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Nēthrā

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Regi Siriwardena

International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo

Nēthrā welcomes contributions from scholars and writers. Since the journal's interests are omnivorous, there is no restriction on subject-matter. Ideally, however, *Nēthrā* looks for material that is serious without being ponderous, readable and interesting without being superficial, and comprehensible even to readers who are not specialists in the intellectual field in which the subject is situated.

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Postcolonial Religion and Public Criticism

Ananda Abeysekara

> The aim of critique is not the ends of man or of reason but in the end Overman, the overcome, the overtaken man. The point of critique is not justification, but a different way of feeling: another sensibility.
>
> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*[1]

Moments of 'After'

How might we conceive of the study of postcolonial religion as a site of criticism? In other words, how might we think of the practice of writing about postcolonial culture and religion — in this case Buddhism, monkhood and identity in Sri Lanka — as constituting a politics of criticism? How can such a politics of criticism be construed as an ethic of intervention in the postcolonial formations of identity and difference, religion and secularism, self and other? How would such a criticism/intervention prove helpful to rethinking and reimagining new public spaces in which different practices of pluralistic and democratic being and belonging — albeit contingent ones — can be cultivated and sustained? Now, writing as we do today after Edward Said, and therefore aware as we are today of the problems of colonialism and orientalism (which, among other things, sought to produce authoritative, canonical criticisms of what should and should not count as religion), these kinds of questions, it seems to

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1 Cited in Giles Deleuze, *Foucault* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. vii.

me, are critical to responding to the demands of our contemporary postcolonial conjunctures.

The postcolonial present, as David Scott seeks to understand it in his recent book, *Refashioning Futures*, is constituted by specific political moments of 'after', if you will. The following passage, I think, nicely sums up part of what Scott takes as the postcolonial present and its demand:

> But now, *after* Bandung, after the dissolution of the project of anti-imperialist sovereignty, after Michael Manley, we do not inhabit the same intellectual and political horizons as before; nor do we inhabit the same intellectual and ideological context of options. That dream is over. Therefore, we have to ask ourselves (postcolonial intellectuals and critics, and intellectuals and critics of the postcolonial) whether we want to continue to pursue this line of preoccupation opened up by postcoloniality on the very eve of the Bandung's decline. We have to ask ourselves what the yield will be of continuing to deepen our understanding of a conceptual space whose contours we have become so familiar with, and whose insights are rapidly on their way to becoming a new orthodoxy. We have to ask ourselves whether it might be more useful to try to expand the conceptual boundaries themselves by altering the target of our criticism. *This*, it seems to me, is the challenge of our present.[2]

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[2] Ibid. p. 223. 'Bandung' refers to a number of meetings held in the early 1950s in Bandung, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, and they were geared toward envisioning a new kind of postcolonial political and economic order. Numerous postcolonial leaders — from Nehru in India to Michael Manley in Jamaica — took part in these meetings. I owe this information to David Scott.

If we (as I think we should) take seriously what Scott suggests, we must recognize that we have arrived at a postcolonial present that demands new ethical-political interrogations of our identities and differences. Now, needless to say, these moments of 'after' do not indicate our having reached a crossroads of postcolonial 'progress' where modernity remains easily liberated from tradition, secularism from religion, state from church, freedom from violence, globalization from alienation, and therefore our having easy access to the options of choosing the good life over the bad other. We know today something of the problem of this Western Enlightenment story of progress and rationality. Rather, the idea of 'after', as I read Scott, alludes to the ways in which the formations and reformations of those very distinctions (i.e. tradition and modernity) animate the postcolonial present. Now we can complicate this picture a bit more by thinking of other 'afters' that could take into account the shifting conjunctures of this present that have come into view and faded from view over the last few decades: *After* J. R. Jayewardene and R. Premadasa, *after* Zia ul-Haq and Nawaz Sharif, *after* Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, *after* (if we jump ahead ourselves) the Taliban, and *after*... The point here is that if we come at the matter this way, we must recognize that the postcolonial present is not one composite whole but comprises fluctuating political movements, and that a criticism of them, of necessity, must take altering forms. Therefore a criticism of colonialism cannot simply be a criticism of the postcolonial condition(s) in so far as colonialism is not available to us in the way it was to anti-colonialist movements. This is why, I think, David Scott (concurring with Gayatri Spivak) argues that criticism should be a 'strategic practice' in that it is not a theory but a strategy that suits a situation. A strategy of criticism, unlike theory as such, is always situational and it *cannot be obtained in advance of the conditions* in and by which it becomes possible.[3]

[3] David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Post coloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999), p. 10. Spivak, 'In a Word: An Interview.' *Differences* 1(1989): 124-56.

I would argue from a Foucauldian point of view that a strategic criticism can be understood as a kind of theory in that 'theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice. But it is local and regional...and not totalizing. This is a struggle against power, and struggle aimed at revealing and undermining power where it is most invisible and insidious. It is not to "awaