consider all three charts together, and at the same time call attention to those disempowered by hierarchy, we can justify our primary argument. Throughout the paper, I have argued that each of these structures - caste, patriarchy and class - contains two extremes of hierarchy, the dominant and the subordinate, and that equality resides in the space between those extremes; further, I have argued that it is in this gap - that is, within a framework of equality - that we can create new structures and bring about change.

In fact, both Sri Lankan and Western social structures hold ideals of equality, but when behaviour is scrutinized, we see an alternate set of ideals (inequality, class, caste) that aren't emphasized. Thus, in our charts we portray the opposition between hierarchy and equality in each of these societies. Reform, creating new structures and bringing about change, would involve literalizing the ideals of equality by enacting them in the world.

Recommended Changes in Images and Practices

Having presented behaviours that subordinate women, and having spelled out how they are detrimental to women, we conclude by summarizing the kinds of practices Sri Lankan women recommend to resist subordination and to help bring about positive change in social arrangements. Specifically, the media must grant women dignity and self respect through a generally positive image. The society must demand responsible behavior, physical and mental, from men. Men must be held accountable for irresponsible behavior, especially in cases of sexual harassment. The images of women and actions of men must be changed. To help achieve this women must maintain their current women's networks and organize new ones. To achieve economic and political justice, the government and corporations must change property laws, wage rates, and cultural norms. They must shorten work weeks, provide healthful working conditions, and grant promotions based on ability. These are important beginnings.

As we summarize, we see the situation of Sri Lankan women disturbingly echoes that of Western women, while in other areas we encounter forms of oppression unique to that country. This issue, if not universal is not unique to Sri Lanka. We must reflect on the subordination of women in our own culture as well. More broadly and philosophically, everyone together must establish new values and power relations. There must be alternative modes of development which supports the equitable dispersion of resources and responsibilities. This would allow for equality and a culture within which the interest of everyone is paramount.¹⁰

Women of Sri Lanka are oppressed by a triple burden - the burdens of caste, class and patriarchy. Sri Lankan women are working to change this. Once women have discovered how society legitimizes and justifies patriarchy, caste and class, they come to question the entire cultural system. They question its meanings, values and power relations and develop strategies for change that implement the ideology of equality. Moreover these strategies grow out of existing ideology of equality which has

mostly functioned as a mystification of social inequalities, but which offers hope for constructive change. Women take action by questioning assumptions made about women and evaluating the implications of those assumptions, especially as they effect gender relations and sexual power. When we find particular points in masculine structures which work against the interest of women. We must challenge and resist at these points. We must develop a discourse to articulate alternative power relations which do not subordinate women. We must work to develop power in women's space in Sri Lanka.

NOTES

1. We realise that other societies are not divorced from our own. The wider base of this repetitive theme of oppression is highlighted in the exchange between Uma Vasudev, a young woman from India, and a patronizing Western male educator who commented: "But even in America, we are going back to the old ways. Women have begun to realize that they'd rather be domesticated than experiment with careers."

Vasudev responded:

"Good God! Obviously. They haven't Amazonian energies. Even spiritual ambition requires physical reserves. Any hobby or occupation or profession requires time. If anybody thinks that looking after a house, without any servants, mind you, is an easy task, they should think again. It can not only be physically enervating, but intellectually deadening. If a husband is not prepared to share in half the household chores equally, the woman is invariably placed with no alternative but to give up the job she has. Whereas, a man can have both marriage and career as part of a normal social pattern, a woman can have only one of the two, unless as I said, she has extraordinary energy and is prepared to fight like the devil. For the vast majority of intelligent middle class women - it is the middle class here or in the West which bears the brunt of the dilemma - this can be nothing short of tragic." (Thapar:66)

2. These are obviously provisional and much simplified definitions. I use the simplification to enhance our understanding without detouring into the fascinating complexities of discourse and subjectivity—for example how they interanimate one another, how subjectivity is not completely constituted by language, and how subjectivity is at times discourse manifesting itself through the speech of individuals. For the purposes of this article we do not go into the many ramifications of discourse and subjectivity (not to mention power). To do so would be to write another or much longer article. For those especially interested in the elaboration of these questions we recommend reading Feminist Practice & Poststructuralist Theory by Chris Weedon and The New French Feminisms edited by Marks and de Courhaun.

³ This distinction is not unlike distinctions within Christianity. Christianity began as an active messianic movement to regain the earthly kingdom of Palestine from the Roman invaders. After absolute defeat by the Roman army in Palestine, the Christians in Rome and neighboring areas claimed not to care about a kingdom on earth, but rather focused on a heavenly kingdom. It became a spiritual otherworldly movement. Rather than guaranteeing improvement in one's earthly life, it guaranteed a reward in heaven. In a similar way, the Hinduist aspect of Buddhism is actively concerned with this world, while the central impulse of Buddhism is to seek salvation and movement into another sphere entirely, *Nirvana*.

⁴ I want to emphasize the disclaimer, that while in practice women may adhere to the hierarchical ideal of submissive women, this does not erase the existence of the ideal of equality.

⁵ The Mahavamsa was written by Buddhist monks. Recent evidence about early migrations from West and South India and archeological materials about the pre-state megalithic and early civilizations can be found in the works of Sudarshan Seniviratne, Professor of Archeology at Peradeniya University.

⁶ In another context we may ask if this myth counteracts the previous myth of the establishment of Buddhism in Sri Lanka by the violent Vijaya in 543 B.C., the year when the Buddha attained *parinibbana*. Does this myth seek to disconnect

Buddhism from the violent Vijaya and connect it to actions of the peaceful Mahinda 300 years later?

⁷ Soon after that we arrived in the village and hired him to work as an interpreter.

⁸ Sir James Emerson Tennent was Colonial Secretary of British colony of Ceylon from 1845 to 1850. During that time he gathered information for the book, Ceylon: An account of the Island, Physical, Historical and Topographical which he published after nine years of work. It is still read by Sri Lankan scholars for its comprehensive coverage.

⁹ Taken in a superficial sense, these comments might be viewed as part of the popular wave to blame Westernization for everything negative, but viewing them more carefully, they can be seen as a request to reduce the hierarchy within the current practices of Westernization. These suggestions thus are more sophisticated than the popular panacea— "Throw out Westernization and return to an ideal Golden Age!"

¹⁰ We may note that it was an American, Rebecca Walker, who said: "Let Thomas' confirmation serve to remind you that the fight is far from over. Let this dismissal of a woman's experience move you to anger. Turn that outrage into political power. Do not vote for them unless they work for us. Do not have sex with them, do not break bread with them, do not nurture them if they don't prioritize our freedom to control our bodies and our lives." Utne Reader Jan/Feb 1993. From Court of Appeal: The Black Community Speaks Out on the Racial and Sexual Politics of Thomas vs. Hill. Reprinted by permission of Ballantine Books. Copyright 1992 by The Black Scholar.

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THE TRINJAN STORY

It is said that there was once a village, where, as is customary in most villages in Punjab, the men get together at the "*chopal*" at nightfall to relax and discuss the day's work. The women too, had their *chopal*, the *trinjan* where they bought their unspun yarn to work and talk and spin the night away.

The reason why this story is told here is because of what befell the women of this particular *trinjan* and how their activities came to an end. We are told that gradually, and over a period of time, the sharing of knowledge and resources that took place at the *trinjan*, wrought a wonderful and visible change in these women. They became more sure of themselves, more self-reliant, more confident.

It would have seemed that it was now a time for rejoicing. But strangely enough, or perhaps it is not so strange it was at this time that the tranquility of the village was disrupted. Rumors began. It was whispered that these women were dangerous, that they were familiar with the black arts (and a danger to the society).

The whispers soon became news and the news became fact. From every corner of the market-place fearful voices clamoured that religion was in danger!

Then the village council met and the men agreed that the source of danger lay in the "*trinjan*" and in the women who possessed this knowledge. With this belief came this recognition that these women, whom they feared, were no strangers. They were the mothers and the wives, the daughters and the sisters on whose love and service depended the security and comfort, not only of the present gathering but that of the future generations as well. And then the decision to act was taken.

That night, when the *trinjans* met and the merriment was at its height, shadowy figures crept out of the surrounding darkness and set the thatched pandal on fire. The pandal and its

inmates were razed to the ground, and its ashes dispersed with the wind.

There is no record of this story in the best known tales and epics of this area. It belongs to the female tradition and has been passed on from mothers to daughters for generations. That the mainstream tradition dismisses it as an old wife's tale and gives it no credence is evidence of the oppression and exploitation of women in patriarchy. It serves as a warning to women who come together to fight against their subjection and oppression.

(Based on writer Farkhanda Lodhi's presentation at a workshop; verified by Zainab, Jaina, Rukiya Bibi, and Firdous from various rural locations in Pakistan).

The Social Implications of Tecawalamai and their Relevance to the Status of Women in Jaffna

Selvy Thiruchandran

Belonging to the same ethnic group has not by itself contributed to the same experiences for people. Apart from the caste, class and ethnic belonging which have differential impact, the sub-cultural system which they embrace has also led to peculiar experiences specific to the sub-cultural system they belong.

This paper makes an attempt to argue that the Tamils governed by *Tecawalamai* in Sri Lanka are more likely to be within the *Sramana* tradition and the society reflected in the *Tecawalamai* is an indicator to this proposition. The *Sramana* tradition as argued by Romila Thapar (1985) is the other of the brahmanical tradition. The brahmanical tradition based on the Vedic texts and the *Dharmashastras*¹ was determined by the hegemony of the priestly caste. This tradition patronized by the royalty was all along antagonistic to the *Sramana* tradition. By the *Sramana* tradition is meant the *Bhakthi* cult and the major part of "the little tradition." In fact the *Bhakthi* cult and the *Tantric* cult as part of the *Sramana* tradition were protest movements.

The paper is structured in the following order. The major facets of the socio-religious conditions in Jaffna are identified first. They are then related to the code of *Tecawalamai* in general to show linkages. The argument concentrates on the status of women picking up that as an example to illustrate.

The Tamils in Sri Lanka fall into three distinct groups. The Tamils who are citizens of Sri Lanka from the earliest times of its history are found in scattered settlements all over the Island and have their traditional homeland in the northern and eastern provinces and are called the Jaffna Tamils and Batticaloa

Tamils respectively. The Tamils in the plantation areas in the central highlands brought by the British from south India as indentured labourers to work in the coffee and tea estates are called "Indian Tamils". The Tamils in the eastern province are mostly matrilineal and practice Dravidian folk religion and claim origin from Kerala in south India (Obeysekera 1987). The Tamils from the northern part, from Jaffna, are mostly Hindus with a patriarchal ideology. About their origins, the popular theory is that they have come from the present state of Tamil Nadu, though some scholars trace them to Kerala. (Tambiah H.W. n.d.) I tend to agree with the latter view.

The Sri Lankan Tamils are by and large Hindus. A variety of cults, beliefs and practices and philosophies are culled under one flag and called Hinduism. The belief systems and philosophy and even the day-to-day religious practices of the so-called Hindus differ from one another according to the sub-culture they belong to. There are many religions within Hinduism. The concept of Hinduism is an invention of the orientalist scholarship to differentiate it from Christianity and Islam (Tapar. 1985), to distinguish the indigenous from the alien.

In the Jaffna province however, the various schools of Hinduism are not fully represented, (*Vedanta, Lingayat, Sahaktas, Vira Saivism* etc.) Almost all who call themselves Hindus in Jaffna call themselves *Saivites*. There are a few *Vaishnava* temples to which the *Saivites* go to pray and offer prayers. The philosophy behind the religion is *Saiva Sidhanta*. The textual religion, the *Saiva Sidhanta* philosophy² and the *puranas* (in Tamil) and the devotional *Bhakti* songs and the understanding of the philosophical concepts like self, *maya* and the other worldly life are matters for literati and the adherents of the great tradition (Mckim Marriot, 1955). The lettered high caste and class who indulge in this theology of *Saivism* are worshippers of the Siva clan. (*Siva Siva's consort Parvati; Siva's sons, Pillaiyar and Murugan*). In these temples *Pujas*³ are done in Sanskrit and the rituals are generally sanskritised. The folk tradition consists of fertility cults, Mother Goddesses and the Pattini cult. Within the opposites of Vedic/non Vedic *brahmana/sramana* the *agama* tradition is non-Vedic and

teaches a different orientation connected to temple worship emphasizing devotion or *Bhakti* in its highest form. Central to the Vedic ritual is the *homam* (the sacred fire). It is important to know this difference. The philosophy that has been introduced into Jaffna was based on the non-Vedic, *agamic* tradition, which is different from the brahmanical Hindu philosophy. This was an important factor in that it also determined a different value system for the people of Jaffna. The *diksha* - the initiation of the *saivites* by which three distinct bars of holy ash is worn upon sixteen different parts of the body is allowed to all *Saivites* irrespective of caste and gender. This is anti-brahmanical and falls within the *sramana* tradition.

Another important factor which needs to be emphasised in this context is that unlike Christianity or Buddhism, Hinduism does not have an ordained clergy or an institutional order to propagate or preach the dogmas of religion. The system of *mutts* that operated in India where the religious saints presided did not have its parallels in Jaffna. This was further accentuated by the fact that the brahmins unlike in India were/are not a powerful group who were the pace setters of the society. Their duties in Jaffna are/were confined to the temples alone and did not extend to the socio-political realm as they did in India. The cultural revival that was spearheaded by Navalar also had its impact in diminishing whatever Sanskritised rituals that have crept into the religion. Navalar preached against the Vedic brahmins conducting *pujas* in saiva temples. He refused to accept holy ash from brahmins and advised the public not to invite the brahmins to perform ceremonies at home. The brahmins unable to survive without support of the community started doing *pujas* according to the rules prescribed in the *Sivaagamas* (Sathasivam 1979). In the caste-based hierarchically organised society the brahmins had a ritual status and vellalars (farmers and professionals), had the socio-political status which is valued higher.

Some of the more overt forms of oppression which affected Hindu women of India including those who live in Tamil Nadu did not penetrate into Jaffna: extreme forms of widow seclusion, prohibition of widow marriages, sati (burning of widows in the funeral pyre of the husbands), female infanticide may be mentioned. Closely connected with the

brahmanical Hinduism over centuries these practices had at times an invisible and subtle sanction and at times more open legitimisation from the brahmanical texts, (the law books and *puranas*) the authors of which were brahmins. The extreme obsession with the concepts of chastity and virginity have manifested in this kind of cruel practices. There are innumerable stories in the *puranas* and *ithihasas*⁴ to illustrate the virtues of the noble chastity of women.

By a stroke of accident in history these overt forms of oppression did not affect the women of Jaffna - the geographical isolation of Jaffna from South India by sea was a factor which prevented the inflow of these values on women. Due to this reason -the geographical isolation from the mainland, - Jaffna developed a distinct culture of its own with a variant dialect (Indrapala, 1968), a variant socio-economic structure and legal systems (Tambiah, S.J). This is an important factor as far as the women of Jaffna are concerned. The absence of the brahmanical Hinduism in Jaffna is the most important factor in this whole process.

The religious aspect is emphasized for the following reasons. Religion as understood by many as the polar opposite of secular is an error as far as Hinduism is concerned. It is a whole way of life, a complex intermix of what is generally termed secular. Ramayana and Mahabaratha are merely part of the literary production of a historical period but later elevated to a religious status and in fact its recitation formed a part of the religious rituals in later times. The hymns, *thevarams* as they are called of the *Bhakthi* cult sung with devotion to a personal deity form part of the literary tradition in Tamil and are taught in class rooms as Tamil literature. Painting and sculptures usually depict a religious theme. Politics and social movements have always a religious content (Thapar 1985). *Dharma* as it is called with a religious meaning transcends religious boundaries. The meaning of dharma extends to concepts like one's duty in secular life as well. It is the dharma of the burglar to rob. A wife is a *sahadharmini* (partner in the path of dharma) and a *dharma pattini* (one whose dharma is chastity). Many an injunction on women were effected with much ease in the name of religion. Religion was used to legitimise and rationalise them by laying

claims to old tradition and culture when there were revivals. Women who lost their husbands had to be ritually pronounced a widow by shaving their heads, breaking their bangles and taking off her *pottu*⁵ in the presence of Hindu priests. The exclusion of the women from the sacred rites and ceremonies and the knowledge of the vedas, women being treated as lesser mortals on par with the sutras is even now legitimised by *Sankarachariyar* in India. But the non-vedic *agamis* Hinduism does not exclude women from the initiation called the *diksha*.

When one looks at this phenomenon very carefully and compare it with the pattern of life in Jaffna one would notice that this streak of extreme religiousness, an obsession with the religion or an attempt to "secularise religion" (Thiruchandran, 1984) is absent.

This factor can be further validated when one analyses the contents of the political movements that originated in Jaffna. The Youth Congress was secular in its character with no claims either to Hindu or Christian sentiments. Even the Federal Party with their defensive chauvinism did not claim a place for Hinduism. The Tamil militants with their demand for a separate state and traditional homelands did not talk of a Hindu identity. Hindu fundamentalism was never a problem in Jaffna. They had no conceptions of a classical Hindu golden age. (Pathmanathan, 1986). This aspect could be validated more when one realises how women were not bought into the religious. Religion remained outside the purview of the socio-political and socio-economic realms historically and at present. The brahmanical scale of values have the least influence on the women of Jaffna. One should recall at his juncture how Mahatma Gandhi in the phase of Indian nationalism projected *Sita* of the *Ramayana*, the long suffering submissive women as the model for the Indian womanhood. Matrilineal inheritance patterns in the Jaffna province and some of the social practices and the legal code called *Tecawalamai* have led Tambiah (H.W) to conclude that the Tamils of Jaffna province have migrated from the Kerala district in South India. The social habits, the marriage rites of the olden days and the culinary art of Jaffna have much in common with the Keralities than with the south Indian Tamils.

Tecawalamai as the Codification of the socio religious practices

The customary laws of the Tamils in Jaffna are called *Tecawalamai*. It literally means "the customs of the land". It is a collection of the customs of the inhabitants of Jaffna pertaining to inheritance, property rights, dowry, adoption laws, laws, on slavery and divorce. It was codified by the Dutch Governors in 1906, approved by the local chieftains, later adopted by the British and remains the operational law till now. It is generally accepted that *Tecawalamai* protects the rights of women and indeed may contribute to the better status of women in Jaffna (Tambiah.S.J. 1973) (Perinbanayagam, 1982). A discussion of *Tecawalamai* with its clear matrilineal character would further illustrate the degree of the deference in the subordination of women in Jaffna. Some parts of *Tecawalamai* show very clear trends of a matrilineal system favourable to women. An ambivalence towards patriarchal blend is also visible. *Tecawalamai* insists on the attainment of the age of maturity for marriage for both men and women. In the olden days, as testified to by the *Tecawalamai*, there were no elaborate marriage rites and ceremonies. The central rite was the tying of the *tali*⁶ followed by a simple ceremony performed by the elders with a *Pillaiyar Puja*. The present elaborate ceremonies with the Sanskritic *mantras* with *homam* is of a recent innovation. The *homam* ceremony, the rites accompanied by the recital of the rites connected with the gift of the virgin (*kanya tanam*), the six kinds of gifts and the elaborate rites accompanied by the recital of Sanskrit verses, called *slokas* are superimposed Aryan rites on the simple nuptial ceremony known to the Tamils (H.W.Tambiah, n.d.).

Many of these rites performed at the weddings of the high caste vellalars were probably brought into Jaffna by the later stream of Tamils. However, the introduction of the brahmanical marriage rites which were legitimised by the *Dharmasastras* and the brahmin priests did not succeed in creating an ideology of a devalued women. The mantras are in Sanskrit, an alien language beyond the comprehension of the bride and groom and the congregation. It signified only a process

of imitation for the glamour alone and not for the meaning. It became a symbol of high caste social behaviour without the entire ideology behind it being absorbed. Neither did it create role models based on the same value system.

The customs of stepping on the grinding stone as part of the marriage rite which is performed in Hindu marriage is an example of this. This rite represents the fallen status of a woman who was turned into a stone on the grounds of infidelity to her sage husband. This is a puranic myth. However, this phenomenon cannot be generalised as an example of sanskritisation in Jaffna. The brahmanical lifestyle did not have an appeal to the people of Jaffna. There was no ideological conversion to a brahmanical value system as far as women were concerned. The elaborate colourful and prolonged ceremonies and rites were enacted like a drama with an audience to look at.

The Tamil customary laws regulate the customary form of marriages by insisting that the attainment of the age of maturity is essential. This clearly indicated that child marriages were not encouraged. According to the *Manu Dharmashastra* the parents are guilty of a heinous sin if the daughters are not married before puberty.

As stated by H.W. Tambiah, the formal type of marriage among the Tamils was simple and devoid of religious rites. The marriage rites among the ancient Tamils varied, but in the main, consisted of the tying of the *tali* by the bridegroom, and the present of a cloth to the bride (*kurai*). The *Tecawalamai* too recognized these ceremonies as the only important rites. On some marriages, Tambiah adds that *Ganesh*, the God of Nuptials, is invoked by a simple ceremony performed by the elders. The ceremony consists of the planting of a piece of *kusa* grass in a ball of cow dung and invoking the blessings of this deity. (Tambiah, H.W., No. 107).

Among the Vellalars, these ceremonies were the only ones observed at one time (see Report of the Commissions Regarding the Marriage Ceremonies). Since these simple ceremonies are very similar to those of the Malabars of the south-west coast of India and since *sambandam*⁷ is the term used even today to designate the matrimonial alliance in Jaffna,

Thambiah H.W argues that the Jaffna Tamils have more connections with the Malabars of the south western coast of India. The more elaborate form, *vivaha* (See Notes⁷) practised today is a more recent innovation by brahminical priest craft and were brought by the later stream of Tamils.

That *Tecawalamai* is a curious co-existence of rites showing tendencies of both matrilineal and patriarchal systems in a society could be explained by the fact that some of the *Dharmasastric* concepts crept into the *Tecawalamai* laws before they were codified. The impact of the Roman Dutch Law which is visible could have possibly been assimilated during the process of the codification. *Tecawalamai* has been modified from time to time, so that today the impact of the English Law is also in evidence (H.W Thambiah). This infiltration process has had a negative impact on women. A discussion of *Tecawalamai* as far as how it affects women is essential to exactly determine its progressive trends and the subsequent infiltration towards a patriarchal system.

Tecawalamai divides the property into three categories as *mudisam*, *chidanam*⁸ and *tediyatetam*. Of this, *mudisam* is the inherited property of a man from his parents, *chidanam* is the property of the woman, given by her parents, when she marries as part of her inheritance and *tediyatetam* is the acquired property of the man and wife in their lifetime. These three types of property remain separate. *Chidanam* belongs to the wife legally, the *mudisam* to the husband and the acquired property belongs legally to both husband and wife. The property is divided between the sons and daughters in the following manner: The daughters get the dowry of the mother, and the sons the *mudisum* of the father. The acquired property is divided equally among the sons and daughters. The daughters get their share when they marry as dowry whereas the sons inherit their share only at the death of the parents. Women have access to property of any kind, movable and immovable. S.J.Tambiah (1973) argues that *Tecawalamai* has a much stronger notion of female property rights than is contained in the classical Indian *Dharmashastras*.

The woman's *chidanam* reverts, in the event of her dying without issue, in order of sisters, sister's daughters and granddaughter, and does not go to the husband. The wife's *chidanam* is not liable for her husband's debts. The rents and profits of her property are also not liable for her husband's debts. If the wife dies the wife's father remains in possession of her estate. If the man dies with children the wife takes charge of the whole property and her dowry. The husband manages the property of the wife but cannot take over, or inherit the property. Hence the property of the husband and wife is kept separate.

When widows remarry the daughters by both marriages get her property. When a widower remarries he must ensure that the wife's dowry, and fifty percent of the acquired property (till then), should go as dowry to the daughters. It would then mean that, when the wife wants a divorce from her husband she gets her dowry back, and half of the acquired property.

It would be interesting to note as when these customs were codified, women were not gainfully employed. Hence her entitlement for the fifty percent of the acquired property is for the services rendered as a housewife and mother and to the general upkeep of the family which she maintains (wages for household labour!!).

The *chidanam* or dowry is divided into three parts, cash, jewellery, land or house. While the movable property can be mortgaged or sold by the wife the immovable property can be sold, mortgaged only with the consent of the husband. This could be an infringement on her property rights, considering the fact that the husband can sell his *mudusam* and the *tediyatetam* which he earned, without the consent of the wife. It was probably believed that women who are not world-wise need to be checked and authorised before they undertake major transactions. Disposing of land or house by women was brought under patriarchal control. "A married woman governed by *Tecawalamai* is not a *femme sole*. She is subject to the marital power of the husband". The right of the husband to give his consent to the alienation or mortgage of his wife's separate immovable property is an incidence of his marital power" (Sri Ramanathan: 1972).

Alien concepts and what they signify for the culture of Jaffna

It is ironical that in a few instances the Victorian ideology of the west was in contradiction with the more equalitarian structures of the colonies as far as women's rights were considered. Matrilineal succession, women's individual right to property existence of polyandry, and loose marriage ties where divorce was easy, were part of the social arrangements in India and Sri Lanka (Obeyesekere, 1967). The imposition of Roman Dutch Law by the British between the period 1803-1833 altered the more equalitarian structures in three major areas. As pointed by Obeyesekere, they are:

1. The notion of communal property was introduced at marriage, which did away with the customary notion of separate estate of woman and has given way to man's control of wife's property. Thus men became the legal custodians of their wives' property.
2. Alteration of the strictly bilateral rules of inheritance.
3. Change in the texture of the more liberal divorce laws of the Sinhalese and introduction of the patriarchal ideology of Roman Dutch Law, which granted divorce only on two grounds - adultery and malicious desertion.

The same kind of anomaly is seen in the *Tecawalamai* the traditional customary laws of the Tamils in northern Sri Lanka. That the *Tecawalamai* did not recognise the principles of a full community of property in 1705 and the fact that subsequently the principle of separate estate was eroded by the husband's power of administration over the community of property was traced to the impact of the Roman Dutch Law (S. Goonesekere, 1980)

More importantly the unique advantage of *Tecawalamai* for women is in the situation of divorce or separation. The Tamil women governed by *Tecawalamai* in the event of a divorce or

separation from their husbands get their entire dowry and half the acquired property of the husband. "If the husband squanders the dowry and the dowry is diminished during marriage the same must be made good from the acquired property of the husband (Tambiah, H.W. 1965). The right of the women to their *chidanam* and *tediyatetam* has reduced to a great extent their dependency status on others and this in fact accounts for the status of the single women in the community.

The idea of having their separate property and having exclusive rights on their property have also other results for the women. Women as wives live on their property with their husbands. This frees them from in-law intervention. The oppressive dominating mother-in-law syndrome which is found in the Indian scenario is not a problem for the Jaffna wives. The conflicts they have with their mothers in-law are conflicts in terms of generation gap. But there is no domination by the mothers-in-law. The dowry as spelled out in *Tecawalamai* has a strong similarity to the Malabar system and has very little in common to the *strihana*⁸ known to *Dharmasastras*. *Tecawalamai* recognised the right of women to her own property - towards the upkeep of the property whereas the notion of female property right is alien to the *Dharmasastras*.

The Tamil customary law recognised the economic independence of women. Her dowry property, gifts received by her and property inherited by her were her separate property. In this respect the customary laws of the Tamils are superior to some of the texts of the *Dharmasastras* which were reluctant to recognise the separate property of the wife.

Divorce and Remarriage

The *Tecawalamai* itself provides no ceremonies for a divorce and speaks of a separation of the property when the wife or husband lives apart and contemplates remarrying. (Thes. Code. Part IV. Section 1 and Part 1, Section 10.) The recognition of polygamy placed no restraint on husbands getting remarried. Some Christian and Victorian ideas have been incorporated while the *Tecawalamai* was compiled by the Dutch and hence

the absence of any provision that a woman divorced by her husband without formality could contract a legal marriage.

But when she remarried, she had to give up her right to the hereditary property and half the acquired property of her husband in favour of her children. (Thes. Code, Part 1, Sections 9 and 10).

When one examines the customary Laws of the Tamils of Jaffna, one is forced to the conclusion that in Tamil society a divorced woman was not prevented from marrying a second time. The *Tecawalamai* permits the remarriage of widows. These factors, it has to be emphasised, are violations of the *Dharma-shastric principles* which categorically forbid widow remarriage and divorce. Widow remarriage and divorce, were/are notably prevalent among the non-brahmanical low castes. Despite customary and the legal requirements being lifted in India by law, women are still unwilling to remarry due to the social stigma attached to such practices.

Apart from these legal concepts and the ideology behind them which has successfully contributed to diminishing the sufferings of the female, there are a few social structural elements which helped this process. Certain "uniquely Dravidian institutional features" (Obeyesekera 1987) have also left an ideology behind them which help to treat women better even to the present day. They help to adjust her social roles. Cross-cousin marriage which was the norm in olden days took away much of the alienation, tension and feelings of strangeness of the women when she entered the folds of the newly acquired relationship - husband, father-in-law, mother-in-law, sister-in-law and brother-in-law. In a cross-cousin marriage the husband is known to her from her infancy and the husband's parents are her aunt and uncle who have now acquired the new kinship label of mother-in-law and father-in-law. She has moved with them from infancy and she is aware of and used to their temperament. The women by virtue of inheriting the property of her mother and father usually does not move out of her ancestral home. The husband moves into the wife's home. This has clearly done away with the mother-in-law syndrome of the South Indian Tamils where the enmity and jealousy between the daughter-in-law and

mother-in-law is considered to be quite common. The system of child marriages by which little girls are burdened with the heavy responsibility of married life, a Brahminical custom, is totally absent in Jaffna. Caste pollution - if left too long unwed girls would choose their mates outside their caste, and obsession with the cult of virginity - if left too long unwed she may lose it - are two reasons one could attribute to the pre-puberty marriages among Brahmins, which custom has spread to the non-Brahmin-castes as well.

However, cross-cousin marriages and the matrilineal residence are not the universal norm. Changing socio-economic conditions and urbanisation have taken women away from their parental homes to places where their husbands work. Marriages are increasingly contracted outside the kinship circle. This does not in any way change their status - the daughters are not virtually given away for ever; they maintain very close and emotive relationship with their parents and brothers, whose help, advice and affection are a continuous source of strength for the women.

It is a common assumption that Jaffna Tamil Vellalars are more Sanskritised than Batticaloa vellalars where the brahmanical values are less established. (Obeyesekera 1987). This is also assumed to be the reason why the *Pattini*⁹ cult prevailed as an independent cult and is wide spread in Batticaloa.

According to Obeyasekere in the "Sanskritised North" (north here refers to Jaffna) brahminical values are firmly established and due to that the Pattini cult is not popular. This by itself cannot be empirically proved. And the conclusion that the east coast female is less frustrated than her northern counterpart due to the Sanskritisation process needs to be re-examined. The Sanskritisation process in the North did not bring about the brahminical values which particularly affect women. The imitation of the values of the higher caste or the infiltration of hegemonic brahmanical Hinduism did not happen in the way it did in South India where brahmins held superior positions socially, ritually and economically. The religious sphere was their preserve from where all power emanated. The conservatism

of the North caused by geographical isolation was of a different kind. The cultural synchronisation was a slow process even during the times of the western colonisation. None of the socio-religious customs or practises mentioned earlier which have its origins in the Sanskrit texts - law books, *puranas* and *Ithihasas* - which affected South Indian women through a process of brahmanisation, penetrated into the North Sri Lanka.

The cult of Pattini was not popular in Jaffna. There are two aspects to it. The textual literature *Cilapatikaram* continued to enjoy a prestigious place among the literate Tamils and the vernacular pundits and the other scholars. Through this process the cult of chastity was legitimised both in the little tradition and great tradition among all sectors of the people across caste, class, urban and rural. The reason for the marginalisation of the Pattini cult is different. There were many temples for Pattini such as Kannaki Amman, Madha, Mari Amman, Muthu Mari Amman (Arokiasamy, 1953). During the *saivite* revival *Arumuga Navalar* considered the folk religion and its rites as unorthodox and the rites performed at variance with the textual *agamis saivism*. He denounced Kannagi worship wholesale and refers to Kannagi as a "Jaina woman" and at other times as a "demoness". Consequently Kannagi worship gave way to the worship of either Siva's consort or Saraswathi (a Sanskrit goddess of learning and fine arts (Perinbanayagam, 1982). Whether the transformation of Pattini to Saraswathi created an ideology which contributed to the high female literacy is to be investigated.

However, on comparative terms, the Eastern women in Sri Lanka are less Sanskritised than her northern counterpart and the ideology of matriliney has a better social grounding in the eastern province. The high class vellalars have assimilated some of the brahmanical system like the marriage rites which spell out subservience. But between the actual practice and the ideology there is still a difference. As has been shown by Shanmugalingam (1988) in his study of the Turkkai Amman temple of Tellippalai, the sanskritised rituals have not completely done away with the folk patterns. In this study he has also identified worship patterns which are novel to Jaffna. The offering of gold *tali pottu* to the goddess, and the *cumangali*

*cupasini*¹⁰, the rites performed respectively by unmarried women praying for married life and married women praying for long wedded life are a few to mention. The *talipottu cumankali pucai* performed by married and unmarried women praying for married life and for a long wedded life are reminiscences of the brahmanical *nonpus*¹⁰. This worship in this temple is initiated by the wife of the head brahmin priest.

The entry of the female into the sacred is also an interesting phenomenon in the male-dominated religious rituals which are common to all religions.

The *nonpus* were performed by the brahmin women in India for whom divorce and remarriages were religiously and socially instituted taboos. For all intents and purposes their social existence depended on possessing the *tali* and hence the signification of *tali*. This is a clear indication of the penetration of Sanskritised worship patterns but this is not a process of Sanskritisation in the sense of imitating a high caste value system to rise in the social ladder. It is important to recognise this difference. The reasons for this are not to simply to follow brahmanical patterns but brahmanical patterns are followed for other socio-economic reasons caused by duress and stress.

Eighty percentage of the devotees are females and out of which sixty five percent are unmarried girls (Shanmugalingam, 1988). A large number of youths have died in Jaffna in the last decade due to the ongoing war and this has left many women unmarried. This certainly has a connection to the emergence of the *tali pottu* ritual and the "frustration of northern women is not due to Sanskritised Brahminical values but due to other socio-economic reasons that have caused frustration at different levels. It is at this point that brahmanical rituals are sought after.

There are other significant differences between the *Dharmashastra* and *Tecawalamai* codes:

The adoption of a son by a son-less couple among brahminically influenced Indians is done in order to provide a son to perform the funeral rites. But under *Tecawalamai*, both women and men are given the right to adopt only to provide a heir (Tambiah, H.W. n.d.); barrenness or absence of a son are not

grounds for divorce. Sons and daughters are treated alike in terms of love and affection and child care needs; girls are not devalued in day to day living (Thiruchandran, 1984). Selective abortion and sex selection by amniocentesis in India are symptomatic of the residual ideology of infanticide. The recent phenomenon of dowry deaths and the revival of "sati" are a sad twist of a religious identity crisis and an oppressive dowry system to suit the demands of consumer capitalism. A testing of this phenomenon by an analysis of the situation against the socio-economic totality should finally lead to the concept of a devalued woman. This phenomenon is not overtly expressed in the socio-religious patterns of existence in Jaffna.

Yet despite the penetration of the brahmanical rituals, Jaffna remained for the major part within the *sramana* tradition. The *Tecawalamai* code is a clear reflection of this process.

Notes

¹ Dharmashastras are classical socio-legal code books with a religious sanctity, the most important of them is the Manudharma shastra

² Saiva Siddhanta, Saivism, Vaishnavism.

The Saiva Siddhanta philosophy was given its final form in the fourteenth century in South India. The philosophy was developed through a series of expositions in the Tamil language, both in prose and verse. Its emphasis is on the primacy of Siva as against Vishnu. However, it cannot be said that Saiva Siddhanta is a complete breakaway from the vedic doctrines. The deviation from the Vedic sources is limited to the flavour it acquired in the process of assimilation of local philosophical views,

³ Puja/Pucal. A manner of worship with specific rituals.

⁴ Puranas are religious texts dealing with myths of gods and goddesses. Itihasas are epics usually illustrating moral truths through heroes/heroines and others. The most famous are the Ramayana and Mahabharata

⁵ A Pottu is a decorative mark worn by girls and married women on the forehead as a symbol of auspiciousness and removed ritually when one becomes a widow

⁶ A Tali is a ritual ornament, a symbol of marriage for women given by the husband as part of the marriage ritual.

⁷ Sambandam basically means a relationship and does not presuppose an involvement with rituals. This then means that it signifies a social process of bride and groom getting together with the blessings of elders and the society at large. Viveha, (the Sanskrit term for marriage) is conducted with a series of rituals with the involvement of priests.

⁸ Chedanam is a corrupted form of the Sanskrit word 'istritana', the meaning of which is, the property belonging to woman

⁹ Pattini literally means a chaste woman. Kannaki of the epic Cilapatikaram was celebrated for her chastity by elevating her to a goddess around which developed in Sri Lanka and India the cult of Pattini.

¹⁰ Cumangali Cupasini refers to the auspiciousness of women, on whom the auspiciousness is conferred by the living husbands, giving women the right to wear the symbols of married life, the tali and pottu. The meanings are subsequently extended to include unmarried young women so as to get them the auspiciousness acquired through marriage. *Nonpu* is the name for this ritual in India where women through the rituals pray for the long life of their husbands. Unmarried women are also coopted into the process of this ritual as a means to getting the same auspiciousness.

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Women's Contribution to Ceylon Literature*

By T. R. Toussaint

The contribution made by women to the literature of Ceylon in proportion to that of men is very small. In the early days of British rule, Ceylon was a more attractive field for the student of historical research than for the poet or general writer, an advantage which was enhanced by the greater opportunities which the former class, represented by the Army Officer and the Civil Servant, had for travelling about the country and seeing things for themselves. There is also this fact to be remembered, that the number of women in Ceylon was at first almost negligible. Cordiner records that, at the time of his arrival in 1803, the English circle in Colombo consisted of about 100 gentlemen and only 20 ladies, while the Dutch Community numbered about 900 persons of both sexes, most of whom were only then beginning to acquire a knowledge of English. It is therefore not surprising that among the first ladies to contribute to the literature of Ceylon should be those not permanently resident in the Island.

These contributors naturally fall into four classes. First, those who wrote before the British era. Second, those who have made casual references to Ceylon in books dealing principally with other parts of the world. In the third class are those who have devoted a considerable portion of their work to Ceylon, and lastly, those whose books deal exclusively with the island. I propose shortly to review the works of a select number of each of these four classes.

The statement that poetry flourished in the time of Raja Sinha II., that is, between 1638 and 1687, may cause some surprise, but it is nevertheless true. A Portuguese courtier named Gascon had risen to high favour with the King and became his

* A paper read by Mr. J.R. Toussaint before the D.B.U. Literary Circle on 30th August, 1940

Prime Minister. Possessed of many rare accomplishments, he attracted the notice of the Queen, and their regard for each other soon ripened into an intrigue. The suspicions of the King were aroused, and having secured proof of his Minister's disloyalty, he promptly cast him into prison. Then ensued a secret correspondence between the Queen and the Minister, which was cast into Sinhalese verse either then or at a later period. The queen addressed the Minister as follows :-

"As the honey bee, heedless thro' the forest flies,
Where the many coloured flowers tempt him with their
rich supplies,

And by fragrance strange allured on the tusked head
alights

Victim of the flapping ears all mid the stol'n delights;

Thus, adored love, art thou captive of thy king and lord;

Yet, dash sorrow from thy brow, cease to mourn my
dear, adored.

The captive Minister replied to the Queen as follows:-

"Lanka's giant king enthralled, only by beauty's sight,

Laid down his twice five heads, uncropp'd the flower of
Love's delight;

Then why should I, a happier swain, who with the gods
above,

Have revelled at the banquet rare of thy ambrosial love,

Repine with my one head to atone for my bold
adventure,

To gain what sweetens human lives as long as they
endure."

The King was at first undecided on what to do with his erring Prime Minister, a poem which the latter had addressed to him begging for mercy never having reached him. Further evidence of the Minister's infidelity was, however, soon obtained, and he paid for his indiscretion with his life.

Another Sinhalese poetess of whom we know something is a lady named Gajaman Nona. She was born at Colpetty in the year 1746, and belonged to a respectable Sinhalese family of the Durawa Caste. Her father, Gajaman Arachchi, was originally a Mudaliyar's clerk. He later became a Vidane Arachchi and finally settled in the Matara District. Gajaman Nona was taught by her mother, who was a fairly intelligent lady, and she imbibed her love of poetry from her cousin, a famous poet called Samarajeeva. She was twice married, and is said to have spent the greater part of her life in extreme poverty. John D'Oyly, one of the most distinguished members of the Ceylon Civil Service, who was afterwards knighted, was President of the Provincial Court of Matara in 1803, and Gajaman Nona addressed a poem to him setting out her pitiable condition. This abject tale of woe so touched the hearts of those in authority that an extensive tract of Crown land in the Giruwa Pattu, which came to be known as Nonage Gama, was granted to her. It is said that some verses of the poem in question have gained such wide popularity that they have found their way into many Sinhalese homes and are used as nursery rhymes. Gajaman Nona died in 1814 at the age of 68. Like most Sinhalese poets, she left behind no particular work. Stray verses committed to memory by her admirers, and traditionally kept up, have been collected and published from time to time.

The first English woman to write about Ceylon was Mrs. Maria Graham, wife of Capt. Thomas Graham, of the Royal Navy. She arrived in Galle on 16th February, 1810, and stayed for about three weeks in the island, visiting Colombo, Negombo, and other places. She had spent some years in India, and after her visit to Ceylon she published what she called "A Journal of a Residence in India, 1809-11," in which she has recorded her impressions of Ceylon also. She was much struck with the cheerful appearance of the Galle Fort, which she attributed to the rows of *suriya* trees so thoughtfully planted by the Dutch. She saw the small colony of Chinese just outside the Fort who had been imported as gardeners because the indigenous inhabitants were unable to raise vegetables. China Gardens, near the Galle Railway Station, perpetuated the name of this Colony.

Mrs. Graham was charmed with Colombo and writes:- "We have now been here some days, and I am so delighted with the place and with the English society here, that if I could choose my place of residence for the rest of the time of my absence from England, it would be Colombo." With true feminine instinct, she proceeds to domestic details and states that the fruits in Ceylon were better than those she had seen in India. The bread she found extremely good, and the butter made in private houses only inferior to that in England. Altogether, she seems to have spent a very pleasant time in Ceylon.

The next woman to write about Ceylon was Lady Nugent, wife of Sir John Nugent, a former Governor of Jamaica, who spent six days at Galle in 1815. She kept a Diary, which was later published, and in it she records her meeting with Lady Hood in Ceylon, shortly after the death of her husband, Sir Samuel Hood. It was this Lady Hood who afterwards became that wife of Governor Stewart Mackenzie. As showing the habits of society in those early days, it may be mentioned that Lady Nugent notes the fact that on a visit to her in Calcutta, Lady Hood "smoked her hookah almost the whole morning, to my great astonishment". It is quite possible that Lady Hood continued this practice in Ceylon while in residence in Queen's House, though no mention is made of it by any Ceylon writer of the day.

Another lady, a Mrs. Smith of Baltiboys, has given us a very intimate picture of the social life of Queen's House during the administration of Sir Edward Barnes, who had the reputation of keeping the best table and dining off an entire service of plate. There seems to have been none of the order and decorum which are such a marked feature of Queen's House functions at the present day. I quote as follows from Mrs. Smith's frank and free remarks:- "The Governor was an old General, very fond of the bottle, who had married a young wife, *very* young and very handsome whom he idolised. It was evident that the aim and end and business of all the merry party at Government House was pleasure, and of a queer kind, a sort of child's play - excepting the wine part which indeed required all the strength of manly brains to bear up under the Governor, who had made his head during a long course of campaigns, not comprehending how

difficult some people found it to keep up to his high mark. The doings of Government House were certainly extraordinary. One night there was a ball and making speeches, then more dancing or rather romping, from which we were glad to get away The rooms were large, numerous and well-lighted; a grand supper and great noise towards the end These were all grand affairs; the ladies and gentlemen romped about, playing *petits jeux* with strange forfeits, hunt the whistle etc. It was all a whirl of riotous folly, very unlike the propriety of a Government House".

The abolition of domestic slavery in Ceylon in 1816 through the efforts of Sir Alexander Johnston, Chief Justice, caused a lady in England, Mrs. Hannah More, to burst into verse in celebration of the event. The poem is in the form of a versified dialogue between a person called Lorenz, another called Silva, and a chorus of Cingalese.

There are eight pages of verse and three illustrations. Mrs. More makes the common mistake of confusing the coconut tree with the cocoa tree, and makes Lorenz say:-

Yes, let us hail the Cocoa Tree
 And all the joys it gives,
 To laugh and drink is to be free,
 The thought my heart revives.

It is difficult to understand how Mrs. More came to give one of her characters the name of Lorenz, as that great Ceylonese had not been born at the time slavery was abolished, unless of course the choice of the name was purely fortuitous, or the fame of Lorenz's father had reached England.

To Mrs. Fletcher, whose maiden name was Jewsbury, we owe, in the words of the late Mr.A.M.Ferguson, "the most beautiful set of verses which ever were written in the island or respecting it". Mrs. Fletcher was the wife of the chaplain of that name in the East India Company's service. She visited Ceylon in 1833 on her way to India, and was the guest, for about three weeks, of the Rev. Benjamin Bailey, Archdeacon of Colombo

of whom it has been said that he was "more remarkable for learned research and attempts at poetry than for evangelical teaching!" Before her marriage Mrs. Fletcher is said to have been an intimate friend of the poet Wordsworth. The poem is entitled "The Eden of the Sea."

There is only one lady, as far as I am aware, who has had her poetry recorded on stone in Ceylon. There used to be at one time near the Wellawatte Bridge a wide-spreading banyan tree, with a granite stone by, on which were inscribed the following lines:-

To Him whose gracious aim in mercy bends,
 And light and shade to all alike extends,
 And guards the traveller on his weary way,
 Shelters from storms and shades from solar ray,
 Breathe one kind wish for her, one pious prayer,
 Who made this sheltering tree her guardian care,
 Fenced in from rude attacks the pendant roots,
 Nourished and framed its tender infant shoots.
 O traveller, if from milder climes you rove,
 How dearly will you prize this Indian grove.
 Pause then awhile, and ere you pass it by,
 Give to Sophia's name one grateful sigh.

Mrs. Marshall, the wife of Henry Augustus Marshall of the Ceylon Civil Service, is supposed to have written these lines, though there is a rival claimant for the honour. Marshall, though an able man and a finished classical scholar, did not possess the gift of high character. He nursed an implacable hatred towards C. E. Layard, the father of Sir C.P.Layard, who was hoping to succeed him as Auditor General. Marshall was determined to keep Layard out of this office as long as he could and so he continued in service although long past his usefulness, until one day he died in office. The stone, with Mrs. Marshall's lines, still

stands by the roadside at Wellawatte, serving a more ignoble purpose in front of a boutique.

"Cinnamon and Pearls" is the attractive title of a romance published by Miss Harriet Martineau about the middle of the last century, in which she made the naive suggestion that the Ceylon Government should give up its monopoly in the Pearl Fishery and the Cinnamon Trade. An English newspaper of the day spoke of the work as a "vehicle of important truths," but the reception it received in Ceylon was lukewarm, owing to the fact that the author was misinformed on several important points. She spoke of the poor natives of Ceylon being sent to work half naked with the thermometer above 80 degree, and committed several other blunders.

We are indebted to Mrs. Heber, wife of the Right Revd. Reginald Heber, Bishop of Calcutta, for much useful information contained in a Journal of their Tour in Ceylon made in 1825, The Bishop and his wife stayed for about a month in Ceylon, and Mrs. Heber gives us a very good insight into the manners and customs of the period. One of these customs, which has long since fallen into disuse, was to accord to the Bishop the same honours as are accorded to the Governor. Mrs. Heber states that on their arrival in Galle Harbour, the Fort fired a salute of guns, which their ship returned, and they were met on the pier by the principal inhabitants of the place, the regiment stationed there, and a band of spearmen and lascoreens. The pier was covered with white cloth, and they passed between two files of soldiers to the place where palanquins were waiting for them. All along the route to their temporary residence they were preceded by native music. Mrs. Heber does not fail to repeat the old fiction started by Captain Percival that the Dutch had an abhorrence of fresh air. She says that the Dutch houses in Colombo were distinguishable from those of the English by their glass windows instead of venetians, "for the Dutch seem to shut up their houses at all seasons".

Mrs. Lorenz, wife of Charles Ambrose Lorenz, made an important contribution to Ceylon History by her translation of the French version of the Capitulation of Ceylon by the Dutch to the British in 1796.

One lady has left behind, under the title "Letters from Ceylon", the story of her missionary efforts. Fanny Gregson was the daughter of the Rev. J. Gelson Gregson, a well-known Indian missionary, who had a son employed as a District Engineer in Ceylon. From an early age Fanny Gregson was of a deeply religious turn of mind, and feeling that she had a call for missionary work, she came out to Ceylon in 1890 and established a Mission Station in the Heneratgoda District with the help of some Ceylonese ladies. She had previously assisted her father in his work in North-west India. She married Arthur Liesching, himself a missionary-minded man, and after working together for some time, her constitution, which was always very frail, broke down, and she died on 5th October, 1893, her husband following her on the 29th of the same month.

A book not very well known is one entitled "Notes of a Tour in India and Ceylon" by Helen C. Ford, published in 1889. Only about 20 pages are devoted to Ceylon. The writer says very little about herself. Some of her references are reminiscent of Ceylon fifty years ago. She saw prisoners walking on the streets wearing straw hats, striped blue and buff jackets, and short trousers; Salvation Army girls with pink and red garments; rickshaws which had then been newly introduced into Ceylon; a policeman, even as we see him at the present day, trying to drive the rickshaw men to their proper stand; beggars, and all the usual concomitants of an Eastern city. She describes some men as wearing trousers and billycock hats besides, what she calls, their petty-coats. While in Nuwara Eliya, she records the arrival in the Hotel of two Sinhalese gentlemen in full European dress - one of whom was the Hon'ble Mr. Harry Dias, who was afterwards knighted, and the other Mr. Felix Dias.

Only one lady has written a book descriptive of estate life in Ceylon. She is Mrs. Mary E. Steuart, and her book is called "Everyday Life on a Ceylon Cocoa Estate". She came out to spend a holiday with her son on a Matale Estate, and she describes the daily events that took place during her stay there with a simplicity of language and a fidelity for the truth that make the book quite interesting reading. She has wisely limited herself to only those subjects that came within the range of her own observation, and has thus avoided the error of those who,

after only a brief residence in the island commit themselves to statements which are fanciful and grotesque in the extreme.

The ruins of Ceylon were long regarded as the special preserve of mere man until 1916, when Miss G. E. Mitton brought out a very useful work on "The Lost Cities of Ceylon". The subject seems to have had a peculiar attraction for her and she has done full justice to it. To quote her own words:- "The mighty monuments of Egypt left me cold, the many attractions of Burma amused and interested me superficially; in Ceylon, from the first moment I was at home. Maybe in one of those previous lives, of which we sometimes have a shadowy notion, I lived there, and the faculty of being able to see it all as it was is merely the stirring of a long-buried experience". In more recent times another lady in the person of Mrs. Jones Bateman, wife of a former Civil Servant of that name, has also described the ruins of Anuradhapura.

One of the best and most trustworthy books on Ceylon is Miss C. F. Gordon Cumming's "Two Happy Years in Ceylon." Miss Gordon Cumming belonged to a family of great travellers and mighty hunters. "There are perhaps few families in the Mother Country" she says, "to whom the farther corners of Great Britain have (from the colonising or sporting instincts of its various members) become more really familiar to the imagination of the younger branches than that to which I was welcomed, as its twelfth addition. Thus, about the time of my first introduction to the immortal Robinson Crusoe, my eldest bother Penrose returned from Canada, soon to be followed by my second brother Roualeyn, who had made his mark as the pioneer of all the Lion-hunters who since then have ravaged the hunting-grounds of Southern Africa.

"Then two more of the home brood started to carve their fortunes in far countries. Almost simultaneously my fourth and fifth brothers, John and William, sailed for Ceylon and Bombay, where the latter tamed wild men and slew wild beasts, while the former settled down to sober coconut-planting in the neighbourhood of Batticaloa: and then through weary years of waiting for the growth of trees which never in his lifetime repaid his outlay, he obtained work in the forests on the east coast, and

likewise distinguished himself as a cunning and mighty hunter, beloved by the wild tribes".

Miss Gordon Cumming and Bishop Jermyn knew each other as children, and when the latter came to Colombo as Bishop, he invited her to visit Ceylon. She came with the intention of making only a brief stay, but so charming did she find the place and the people that, as she says, "wellnigh two years slipped away ere I finally bade adieu to the green Isle of Palms, to which, I think, notwithstanding the claims of many a lovely South Sea isle, we must concede the right it claims-to have been, and still to continue, the true Earthly Paradise".

Strangely enough, this opinion, expressed forty years ago, received striking confirmation only the other day, when Mr. Gardiner, Director of the Ceylon Theatres Ltd., on his return after an extensive tour of America and the islands of the Pacific, stated that for scenic beauty Ceylon was unrivalled.

An important book on Ceylon with a historical background is entitled "A Man's Honour" by Miss Violet Methley, published in 1920. The authoress claims close relationship to the unfortunate Major Davie, and the object of the book is to clear the character of that unfortunate official from the charge of cowardice which is sometimes levelled against him for abandoning Kandy. With the same object in view Miss Methley read a paper before the Royal Historical Association on the subject of the Expedition to Kandy in 1803.

Mrs. F. E. Penny, the wife of an Archdeacon of Madras, is the author of many novels, two of them. "The Tea Planter," and "The Old Dagoba," having a Ceylon background. Mrs. Penny was, it is believed, a sister of Mr. Farr, an upcountry planter and sportsman, hence her familiarity with upcountry life as revealed in her book, and the choice of Ceylon as a setting for her novel. She also did much research work in India, and her two books "Fort St. George, Madras" and "On the Coromandel Coast" contain much useful information in regard to Madras in the olden days. The Rev. Mr. Penny himself is the author of three bulky volumes dealing with the history of the Church in Madras.

Caroline Corner is a writer who was much in the news over thirty years ago. She came out as the wife of a Mr. Ohlmus, a clerk in the Colonial Secretary's Office, but the marriage does not appear to have been a very happy one, and after some time in Ceylon Mrs. Ohlmus returned to England. Then followed an acrimonious correspondence in the newspapers, her husband accusing her of "walking with things to the Pawn broker from her father's residence in the East End of London", owing to which proclivity he averred that she was known in pawnbroking circles as "The Duchess of Hackney".

In spite of this alleged predilection, it must be admitted that Mrs. Corner Ohlmus was a clever woman. She was a facile writer, and frequently contributed articles to local magazines. In 1908 she brought out her *magnum-opus* entitled "Ceylon: the Paradise of Adam. The Record of Seven Years' Residence in the Island". The book did not meet with a very favourable reception. Mr. R. G. Anthonisz, who reviewed the book for the D.B.U. Journal, said: "A peep into its pages has been sufficient to fill us with wonder and amusement at the uncommon and improbable nature of some of her experiences, and to make us hesitate to accept the stories she relates as narratives of actual occurrences". Notwithstanding this defect, the book contains a good deal that is of interest, and deserves to be more widely known than it is.

One does not usually associate a lady with the production of a Guide Book, yet we are indebted to one of them for one of the best guides to Ceylon. It is called "How to see Ceylon". Bella Sidney Woolf, the authoress, belongs to a literary family. Her brother, L.S. Woolf, who was in the Ceylon Civil Service, wrote one of the finest books on village life in Ceylon. Bella Sidney Woolf married R.H. Lock of the Agricultural Department, who had himself literary tastes, and on his death she became the wife of W.T. Southern, who is now Sir Wilfrid Southern, Governor of the Gambia, West Africa.

In 1925 she brought out a small book with the attractive title "From Groves of Palms". It contains 15 chapters on various phases of life in Ceylon, one of them being devoted to "Passengers". One learns with interest for the first time that to

the native mind all foreigners are Dutchmen. Lady Southorn always had a soft place in her heart for the Dutch, for she herself was of Dutch extraction, and this feeling is reflected in the chapter on a journey by canal to Negombo. "My thoughts" she says, "flew to Holland and her canals, and hours spent once on a trekscuit floating through that flat pleasant land, with the windmills and the black and white cows, and the sun, sinking like an orange on the horizon. The Hollanders, floating along the 'old' canal, must have often thought with a pang of their far-off country which so few of them were destined to see again".

A Geography of Ceylon can hardly be classed as Ceylon Literature, but Miss E. K. Cook's work contains so much that one does not usually find in a school book that it deserves mention. Unlike most writers on Ceylon, Miss Cook's remarks regarding the Burghers are unexceptionable except for one single misstatement which we can only attribute to the fondness of some people for saying spiteful things about their own sex. She says:- "As a rule, the Burghers try to marry Europeans, and as the men have more chance to do this, by travelling for their education, the girls will often remain unmarried, owing to the prejudice on the part of their parents against marriage with the Ceylonese". As we all know, there is not the slightest justification for this statement; but it has been eagerly seized upon by a later writer and magnified into the assertion that "a European husband is the dream of all Burgher girls".

Another lady who wrote a Geography of Ceylon is Miss A.G. Gibbon. The book met with a very unfavourable reception. It was described as a "a 'boil-down' of other books in Longman's Geographical Series, and the result is a sort of indigestible pemmican.... It is not a Geography at all. Certainly not the kind of Geography 'primarily intended for school children'."

One lady has struck out in a new direction and written a book for children, entitled "Legends of Ceylon", consisting of seven stories based on Sinhalese legends. The authoress is Miss Aline van Dort, and the book contains the following dedication:- "To my little friend and child-critic Alice Maartensz, from her

Ya-Lu." Of the same class is Miss Grace van Dort's little book "Karuppen and Karupie."

In 1933 there was published a little book of "Verses, by Wendy", the authoress being no other than the talented daughter of our own valued member of the Union, the Hon'ble Mr. O. L. de Kretser. It is no exaggeration to say that Wendy's poetry is of a high order and does her infinite credit. We hope to see further writings from her pen.

Since my definition of literature is somewhat elastic, and I have allowed a Geography of Ceylon to come within its category, I venture to go a step further and to include two books on Cookery as coming within the scope of this review. One is a somewhat comprehensive book, compiled for the Ceylon Daily-News by Miss Hilda Deutrom. The other is on more modest lines and bears the title "Rare Recipes of a Huis-vrouw of 1770". The compiler is Miss Grace van Dort.

Only one Ceylon lady, as far as I am aware, has attempted to write a novel, and that is Rosalind Mendis. The book is entitled "The Tragedy of a Mystery" and the scene is set in Kandy. There are of course certain defects in it owing to the use of "Ceylonisms" of which we have heard a good deal recently, but considering the difficulty of writing a good novel, the book is a creditable production for a first attempt; but like almost all works by Ceylonese it did not meet with the appreciation it deserved, and is now practically forgotten.

Time will not permit of my referring in detail to the poetry of Nelly Austin, Heliope, Miss Tench of Nuwara Eliya, who wrote under the pseudonym of "Mez", and other ladies who have left their mark on the literature of Ceylon; but the question may be asked whether the women of the present day are continuing to take that interest in literature which their sisters did in days gone by. The answer must, I am afraid, be in the negative. One can scarcely mention a single outstanding literary contribution made by a Ceylon woman. The only explanation of this is that women are now devoting a larger part of their time to outdoor games and other pursuits, and have therefore less opportunities for literary culture. Outdoor games and amusements have their proper place in the life of the

Community, but they must not be allowed to usurp the position which reading and writing should occupy in the daily life of a woman. Already there is a marked falling off in the literary output of the women of our own Communities. If this continues, a very deplorable state of things will result, as far as our Community is concerned. It is not expected that every woman should be an authoress, but what we do want to see is women taking an intelligent interest in literary matters and making what contribution they can to the literature of the island.

Class and Gender, a Conceptual Analysis

Selvy Thiruchandran

The concept of class is central to both Marxist and non-Marxist sociological theory. The manner in which class is defined and conceptualised has led to many debates in contemporary social thought in various disciplines. Feminists have challenged many of the traditional assumptions which form the basis of such class theories (Gardiner 1977: 155-163, Garnsey 1978:223-43, Delphy 1984: 29-40, Crompton 1989: 565-587).

Incorrect Assumptions in Class Analysis

Both Marxist and Weberian social scientists have succumbed to gender ideological assumptions in the social process when dealing with class analysis.

The first problem is that the class position of women is defined as dependent on a male household breadwinner. This criterion is quite often used to analyse the class position of women. The second problem is to take the family as a unit of analysis for a married woman and even for a spinster and a widow. When a woman's class position is analysed, the criteria of the place they occupy in the system of social relations of production shift to their position vis-a-vis husband and family. Many other contradictions originate from these two major factors of error in the system of socio-economic stratification. It has always been assumed that the socio-economic stratification level of the family is solely determined by the income of the head of the family who is usually taken to be a male. It is also assumed that the wife and the adult woman also belong to the same socio-economic status as the husband. The unequal position of the wife in the family is usually considered irrelevant in the structure of stratification. It is ironical that when feminists have identified the family as basis of women's oppression, that

the family in which gender inequality is at its worst, should be treated as a unit on which class identification should be made. It is indeed a case in point where researchers and theoreticians have succumbed to ideological constructions. By doing this they have ignored fact that the family is the important site of gender inequality.

The family is taken as a homogeneous unit even when the wife is not in paid employment. Access to assets within the family and usage of the resources within the family are not the same for a husband and wife. In most cases the wife does not have the same amount of power to control the husband's wealth, though she can use it for the family expenses with or without his consent. The wife may or may not be part of the decision making process within the family, either on the use or on the control of the family wealth.

The main inconsistencies are as follows :

- A woman is classified on the basis of her occupation if she is single (spinster, widow). When she is married her occupation is not taken into consideration and she is classified by her husband's occupation.
- For a man, married or widower, his occupation alone determines his class position.
- After marriage occupation of a woman is replaced by the economic position of the husband, a completely different criterion.

This is more than a methodological error. The ideology of dependence of a woman on a man is not only used but also validated further by social scientists on certain assumptions. Moreover, her occupation is not taken into consideration even when occupation is used as an index of analysis. Hence, for a woman two criteria are used to determine her class: her own occupation, if not married, or her husband's occupation if married. An example will further elucidate the absurdity of this kind of analysis. A married woman, who has a reasonably good occupation and who earns a higher salary than her husband, will

be classed on her husband's salary which is lower. This woman may have higher socio-economic status by virtue of having more access to use and control of her finances, whereas an unemployed woman or lower salaried woman who has little or no control of her husband's wealth, or of her own salary, but has a husband who earns a higher salary than the wife in the former case will be placed on a higher status in this class analysis. A woman's higher social position is denied to her, and the other woman is ascribed an erroneous higher class position. The criterion of "an association through marriage" (Delphy 1984:36) used on women will yield unscientific results.

It has also to be added that under the category of being economically inactive, a full time housewife is treated on par with the child, the infirm, the old and the sick. The problem of defining house work which is referred to as "domestic labour" has its related problems of where to locate the housewife. It has been argued by feminists, that housewives fall into the working class because they are indirectly exploited by capital (Seacombe 1974: 3-24). They lower the cost incurred by the capitalists by contributing to the subsistence of their husbands. Placed in the category of "domestic mode of production" (Delphy 1984:17), they are seen as exploited by their husbands within a subsidiary class relation. Terminological classifications such as the above have not helped much in solving the problem. Wright (1985:129) placed the husbands within a contradictory class location because they exploit and dominate their wives within the household relations of production, while they themselves are exploited by capitalist relations of production. This is one way of understanding the problem.

Radical Feminist Class Theory

The radical feminists' (Redstockings' Manifesto, 1970) attempt to reduce women per se into one class in patriarchal societies represents again a partial vision of a social totality which is complex and contradictory. Women, though small in number, do own productive assets in varying degrees as their own. Then seen from a Marxist point of view women as

capitalists do exploit, dominate and oppress men and women of the working class. Women as wives and daughters of capitalists, collaborate with their husbands and fathers in the exploitative relations directly and indirectly. However, they are simultaneously subjected to patriarchal dominance and oppression by their husbands and fathers in familial relations. Even under patriarchal relations the levels of social oppression and economic exploitation are not uniform for all women to assign to all of them the same class position. The fact that a capitalist woman is oppressed by her husband does not exempt her from her exploitative nature as a capitalist in her relations with the working class. Combining patriarchal relations and capitalist relations does not necessarily lead to understanding either of them.

However, what radical feminists have done is to challenge the Marxist vision that class is the only form of oppression and that others are transitional ideological illusions. Theirs is an attempt to place patriarchal oppression on the agenda of liberation practice (with a radical theory), to which many Marxists were inadequately conscientized. However, despite their subordination, at different levels though, women per se cannot be categorized as belonging to one class. This could be proved when the caste dimension is brought in to research on gender relations.

The Comparative Material Inequality

My argument then is that the unit of analysis should not be the household. While basing the research merely on the respondents, their class position should be determined on lines of comparison with other women. However, in the joint family system which is common in Asia, unmarried daughters and married sons and daughters-in-law contribute to the common purse. The class position of the unemployed mother-in-law and the employed daughter-in-law may be the same. Patriarchal social relations have conferred on the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law a same class position. Within this relationship both the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law may have been

deprived of accessibility to financial resources without necessarily depriving them of some comforts and the benefits of their husbands' and sons' income and wealth. In such cases they should both be placed in the same class position.

In the nuclear families too son and daughter earn an income that is shared. Where the children are young, a woman's class position should be determined by the joint income of both husband and wife put together. Wherever the wives are not working, class position can be determined by their husbands' income as that becomes the only index to determine her class position in terms of the material status. In this manner, women can be analysed on a class basis: upper, middle, and lower class. In conclusion, one has to agree with Crompton (1989:567):

"that difficulties in the treatment of gender and class within a single framework or approach have revealed weaknesses in some existing theoretical attempts to operationalise class, which suggest a more flexible approach is required".

What can be kept within the framework of a class analysis amidst the structures of relations is the factor of material inequality among women in comparative terms.

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Religious and Cultural Identity and the Construction of Sinhala Buddhist Womanhood*

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Issues of gender, ethnicity, religion and class have figured as topics of significant research in Sri Lanka in recent years. Some connections have been established between religious-ethnic issues and class consciousness, with gender in these cases being ignored or treated as peripheral. Research has also been done on women within categories based on class or ethnic origin, which includes the writings on women workers in the Free Trade Zone or on Tamil plantation women. There remains, however, an important area that has yet to be adequately researched, namely, the multiple and interactive constructions of gender in movements based on religious and ethnic identity as they evolve over time.

Gender can be viewed as a core element of the ethnic issue. Women are the reproducers of the members of the ethnic group and, hence, control of female sexuality and of reproductive functions becomes a key material and ideological issue. The purity and chastity of women have to be ensured so that the group is not polluted by admixtures from outside; religious and social sanctions are used for this purpose. Campaigns for more children are projected as the "duty" of women to the ethnic community so that it is not "swamped" by other antagonistic groups; in this context, birth control, sterilization or abortion, which put the control of reproduction in the hands of women, are often seen as conspiracies by rival ethnic groups. Women also have a clearly specific task as cultural carriers, signalling ethnicity through dress, ornaments, and modes of behaviour; they play a far more significant role in this respect than men. Women are, in addition, the reproducers of culture and the socializers of the young into an awareness of ethnic and religious identity and of the rituals of the group.

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Women thus determine, both biologically and symbolically, the boundaries of the ethnic group. It is true that women within the ethnic group are segmented in various ways and that they will participate in the religious and ethnic processes differently as determined by their class, age or status in the family (Anthias and Davis, 1983). Yet what is crucial is that the ethnic identity of each group is frequently expressed in terms of its womanhood and its vision of the ideal woman. She symbolizes the purity, continuity and exclusivity of the ethnic group and is therefore central to ethnic discourse.

In many Asian countries, the years of nationalist awakening and of resistance to colonialism brought the issues of both women's emancipation and motherhood to the fore. The identification of motherhood and the motherland also indicated the various ways in which gender became symbolically interwoven with nationalist discourse. But many nationalists and revolutionaries - as, for example, Sun Yat Sen, Nehru, Mao Ze Dong, Kemal Ataturk, Sukarno and Ho Chi Minh-believed that the struggle for independence also involved the modernisation of society, the elevation of the status of women, and the elimination of obscurantist and retrograde practices based on old religious and social traditions. Their message was clear: Women had to be educated, had to come out of their houses into schools, universities, factories and offices, and had to be an integral part of the struggle for national liberation and social change (Jayawardena, 1986).

This momentum, however, did not survive in the post-independence period. The discourse of national liberation against alien rule usually united different ethnic groups and the freedom and equality of women figured prominently in such struggles. This must be sharply distinguished from the fragmented nationalist discourses based on assertions of religious or ethnic identity. These movements are chauvinist, fundamentalist and often antagonistic to each other; a significant aspect of their mobilization is the way in which they have brought women within their compass as upholders of cultural and religious identities and as the progenitors of a pure unpolluted community through their roles as good wives and mothers.

Since gender and ethnicity are closely linked, I argue that control is most specifically seen in the case of women of child-bearing age whose tasks are to reproduce the ethnic group and socialize children into their ethnic roles. The process of control starts from puberty and a girl's first menstruation signals the event. She has grown up; she can be sexually active and get married and have children. She can be a great asset and prize to the community if her virginity and chastity are ensured, if she is married to a carefully selected partner and produces and brings up the next generation according to the demands of law and social custom. On the other hand, she also personifies a threat of disorder to the ethnic group if she disobeys the tradition; she will then risk 'going astray' and shame the community by producing children of mixed ethnicity who will defile the purity of the ethnic group. After menopause, women are of less concern, and while they are expected to assume the role of the 'good' grandmother, they have some space and mobility denied to younger women.

This paper will consider some implications for gender of the assertion of a separate identity by the Sinhala Buddhist majority in Sri Lanka from the late nineteenth century, paying attention, at the ideological level, to the devising of controls of women during the age of reproduction, and the type of freedom allowed to those who have passed this age.

Gender and the Sinhala Buddhist Revival

The peopling of Sri Lanka has been a process marked by numerous migrations from the Indian subcontinent and also by trade connections with the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Sri Lanka came under the rule of several European colonial powers from 1505 to 1948. As a result, Sri Lankan society today is multiethnic and multireligious. Ethnically, according to the census of 1981, the Sinhalese formed the majority, with 74 percent of the population of 15 million. Tamils comprised 18.2 percent of which 12.6 percent were Sri Lankan Tamils and 5.6 percent were Tamils of more recent Indian origin. Muslims formed 7.4 percent, and there are very small communities of

Malays, Burghers and Eurasians. The religious affiliations of Sri Lankans, according to the 1981 census, indicated that Buddhists were 67 percent, Hindus 18 percent, Muslims 7 percent and Christians 8 percent of the population.

In the course of interaction in the historical past and particularly during the colonial period, these different ethnic groups have developed their own assertions of identity, bolstered by their own myths of the purity of their origin. Religion has also entered into the assertion of identity because Sinhala was largely congruent with Buddhist and Tamil with Hindu. The Sinhalese and the Tamils, the two largest groups, were also divided within themselves on the basis of a hierarchically-defined caste structure; the ethnic assertions have, however, been strong enough to weld the various castes into cohesive ethnic blocs.

The Buddhist revival began in the second half of the nineteenth century with a movement of monks and lay people to restore the religion, purify religious practices, reform the clergy and give the Sinhala Buddhists a sense of religious and ethnic identity. The lay Buddhists concerned included a section of the bourgeoisie and the urban and rural petty bourgeoisie of school teachers, journalists, clerks, traders and small commodity producers. Their main task was to challenge the dominance of Christianity and the hold the missionaries had over education. Support and inspiration for this project came from free thinkers in Britain, and from the Theosophical Society formed in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott. The construction of Sinhala Buddhist identity stressed the unity and indivisibility of the island and claimed that the Sinhala people had been chosen for the mission of upholding and protecting the religion of Theravada Buddhism within it. It thus involved the assertion of Sinhala Buddhist hegemony over the minority ethnic groups.

While the processes of economic transformation through a plantation economy set in motion by the British in the nineteenth century had brought into being new classes, the national awareness that subsequently developed was in part fuelled by the desire of the emergent bourgeoisie to participate more fully in economic and political processes; but its very

composition - traders, plantation owners and liquor merchants - and its close links with an agrarian society of small producers, prevented it from developing an ideology that was secular, rational and strongly assertive of bourgeois values. In the absence of a powerful modernizing ideology that could have united classes across ethnic confines, the nationalist revival took on an ethnic and religious form. Even the constitutional agitation for political reforms could not compel the ethnic groups to submerge their specific identities for the evolution of a national consciousness during colonial rule.

The issue of women's emancipation did not figure prominently in the nationalist discourse in Sri Lanka in its early stages at the turn of the century. In fact, some leaders of the Buddhist revival laid down conservative codes of behaviour and dress for their women, also urging them to reject the modernizing processes that had begun to affect the status of women. The distorted Sinhala nationalism of Sri Lanka thus combined ethnic and religious chauvinism against the minorities with chauvinism against women; this was in contrast (as mentioned earlier) to the nationalism of many other Asian countries that attempted to include women as well as minority groups in their agenda for national liberation. When Sinhala Buddhists began to assert an exclusive ethnic identity and also to assert themselves (in gender terms) as *sons* of the soil, minority groups as well as the *daughters* of the soil were pushed into a space determined for them by the men of the majority group. Minorities were downgraded as aliens, who were then defined as members of an anti-national conspiracy; similarly, an attempt was made to confine Sinhala women to a narrow and strictly defined role. These two tasks - of subordinating minorities and women - were assumed by the intelligentsia of the Sinhala Buddhist revival in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

One of the foundations of Sinhala-Buddhist consciousness formulated during this period was the myth of Aryan origin. The word *Arya* was familiar in Sinhala discourse and meant that which was noble or honourable; monks who had renounced lay life were, for example, described as Arya. This word was given a new meaning when intellectuals in India and

Sri Lanka accepted in toto the notions of Western orientalists who had deduced, on the basis of links between Sanskrit and the European languages, the existence of a common original language and of a common Aryan race. Though the notion of a common race was later repudiated by most of them, including Max Müller, its original proponent, the myth of Aryan descent continued to hold sway; in Sri Lanka, the myth confirmed the superiority of the Sinhala people, who were said to be the descendants of immigrants from Bengal, over the Tamils who were said to be of inferior Dravidian origin.

The construction, within this framework, of a specifically Aryan Sinhala Buddhist woman pervades the Buddhist revivalist debate, the early nationalist discourse and the writings of Sinhala novelists and poets. The correct way a Sinhala Buddhist wife/mother should behave, dress and conduct herself in society was categorically defined. Women followers of the Buddha and the queens and heroines of early Sri Lankan history were projected in the nationalist press as role models. While being exhorted to follow the patterns of conduct laid down in the discourses of the Buddha, women were given the added roles of guardians of the Aryan Sinhala race and the inspirers of their men - dissuading them from alcohol, meat-eating, immorality and imitation of the despised foreigners. Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933), the most outspoken ideologue of the revival, visualised the Aryan wife and her family thus: "The Aryan husband trains his wife to take care of his parents and attend on holy men, on his friends and relations. The glory of woman is in her chastity, in the performance of her household duties and obedience to her husband. This is the Aryan ideal wife". (Guruge, 1965 a, p. 345).

The Christian and Burgher Female as "Other"

At the early stages of the Buddhist revival, in a context where Christianity was the religion of the "whites" and its proselytizing activities were defined as corruptive and supportive of imperialism, the Sinhala-Buddhist ideal of womanhood was advanced in contradistinction to an image of

the Christian "Other." Dharmapala spoke of the whites as "a powerful race," but their behaviour was also characterised by wife-beating and the "promiscuous dancing of men and women regardless of the laws of decency," which were vestiges of their "primitive customs when they lived half-naked and painted their bodies" (Guruge 1965a:pp. 479-80). He also alleged that Christians indulged in "killing animals, stealing, prostitution, licentiousness, lying and drunkenness" (p.482). They were thus in clear violation of the five principal precepts of Buddhism. Even more important, practices such as these were pushing native males in the direction of miscegenation, which would pollute the pure ethnic community; it would also have effects reaching into the subsequent generations because an alien mother could not be expected to socialise her children into the culture of the community.

Dharmapala and the Buddhist revivalists expressed particular animosity against missionaries and the Christianization and westernisation of the students by European and Burgher teachers. The latter, being partly European and English speaking, were pioneers of the modernizing process, and from the mid-nineteenth century, dominated the teaching staff of girls' (English) schools; by the late nineteenth century, they had also become nurses and secretaries. The first women doctors on the island were Burghers who qualified in Scotland in the 1890s, thereby setting the pace for Sinhala and Tamil women students (Jayawardena, 1986, p. 12).

Such westernization outraged the orthodox of all communities who felt that their women were losing all traditional virtues in the pursuit of Western ideals. Dharmapala warned that Sinhala Buddhist women of noble character were becoming rare because of Christian influences and marriages to Christians. Buddhist women, he said, had given up their pleasing Aryan names for those of the foreigners. And although the clothes worn by European women were offensive to the eye, women of the local bourgeoisie had taken to wearing ridiculous hats and stockings and dresses that exposed their legs (Guruge, 1965 b, pp. 77-94).

The Christian woman began to figure in the polemics and diatribes of the period and in works of fiction. European women were dismissed as whores and the Virgin Mary was written about in obscene terms.¹ The Burgher woman became the standard stereotype of the immoral temptress who not only appeared in public with men, but danced and drank with them. When westernized Sinhala women began to dress in European fashion and socialize freely with men, they were denounced as loose women who had been contaminated by Christian and Burgher influences. This mixture of race and culture was seen as a sign of the decline of the Sinhala nation seen in its most deplorable form in the behaviour of women; if the women were corrupt, then their progeny too would be corrupt and the Sinhala nation would have no future. The protection of Sinhala womanhood against this degeneracy then became one of the main tasks of the Buddhist revival.

This attitude is apparent in the Sinhala novels of the period, particularly those of Piyadasa Sirisena, one of the leading propagandists of the revival and a protege of Dharmapala. For example, in 1906, he wrote a novel *Jayatissa & Rosalin* that became one of the best-sellers of the time; Jayatissa, the hero, is a Sinhala Buddhist, while his fiance Roslin is Sinhala but Catholic and therefore, unsuitable as a wife and mother unless she converts. All the villains are denationalized, rootless Catholics (with names like Donald Silva, Alphonso Perera and Vincent Perera) who try all manner of ploys to prevent Jayatissa from marrying Rosalin and converting her to Buddhism (Amunugama, 1979). Sirisena's novels are full of moral preaching, directed mainly toward mothers and would-be mothers, concerning the necessity of bringing up children to be worthy members of the ethno-religious community. His heroes and heroines, as Roberts notes, "give lay sermons, engage enemies of the Sinhala ... in debate and emerge triumphant"; he also points out that "the corrupting influence of Burghers, especially Burgher women... was standard fare" (Roberts, 1989:p.11). In Sirisena's 1909 novel *Apata Veccha De* (What Happened to Us), a Sinhala youth, who goes from his village to Colombo, the capital city, gives up his studies for sports and dancing, became a wastrel and marries a Burgher girl; on hearing all this the mother sickens and dies. "Alas, what has

happened to us," is his father's lament (p.15). *In Maha Viyavula* (*The Great Confusion*), also written by Sirisena in 1909, a Sinhala woman from a wealthy family declines into distress and poverty after becoming the mistress of a Burgher who is eventually reduced into earning a living by repairing shoes (p.254). It is of course implied that an even greater confession would result from these unions; they would be producing a progeny that would not be brought up to be proper Sinhala Buddhists.

Although Sinhala Buddhist consciousness has passed through some changes of emphasis during the subsequent periods, this theme has persisted over the decades and has found its way into other forms of popular art. In many Sinhala films, the virtuous Sinhala hero is temporarily led astray by a loose Burgher woman. In popular television serials, an alliance with a non-Sinhala or Burgher woman inevitably corrupts the male; he is diverted not only from the path of filial and familial duty, but also (more importantly) from ethnic duty. Marriage to a non-Sinhala and the creation of half-Sinhala or non-Buddhist children is seen as a real threat to the Sinhala Buddhist nation.

The concept of a Sinhala Buddhist woman was thus constituted, at the early stages of the revival, in opposition to a concept of white or Burgher Christian womanhood. There was one dominant construction of a virtuous Sinhala Buddhist wife/mother, formulated, accepted and promoted by both the religious and lay Buddhists. There were also, however, other acceptable roles for women within a Sinhala Buddhist framework Buddhism, which is often claimed to be a liberating doctrine, allows some freedom within patriarchy to women who have passed the child-bearing age and to a few who choose to withdraw from that task. All these formulations drew upon certain strands of the Buddhist tradition but also responded in diverse ways to contemporary needs. I propose here to outline two such constructions: the Buddhist wife/mother formulated during the early stages of the nationalist revival and the mother of heroic sons, crafted to meet the threat of the current separatist struggle. I shall describe the traditions upon which they have drawn and illustrate them with some examples. I shall thereafter

deal with two other approved roles; the benefactor of Buddhist causes and the *religieuses* known as *dasa sil mathas*.

The Buddhist Wife/Mother

The construction of the ideal wife and mother by the intelligentsia of the Buddhist revival was made both in terms of Buddhist values and also in terms of the social and economic transformations of the time. The construction was thus one of a middle-class wife who would be an asset to her husband, presentable in colonial society, modestly dressed, educated (but not too much, and preferably in English) and knowledgeable about Buddhism and local history. She also had to be an asset to her community in reproducing a new generation of good Sinhala Buddhists. It was important for the "new Buddhist woman" to be appropriately middle-class in her behaviour and to be educated out of "uncouth lower-class or rustic habits"; a bad woman, according to Sirisena, is one who scratches her head, laughs loudly, talks a lot, weeps unnecessarily, eats too much, stands in doorways and wipes her face with the clothes she wears (Sirisena, *Debera Kella*). Just as missionary schools and convents were making "ladies" out of local girls, the Buddhist girls' schools undertook a similar project; the difference was that of religious atmosphere. Here we can also see a curious example of a congruence between the values of the Buddhist revival and the values of Victorian womanhood that the colonizing power was trying to introduce. There is no doubt that the latter set of values played a part in the formation of the ideology of the revival, and that "Protestant Buddhism" (as Ganarath Obeyesekere has called it in Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988, pp.215-222 and elsewhere) included reforms affecting women.

Selected Buddhist texts were used in the construction of this middle-class Sinhala woman and much stress was laid on the economic stability that women could bring into social and family life. The emphasis was not so much the sensuous, beautiful Panchakalyana image, but the industrious, thrifty, loyal wife who ordered her husband's social and economic life,

paying special attention to his belongings and property. An important Buddhist text used for this purpose was the *Gihivinaya of the Sigalovada Sutta*. The wife had to serve the husband in five ways: duties well performed, hospitality to the relations of both, faithfulness, watching over the goods he brings, and skill and industry in discharging her work. The husband has to be faithful and conscious of her needs, thus deserving her respect, and also must bring her gifts. This utilitarian emphasis on work, discipline and thrift was also buttressed by the use of texts from the *Anguttara Nikaya*, where the Buddha states that a girl should be trained to be a willing worker after marriage, to revere her husband and be hospitable to his friends, to be industrious in doing and getting things done, to know the capabilities of each one in the home and to be thrifty and safeguard the family possessions. As Harris has noted, "The teaching delineates clear roles for men and women; the wife manages the hospitality and the household and the husband brings the goods" (Harris, 1989, p.7).

This amalgam of Buddhist and middle-class virtues is well illustrated in *Dingiri Menike*, another novel by Piyadasa Sirisena. There, a well brought up and virtuous Sinhala youth lays down the qualities he expects of a wife: that she (1) treasures Buddhism more than her life; (2) respects Sinhala family customs; (3) behaves in strict accordance with such customs; (4) is humble; (5) is satisfied with what is available; (6) is happy and contented; (7) looks after the welfare of others even at the risk of her own; (8) rejects all vices; (9) dresses in accordance with custom and situation; (10) is beautiful; (11) can read and understand; and (12) has a good knowledge of the Sinhala language. In explaining some of these qualities, great emphasis was laid on a wife's duty to care for household goods and the family wealth. She should have a proper understanding of her husband's income and order household expenses within it; her attire must be in conformity with income; she must clean and take good care of the house and garden.

In the formation of this ideal Buddhist middle-class wife, a good education was seen as being of fundamental importance. In *Debera Kella*, a later novel, Sirisena imagines the ideal finishing school for Sinhala Buddhist girls, which he calls

Subhadra Vidyalaya. The school was restricted to girls over 12 who had had six years of schooling; this means in effect that it was for girls who had reached puberty and therefore needed to be indoctrinated into their ethnic roles. The selected girls had to have Aryan Sinhala names; their mothers had to be of blameless character; their fathers could be farmers, traders, entrepreneurs or government servants who were teetotallers and nongamblers. Class was important and the children of manual workers were specifically excluded. The curriculum was primarily based on a study of the Sinhala language and its classical texts, particularly the *Kavyasekaraya* with its famous stanzas advising women on marriage to be docile and obedient. Buddhism was to be taught with some emphasis on the duties of lay persons, exemplified, for example, in the *Sigalovada Sutra*. In addition, home management (cooking, sewing, gardening), health care, child care and sex education were included so that "pupils brought up with such knowledge and attitudes would give birth to good well behaved Sinhala children who would grow up to rescue the Sinhala nation from its present degeneracy" (Ibid). The crux of the problem, as far as the continued existence of the ethnic group was concerned, was the production of suitably socialized middle-class children who could be entrusted with the tasks of preserving and advancing its cause.

Western Women Construct the Eastern Wife and Mother

One of the unusual characteristics of the period of nationalist revival in Sri Lanka, as well as in India, was the support local leaders obtained from Western women in the project of restoring and inventing tradition and constructing the ideal Aryan woman. These women, who were dissenters in their own societies and were critical of Christianity, patriarchy and colonialism, were somewhat paradoxically involved in promoting the 'ideal' Buddhist or Hindu wife and mother. The most famous of them was Annie Besant (1847-1933), who had earlier been a free thinker, socialist, feminist and champion of birth control and higher education for women. As her biographer remarked, Besant knew "how to wear sandals in India and shoes

in the rest of the world" (Nethercot, 1963, p.469). She promoted a traditional education for women, urging them not to modernize or take up the Western model of higher education and employment. Another such Western woman was Swami Vivekananda's disciple and soul mate Margaret Noble (1867-1911), who achieved fame as Sister Nivedita; she was noted for her insistence on traditional values for women and the idealization of Hindu family life. Discouraging Western education for Indian women, she said, "Shall we, after centuries of an Indian womanhood, fashioned on the pattern of Sita or Savitri... descend to the creation of coquettes and divorcees?" (Nivedita, 1973. Vol.III:4).

Dharmapala greatly admired strong independent foreign women like Besant, Nivedita, Blavatsky and Theosophist women because of their opposition to the Christian societies of the West and their admiration of Eastern religions. Theosophy was associated with women's emancipation and many of the most famous leaders of the movement were charismatic women like Madame Blavatsky and Annie Besant who were active in the cultural, religious and political awakening in South Asia. Many Buddhist Theosophist girls' schools in Sri Lanka had, in their formative years, Western Theosophist women as their principals and teachers. For example, Marie Musaeus Higgins, Hilda Kularatne (nee Westbrook), Clara Motwani (nee Irwin) and Lu Vinson Halliday were associated with leading girls' schools - Musaeus College, Ananda Balika, Visakha Vidyalaya and Sri Sumangala, respectively. Significantly, these women were graduates of Western universities and brought with them new ideas on modern education as well as firm views on women's right to higher education. The presence in the Buddhist movement of white women who were, in effect, opponents of colonial domination no doubt gave it a greater legitimacy.

Although some Sinhala Buddhists had stressed traditional dress and codes of conduct for middle-class Buddhist women, the need for Buddhist women to be educated in both Sinhala and English was also recognized. The Sanghamitta School for girls was begun in Colombo in 1889, with an English woman Theosophist as principal; it was superseded after her sudden death by Musaeus College started in 1893 by Marie

Musaeus Higgins (1855-1926); she was a German Theosophist who had earlier been a teacher at the Sanghamitta School. Her new school (with provision for boarders) gave a secondary education in English to children of the new class of Buddhist entrepreneurs, professionals and government servants who felt the need for wives and daughters, educated in English on the western model, but in a Buddhist atmosphere. Here again the emphasis was on giving girls a selective education in English with the aim of creating an enlightened younger generation.

The Evolution of Sinhala Buddhist Consciousness and Gender

Before directing attention at the other construction I referred to earlier - woman as the begetter of heroic sons - it is necessary to look at some of the massive political, economic and social changes that Sri Lanka has gone through since the beginnings of the Buddhist revival in order to locate this phenomenon in its setting.

A democratic political system based on universal adult suffrage was installed in 1931. The country gained independence from British rule in 1948. Since then, Sinhala Buddhist consciousness has been primarily directed toward maintaining the hegemony of the majority within the country and keeping the ethnic minority groups in a subordinate position. At a political level, Indian immigrants of recent origin working in the plantations were disenfranchised in 1948. At the linguistic level, Sinhala was made the only official language in 1956; this effectively served as a barrier to Tamils gaining state employment. Entry to higher education was subjected to a standardization process that restricted the numbers of Tamils gaining admission to universities and other institutions at the tertiary level. State-aided colonization was used to change ethnic ratios in provinces with a Tamil majority. These various forms of discrimination led to a crisis in ethnic relations in the country that finally took the form of an armed conflict between the state and Tamil militants. These political developments posed the

Tamils as the antagonists of the Sinhalese and had implications in the field of gender.

Economic developments, too, had similar effects. Women have become increasingly a part of the labour force in the modern sector. Besides their traditional roles in the peasant sector and in the plantations, women are a major part of the work force in garment industries in the Free Trade Zones and in tourism; they also form the bulk of migrant labour in the Middle East.

The effects of these new developments on the construction of gender have yet to be studied in depth. However, I offer here one construction that is a direct outcome of the militarization of the ethnic conflict: the concept of the mother specifically in the role of the producer of heroes who are ready to offer their lives in the protection of their country, religion and ethnic group.

Purity, Motherhood and Sinhala Buddhist Women

The concepts of female purity and of the women as the producer of heroic males acquire enormous significance in times of heightened ethnic rivalry and conflict. Popular inflammatory and demagogic appeals during such times are based on atrocity stories about women, ranging from allegations of rape, to the cutting off of breasts, abduction, forced marriage and the luring of women by males of the "other" community.

These attitudes were apparent even in earlier periods. During the 1930s, a period of economic depression and unemployment, the campaign to deport Malayali workers from Kerala (South India), who at that time formed an important section of the Colombo working class, was characterized by frequent accusations that these Malayali Hindu workers were using unfair tactics such as "Malayali black magic" and charms to entice Sinhala Buddhist women. Some racists of the time praised Hitler's policies of Aryan purity, and a letter to the editor of a trade union journal, commenting favourably on Hitler's prohibition of marriages between Aryans and Jews, wrote:

"Everyone says that unions between Sinhala women and Malayalis, whether legal or not should be prohibited. If this practice, which is certain to lead the nation to slavery and servitude, is prohibited, it will be a timely step for the cause of the Sinhala race. It is the duty of all Sinhalese to support such a demand (*Viraya*, 17 April, 1936)."

The affirmation of women as mothers of heroic males has now acquired significance in opposition to the Tamil separatist struggle. The emergence of militant Tamil youth groups demanding a separate state and committed to armed struggle to achieve it has dominated the politics of Sri Lanka for the last decade. The violence of the 1980s included the army moving in against the militants, the pogrom against Tamils in July 1983, the continuing escalation of the conflict, and Indian intervention and consequently the flaring up of Sinhala militant youth, led by the JVP, in the South. The unceasing violence in North and South made Sri Lanka a country with the highest number of violent deaths per population in the world in 1989-1990.

Gender issues have figured prominently in the carnage of these years. In the South, the 1983 pogrom and the resulting numbers of Tamil refugees led to women's organizations coming out to give shelter and help to refugees. In December 1984, over 100 women of all communities prominent in the arts, professions and politics signed a statement calling for a political settlement to the conflict, stating that there could be no military solution; this led to the formation of an organization called Women for Peace in 1985. While some women have thus been agitating for peace, the dominant tendency within the Sinhala Buddhist ethnic group has been to oppose any political solution and to support the efforts of the state to suppress the Tamil militancy by the force of arms. It makes heroes of the members of the security forces, calls for support to them and exalts the mothers of soldiers as heroic women making sacrifices for the country and the Sinhala community.

In an unsigned article (called "'Macho' Sons and 'Man-made' Mothers"), Serena Tennekoon made an analysis of

these constructions as they were manifested in a cassette of Sinhala battle songs (*Rana Gi*) put out by the government in 1986 that "glorified war and violence perpetrated in the name of patriotism and motherhood by male 'military culture'." According to one song,

Defending the motherland, myson is like protecting the
Mother who bore and nourished you.

As Tennekoon notes:

The cassette... makes heroes of males who have entrapped themselves in a vicious cycle of violence and counter-violence. Male military heroes, and their "supporting" cast of mothers and admiring wives and lovers, are invoked to condone the insanity of organised male violence. A...pernicious objective of these songs is to define women as an intrinsic part of military society.²

These criticisms notwithstanding, the invocation of motherhood as a sacrifice for the country proceeds apace. Newspaper stories have recently been giving prominence to tales of mothers whose sons are in the battle front. One tells of a mother with three sons in the army. She is quoted as saying, "The North and the East war had just started to rage. But I was proud of my sons and of their desire to go and fight not only for the country but also for millions of people in it." Elements of popular Buddhism are also involved in this glorification. She goes on to say: "If tragedy befalls any of my sons, I will have to take it as a karmic effect. If they have to die, it will happen whether they are here at home or fighting in the north. If they die while fighting the war I would be proud of my sons as they died for a cause" (*Sunday Times*, Colombo, 11 August, 1991).

The role of the mother, as the producer of new generations of acceptable Sinhala Buddhists, is now being transformed into the producer of warriors who fearlessly give up their lives for the cause. The maintenance of ethnic hegemony now demands sacrifices and this need is then written into the construction.

The Buddhist Female Benefactor

I shall now briefly delineate two roles for women, outside the wife/mother roles, that were accepted, and approved of the Buddhist patriarchal model. The first is the role of the female benefactor of the religion. A Buddhist woman who has completed her 'duties' to the community in the matter of reproduction is allowed a certain freedom, especially if she is a rich widow; she is then at liberty to decide on how to distribute largesse to Buddhist causes. Having passed a certain age, she is presumed to have transcended the age of sexuality and therefore she should not be in need of rigid rules of conduct.

Woman as benefactor is one of the most acceptable of role models for older Buddhist women. Buddhist religious lore is replete with tales of the wives of traders and merchants who were among the staunchest lay disciples of the Buddha. These women were important personalities in their own right; the most notable of them was Visakha, who in Sri Lanka has been projected as the ideal Buddhist woman: devout, educated and benefactor of Buddhist causes, often cited as an outstanding symbol of the emancipated independent women of Buddhist India. Her grandfather was Mendaka, "a great merchant of illimitable wealth"; her father, Dhananjaya, was also a leading merchant, and she married Punnavaddhana, the son of another wealthy merchant. With all this wealth behind her, she became the chief lay benefactress of the Buddha. She advised and criticised and even mediated in debates on the doctrine among monks. It is clear from her example that certain privileged women were able, by reason of their wealth and social standing, to lead independent lives and to be accepted as the intellectual equals of men (Horner, 1930, Part III, Chap. 5). The other role models from Buddhist history included Mahamaya (Buddha's mother), Yasodara (Buddha's wife), Sujata who supplied him food, and in later times Sangamitta, daughter of King Asoka, who brought a sapling of the sacred Bo tree to Sri Lanka. Significantly, Buddhist girls' schools in Sri Lanka have been called after these personalities (Sangamitta, Sujatha, Visakha, Mahamaya and Yasodara).

With the Buddhist revival in Sri Lanka in the late nineteenth century, there emerged a number of women - especially widows - who followed these early Buddhist examples and achieved fame as benefactors. Some examples can be cited from this period. Colonel Olcott and Helena Blavatsky, founders of the Theosophical Society, on their arrival in Sri Lanka in 1880, stayed in the house of Mrs. Wijeratne, a rich widow of a contractor for merchant ships in the port of Galle, who, according to Olcott, "lavished every hospitality upon us" (Olcott, 1954, pp. 158-159). And among the early woman funders of the Buddhist revival in the 1880s was a widow, Mrs. Cecilia Dias Illangakoon, described by Colonel Olcott as a wealthy Buddhist lady of "saintly piety" who financed the Sinhala and English editions of Olcott's "Buddhist Catechism" and who donated valuable books to the Theosophical Society library in Madras (Olcott, 1954, p. 199).

The rich foreign widow could also be a funder. Anagarika Dharmapala, for example, was dependent on Mary Foster, an American Theosophist in Hawaii, whose father and husband had made fortunes in shipbuilding. She was the largest funder of Dharmapala's Buddhist projects in India, Sri Lanka and Britain. As he was to say, "I owe everything to my parents, to Madame Blavatsky and to Mrs. Foster" (Guruge, 1965a, p. 768). Between 1903 and 1908, she sent \$8,000 to him, followed by large donations at later dates of money, bonds and a bequest of \$50,000 on her death. "But for her wonderful liberality and personal affection I would never have accomplished the work I had undertaken," wrote Dharmapala, who referred to her frequently as his "Foster Mother" and in Buddhist terms as Maha Upasika (The Great Female Lay Devotee) (Guruge, 1965a, pp. 155, 668 & 672). Dharmapala named a school and hospital after her and Foster Lane in Colombo still serves as a reminder of her links with Sri Lanka.

Dharmapala's mother, Mallika Hewavitarna (1842-1936), also figures prominently in Buddhist revivalist history. She was the daughter of Don Andiris Dharmagunawardena, a rich merchant, and her husband, H. Don Carolis, who had a furniture business in Colombo, was one of the few Sinhala Buddhist entrepreneurs of his time, Mallika Hewavitarna is

highlighted not only as daughter, wife and mother of important men, but also in her own right as benefactor of many charities and especially of her son's projects, being the first contributor towards his purchase of three acres of land in Sarnath, Benares (Guruge, 1965a, p. 732). Her name is commemorated in the Mallika Home for the Aged, begun in 1921 and still existent in Colombo. She also followed her son's advice and wore the sari and propagated its use. Her biographer gives a portrait of a pious widow who, during times of "foreign rule when Sinhala women were confined to their homes, came forward to perform a great national service" (Seneviratne, 1986, p. 10). Mallika Hewavitarna's role was particularly highlighted by the Buddhists because social work and non-government institutions for the poor were at that time mainly in the hands of Christians and foreign missionaries.

Another important Buddhist benefactor was Selestina Dias, widow of P. Jeremias Dias, one of the largest liquor traders and land owners of the late nineteenth century. Her father Solomon Rodrigo of Panadura had also been an arrack renter and owner of large extents of land. On her husband's death in 1902, Selestina Dias took over "the manufacture of arrack... in all its forms, in addition to the management of the estates" (Wright, 1907, p. 678). The latter included coconut, cinnamon, rubber and tea plantations, and she was assisted in their management by her four sons. Jeremias Dias had been a large benefactor of the Buddhist revival and was the chief lay supporter of the Buddhist temple in Panadura, the Rankot Vihara. Selestina Dias continued this philanthropy and gave land for additional buildings to the Rankot Vihara, and large donations to Buddhist charities, including Visakha Vidyalaya, the leading Buddhist girls' school.

In the 1930's, this tradition was continued by rich women like Badrawathie Fernando, wife of a rich merchant and land owner. She donated large sums of money to the restoration of Buddhist monuments like Ruwanwelisaya, and to temples and girls' schools; and as a result she became a legend in her lifetime among the Buddhists.

These generous benefactors, who were generally designated as *maha upasika* (great female devotees), played an important role in endowing temples, in fund-raising, as well as in organizing Buddhist lay groups. They were, however, definitely a part of the laity, living in their own homes and participating in lay activities. There are another group of women who renounced the lay life, yet do not form part of the order of monks; this is a role for Buddhist women that has become acceptable during the last two decades. The emergence and acceptance of this new role has to be located in the context of another development in Sinhala Buddhist consciousness. This is a tendency to effect certain purifications in the Buddhist religious order and in the practices of lay life so as to approximate the ancient glory of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. It implies a going back to textual Buddhism and an attempt to eradicate certain "corrupt" practices of contemporary popular Buddhism; this has remained primarily an intellectual trend, but has manifested itself in the public acceptance of women as religious figures.

Buddhist Religious Women

The *dasa sil mathas* (mothers of the ten precepts) are lay women, with shaven hair, dressed in yellow robes, observing the ten precepts or rules of conduct. They are not *bhikkunis* or ordained nuns. The beginnings of this movement can be traced back to 1907. Catherine De Alwis, a convert to Buddhism from Anglican Christianity, who had gone to Burma and received ordination there as Sister Sudharmachari, started an *aramaya* (Buddhist temple) in that year. The movement did not attract much attention during the early period when its few members were generally old women (Salgado, n.d.). Recently, however, there has been an expansion in the numbers of *dasa sil mathas*. Earlier the majority of them were mainly poor older women, treated with little respect since they lacked social and religious status. A fair number of recent converts are, on the other hand young and well educated.

Buddhism was the earliest religion to ordain women. Though agreeing finally to the ordination of women, Buddha is said to have laid down certain conditions that clearly defined their subordinate status. "A nun who has been ordained even for a century must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, and do proper homage to a monk ordained but that very day.... Admonition of monks by nuns is forbidden, admonition of nuns by monks is not forbidden." According to Buddhism, a woman can never become a Buddha. Moreover, her birth as a woman is due to her past bad *karma*, and if in this life she acquires merit, she may be reborn a man. Buddha, while treating exceptional women like Visakha on an intellectual plane, frequently warned Ananda about the wiles of women: "Women are soon angered, Ananda, full of passion, envious, and stupid" (Conze, 1954).

A *bhikkuni* order actually existed in Sri Lanka at least up to the tenth century; there are historical records that nuns from the Abhayagiri Vihara in Anuradhapura went to China and ordained women there. The order of nuns disappeared in Sri Lanka about the twelfth century but lives in the Mahayana form in China. It has been suggested that the *bhikkuni* order in Sri Lanka be revived with ordination from China but this is a tricky question, since Sri Lanka is very protective of its Theravada tradition. Another factor preventing an ordination of *bhikkunis* today in Sri Lanka is the lack of enthusiasm among both the Buddhist monks and laity. A few feminists have raised the issue without success, and as Salgado writes:

Individuals and the media may give some publicity to their cause, but the patriarchal nature of Sri Lankan Buddhist society is such that either the Dasa Sil Matha well have to come to the fore and contribute to changing it, or the character of the society itself will have to change (Salgado, n.d., 18).

But changes have occurred in recent years in the status of the *dasa sil mathas*; and many educated women have joined these groups and have assumed the functions of a *bhikkuni*. A walk of over 100 miles of *dasa sil mathas* from Colombo to a developmental celebration (*gamudava* in Kamburupitiya) over several days in June 1991 was given publicity daily in the

newspapers and on television. These religious women have also assumed roles in counselling and helping women, in social work and in religious rituals. Some of the young better educated ones have taken more aggressive stances leading to opposition to their role by leading monks. In July 1991, the Rev. Walpola Rahula, a well-known intellectual monk of Sri Lanka, chose the occasion of a ceremony in his honor to make a public criticism of the *dasa sil mathas*: "It has become evident... that female lay devotees are making an attempt to appear and act as Bhikkunis (Nuns) emulating the Bhikku appearance, in a manner that is contrary to the Theravada tradition." The monk condemned their use of yellow robes like male monks, and suggested that they be provided with facilities to learn Buddhism and meditate "rather than be utilized as exhibits." Significantly, he did not advocate a parallel order of nuns, but was content to keep the *dasa sil mathas* in a subservient status.³ This led to lively correspondence in the press; one writer alluded to Rev. Rahula as one of the "anti-feminists and male chauvinists in the Sangha," and added that "The proposal to demote Dasa Sil Mathas, give them white robes and oppose ordaining them as Bhikkunis... should be condemned and resisted," and noted that, "the Sinhalese Sangha has an unenviable history of monopolism, casteism... and male chauvinism."⁴

Conclusion

I have outlined above some acceptable roles for women that were developed within the overarching framework of Sinhala Buddhist consciousness. There will probably be others that further research will uncover. However, it is often the case that activities undertaken with one intention tend to generate opposite impulses. I want to make a brief mention here of one such impulse.

The educational activities undertaken by the Buddhist Theosophical Society and other such organizations created the context for new roles for women that were in contrast to traditional views. The *Buddhist Schools Magazines* in 1895, for example, lamented the absence of "blue stockings" in Sri Lanka

and called for higher education for local women so that they could become as distinguished as Western women (Jayawardena, 1986, p. 124). The first Sinhala Buddhist women doctors appeared at the turn of the century, and educated women started entering other professions such as teaching and nursing. In the 1920s, women began to be active in politics; some of them entered the Ceylon National Congress and the Ceylon Labour Party, while others joined the trade union movement. The Women's Franchise Union was an autonomous women's organization that agitated for women's suffrage; they made representations for votes for women in 1927 to a constitutional commission. Educated women also made their presence felt in other ways. To give one example, Nancy Wijekoon, a school teacher, wrote poems with a distinct anti-British flavour around 1915 and was suspected of sedition by the police (Jayawardena, 1972, p. 172).

In the early 1930s educated women took a further step. Inspired by their teachers, some women from Buddhist Theosophical schools joined the early anti-imperialist and socialist movements. Most responsible for this trend was a British socialist, Doreen Wickremasinghe, nee Young, wife of the leftist leader Dr. S.A. Wickremasinghe; she was successively the principal of two Buddhist girls' schools, Sujatha Vidyalaya in Matara (from 1930 to 1932) and Ananda Balika in Colombo (from 1933 to 1935). The Suriya Mal movement, organized by radical groups as a counter to the Poppy Day of the colonial power, had its nerve center at Ananda Balika school, whose teachers and pupils eagerly participated in its activities mixing freely with young men of the Left of different castes and ethnic origins. These trends, however, were not welcome to the conservative elements of the Buddhist educational establishment with whom Doreen Wickremasinghe had problems. Once, when she was offered the post of principal of Visakha Vidyalaya in 1933, the offer was withdrawn when it was discovered that she was to marry the Leftist politician, Dr. S.A. Wickremasinghe that year. Again in 1936, she was replaced as principal of Ananda Balika because some Buddhists were alarmed that the school had become a centre for controversial anti-British and Leftist activities.

The concern of Buddhists at the appearance of women political activists was reflected in a Piyadasa Sirisena novel of the 1940s. He categorizes the "bad woman" as one who travels about on her own, attends political meetings, addresses public meetings, speaks English to Sinhala persons, considers household work demeaning, and shows scant respect to parents. What is more revealing, however, is that a character in the book who talks in favour of education, employment, sports, theatre and other independent activities for women is told: "If anybody accepts all that you have said, then he or she must necessarily be a communist" (Sirisena, *Debera Kella*). This illustrates the view among some Buddhists that socialism meant women going out of control in the form of free love and the holding of women in common. The reality, however, was that there was no Buddhist feminism. There were no women from within the Buddhist discourse to dispute its patriarchal structures or at least to reinterpret its texts and practices in ways that would question women's subordination. Buddhism did not apparently offer any inspiration to feminism.

I have thus far looked at a few of the constructions of womanhood engendered by the Sinhala Buddhist movement. As pointed out earlier, it started as a revivalist discourse in the late nineteenth century with anti-Christian and anti-Western overtones, and developed into a movement dedicated to the maintenance of Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony over other ethnic groups. During this long period it has passed through many phases and has undergone many changes and nuances of emphasis in response to changing politico-economic circumstances.

There have recently been greater attempts at welding the many and sometimes contradictory elements of this consciousness into a coherent ideology. During the last decade, some members of the Sinhala intelligentsia have attempted the articulation of a *jathika chintanaya*, or national ideology. While stressing the Sinhala Buddhist nature of Sri Lankan society and the need to preserve it, they have developed a set of arguments based on ideas of cultural relativism to justify their position. They have reinterpreted history to invent the picture of an egalitarian and harmonious society that existed in Sri Lanka in

pre-colonial times and whose restoration is the aim of their project. Their attitude to gender remains traditional. According to them, Judeo-Christian civilization is inherently oppressive to women; not so Eastern or Buddhist cultures that recognize the importance of women and give them an equal role with men. Thus no changes are required in the basic status quo as far as women are concerned. For example, the wearing of Western dress by university women has been challenge by male students in the name of *Jathika Chintanaya*.

While it is certainly true that the condition of Sri Lanka women in terms of their physical quality of life has materially advanced, and the rhetoric of women's rights is freely indulged in, women remain subordinated. Messages to women, couched in religious and ethnic terms, have, despite some nuances, remained remarkably traditional. Buddhist monks, supported by lay intellectuals, still emphasize correct patterns of conduct. Women are urged not to follow alien and demoralizing examples; preventing the entry of such intrusions is seen as the duty of a righteous government. In such a situation, women leaders professing to be Buddhists hesitate to take up feminist causes, and radical women agitating for women's rights do not seek support among the Buddhist religious and lay hierarchies.

During periods of heightened Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict and war, with the resultant increase of chauvinism and xenophobia, one also sees a hardening of attitudes towards women. They have to be brainwashed and conditioned to perform their "patriotic" and ethnic roles. Women are discouraged from cross-ethnic contact with other women and a barrage of propaganda in the media urges them to confine themselves to the religious and ethnic community. Those who disregard this and continue to seek contact across ethnic boundaries are termed traitors to the nation. In this context, it is not surprising that to the orthodox, the feminist often emerges as the threatening deviant "Other". For it is she who can challenge the patriarchal imposition of roles that confine her as wife or mother, and in condemning both ethnic chauvinism and male chauvinism, it is the feminist who is able to project a vision of a society that has overcome both ethnic and gender subordination.

Notes

I would like to express my appreciation to Romila Thapar, Valentine Moghadam, Arjuna Parakrama, and Doug Allen for their helpful suggestions in the preparation of this chapter.

¹ A notorious pamphlet banned by the colonial government was "Kanni Marilyage Hati" (The Truth about the Virgin Mary). In the late 19th century, G.W.Foote's *Freethinker* (published in London and popular in Sri Lanka) had ribald stories about women biblical figures and other satires against Christianity.

² *Lanka Guardian* 8, No.15, 15Jan. 1986.

One song begins "The blood-milk of mothers"; and another, by a woman to her soldier lover, says

Don't write to me in pretty handwriting
Tales of innocent love, as in the past
Write to me of how you are doing
Brave and steadfast at the battlefield.

³ *The Island*, 25 July 1991.

⁴ Letter to the Editor from D.Amarasiri Weeraratne, "Demoting Das Sil Mathas." in *Sunday Observer*, 11 Aug, 1991.

⁵ The attempt in Sri Lanka to create a regulated welfare state has had some important results that have been highlighted since the country produced the world's first woman prime minister in 1960. Women in Sri Lanka today have a life expectancy of 67, a literacy rate of 82 percent (over 90 percent among young women), and a maternal mortality rate of 1.2 per 1,000 births. These indices are among the best for underdeveloped countries and are significantly better than in neighbouring South Asian countries. There are also no glaring social evils like sati, dowry deaths, or child marriages. It is therefore argued by some that Sri Lanka is a notable exception to the deplorable forms of oppression against women that exist elsewhere.

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A FRESH DAY, A NEW HOPE.....

Another day dawns,
I shudder at the thought of rising
Oh, how lovely it would be
To be sleeping away in peace.
My eyes and body protest heavily
I get up and do....

Washing and cooking,
Dishing and setting,
So robotlike....
I've got to hurry up

Have to falter and fall
To feed the children, wash and dress
Send them to school
Rush to office after the red line is drawn,
The game is the same
For the last twenty years
And who sets the rules for the game ?

For the last twenty years
I play the game, the only player
The partner oversleeps
And now I want to wake up with a hopeful heart
Perhaps with a smile on my lips
To another day in which I will have leisure and hope,
In which there will be time
To read and relax..
Never too late
To bring the partner into the court.

- Rocky Ariyaratne

International Dimensions of the Violent Patriarchy, a Re-reporting

Violence in Pakistan, A new Form

"He poured the fire of hell on my face..."

Acid has become man's latest weapon of terror against 'non-complaint' women. An exclusive report by Zaigham Khan in Multan.

Hundreds of women in Pakistan are permanently disfigured and blinded by acid thrown on their faces by men. The women's crime is usually no more than refusing the man's sexual advances, or his proposal of marriage.

Tahira, a fourth year student at Government Degree College for Women, Multan, commuted from home to college by van. Trouble came when Mohammed Jamil, a young shopkeeper started molesting the group of girls with whom she travelled everyday. One day, Jamil pursued Tahira all the way home, and was thrashed by her brothers.

Jamil decided to take his revenge on Tahira. While she was sitting on the front seat of the van on her way to college, Jamil poured acid on her face. The incident created a furore in the town because Tahira was popular as a debater, quaria, na'at khwan and poetess, and was also admired for her good looks.

Tahira's case was by no means an isolated one. Hundreds of girls are defaced every year in the southern part of Punjab alone. "Why are these incidents not high-lightened by the press? I feel that journalists are either callous or blind", says Dr. Ikbar Baloch, a plastic surgeon at Nishat Hospital and Associate Professor at Nishat Medical College. "I myself treat

one such case very week and I am referred to only a fraction of the total number of cases in the area".

Tahira, who belongs to a modestly well-off family, has been admitted to a private ward of Nishat Hospital at Multan. There is no skin on the left side of her face. Doctors say she may lose her left eye if the lid does not work properly. "We have done three operations on the left eye so far" they told TFT.

Her parents take out photocopies of her poems. One is very recent and is titled "The Weaker Sex" In this poem she compares herself to Imam Hussain at the moment of his martyrdom and raises questions about the status of women in society.

The young poetess breaks down and weeps bitterly while narrating the incident. "I was like an animal brought to bay" she says. "No one intervened when he threw acid at me. I cried for water, but nobody came to my rescue. People gathered around me in a circle as if I were conjurer showing tricks".

In the hospital's surgical ward another woman goes through the same agony. Nineteen year old Aasia, lacks Tahira's sophistication and education. She comes from a suburban area, Makhdoompur, and speaks Seraiki with a strong rural accent. Her nostrils are burnt, face damaged permanently and body badly injured.

"A man called Aslam Hiraj wanted to marry me" she says. "My parents refused and married me to Akram Mistri two years ago. Aslam first tried to implicate me in a false case, but he failed. Then he contacted me and conveyed his wish to establish (sexual) relations with me. I refused, saying that I was the mother of a baby and did not want to destroy my family life. He threatened me with horrible consequences. One night he broke into our house and threw acid on my face while I was sleeping with my husband. My husband's body was also badly hurt".

According to Aasia the accused has already been granted bail. "They are influential people and we have no one but Allah on our side", she says.

Farzana is in her early twenties. She left the hospital a few weeks ago, blinded and disfigured for life. Extremes of misfortune and poverty seem to have joined hands in her case. Her father is handicapped and both brothers addicted to heroine. She and her mother sew clothes to make ends meet. Salim, a young man of her neighbourhood with criminal tendencies was attracted to Farzana. He sent a proposal to her mother who refused it. One night he entered their small one-roomed house and "poured the fire of hell on my face".

Lying in a cot in her house, it is difficult to look at Farzana's disfigured face. "I now pray to God for an early death", she says.

"Life is never the same again for a person who is disfigured" says Dr.Ibrar who is a plastic surgeon. "Surgery has its limits. We can improve things to a certain extent. And even if we succeed in removing all the scars from the victim's face, we are helpless as far as the scars on her psyche are concerned". Dr.Ibrar strongly recommends combined therapy and insists on the need for a substantial number of clinical psychologists at the hospital.

In the vast majority of cases, the woman's face is the target of the attack and the worst damage is found around the eyelids. Eyesight can be lost in matter of minutes if the eyelids are damaged and the eyes remain exposed.

Doctors in Multan say that most of the cases of acid attack that they have treated come from the areas adjoining the banks of the River Chenab. Most of the offenders, in their experience, are close relatives of the victims, and refusal of a proposal of marriage is the commonest reason for the offender's hostility. "The victim is rarely a party to the conflict", says one doctor, "the dispute is usually between the offenders and the parents of the victim".

Mrs. Fakhrunnisa Khokhar, the chairperson of a Women's Organisation, is Farzana's lawyer and is also helping Tahira in her case. "Neither the law nor the manner in which they are implemented provide enough deterrent for crimes against women of such a gruesome nature", she says.

"Magistrates in whose courts these cases are tried, are not known for their sympathetic attitude. And the police interprets laws in a way that benefits the offender".

Farzana has filed a writ petition in the Multan Bench of the Lahore High Court, in which she has asked for the case to be transferred from the magistrate's court to the Special Court for the Suppression of Terrorist Activities. In the petition, she has argued that further incidents of this nature would not have taken place if proper and speedy action had been taken against the offender.

Admitting the writ for hearing, the learned court summoned the District Magistrate and ordered stay of further proceedings in her case before Mr. Noorullah, the magistrate.

"How many other Farzanas are still waiting for their bottle of acid ?" she asked while coming out of the court.

- The Friday Times May 20-26, 1993

Sri Lanka:

Little Beauty Queen Killed by Sex Maniacs

The possible rape and the ruthless murder of an exceptionally beautiful six year- old girl by a sex maniac or maniacs, has plunged Elpitiya into a state of shock.

Five suspects have been arrested in connection with this brutal murder of the little Beauty Queen of Kudagala, Elpitiya.

The body of pretty little Nayomi Muthulatha, a first grader at Kudagala Junor School, has been discovered after five days had lapsed since her disappearance. It was found in the Elpitiya cemetery 800 yards away from her home and police have vowed to track down the maniac sex killers.

"She disappeared when she went off to play with her two brothers, close to her home," K.I. Ariyawathie, Nayomi's tearful and grieving mother said. Nayomi had gone to play

around 2.00 pm, following a lunch of rice, dried fish and potatoes.

Her elder sister a fourteen-year-old, had also been in the vicinity when innocent little Nayomi had disappeared, but neither sister nor her brothers had noticed exactly when their sister vanished.

On April 28, villagers in the vicinity had observed a foul smell drifting from the cemetery, and upon inspection had discovered the body of Nayomi, clothed in a beautiful, bright yellow dress, with her undergarments half pulled down in a hollow grave.

Inspector Wijeratne said the uncanny thing about the whole affair was that the grave in which the body had been found, built of bricks, had previously belonged to another two and a half-year-old girl who had died about three years ago.

Elpitiya Magistrate Manilal Waidyathilleke had held the inquest that very same day and returned a verdict of homicide. The body then had been sent to the Forensic Department in Karapitiya Hospital, Galle.

- Sunday Times 1.5.94

According to the latest reports, the suspect who is a youth, now under arrest, is a close relative of the family and had been frequently visiting their home, showing great affection towards the little girl.

Rape as an Expression of Violence Against Women

The following cases, reported in the "Sunday Observer" in 1992, are really a glimpse of the whole picture.

A lady doctor of 27 years was raped by a male doctor.

A thirteen-year old school-going girl was raped by a 23 year old boy.

A woman was raped by three security guards at a park.

An Eleven-year old school girl was raped by a boy in her neighbourhood.

An eight-year old female student was raped by the principal in the school office.

A thirty-two year old singer was raped and killed. (Investigations are continuing)

An eighteen-year old woman was raped and dropped into a well and was found dead.

Five women were raped and killed by an OIC of police.

A mother of two children was raped by two policemen.

A mother of two children was raped by four youths.

A fifteen year old school girl was raped by a gang of school boys after school, in the class room.

A nineteen year old girl was raped by a 35 year old man.

A girl was raped and put into a canal. She was a domestic helper.

Collected by Tilaka Dissanayake of Women's Education and Research Centre

India:

"The wife of one of the priests of the temple (pandaram) is the first to admit that she had killed her baby daughter." I 'kept' it alive for a month; but everyone including my husband put pressure on me - even visitors kept on saying, "You already have two daughters, why are you 'keeping' this one too? ". So I gave her three tablets that I had kept ready. I may have to kill the next one also, if it is a girl."

"Death of the Female" in Frontline 9.10.92

Conclusion:

Has the 'family' declared by the UN as a worthy institution, the value of which is to be upheld in the year 1994 - saved women from violence ?

Has the South Asian value system which is glorified by the State and by the politicians acted as a guiding principle to protect our women and girl children ?

The guardians of law are actively involved in acts of such heinous crimes. Will they be punished more, we ask not innocently?

The answers are not in the affirmative as the international media reporting proves. Hence, we cannot abdicate our rights to the State and the UN. Women have to organise and act to protect women and conscientize the men - the fathers, brothers, husbands, grandfathers, uncles, cousins and nephews.

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Sri Lanka

HOW TO AVOID RAPE

Don't go out without clothes...

that encourages men.

Don't go out with clothes

Any clothes encourage some men.

Don't go out alone at night...

that encourages men

Don't go out alone at any time..

Any situation encourages some men.

Don't go out with a female friend...

some men are encouraged by numbers.

Don't go out with a male friend..

some male friends are capable of rape...

or you may meet a rapist who will assault

your friend before starting on you.

Don't stay at home...

Intruders and relatives are potential rapists.

Don't have neighbors..

they often rape women.

Avoid childhood..

some rapists are turned on by the very young ones.

Avoid old age..

some rapists inflict themselves on aged women.

Don't have a father, grand father, uncle brother...

these are the relatives who most often rape women.

Don't marry...

rape is legal within marriage.

To be quite sure..

Don't exist.

'SISTER' from Namibia.

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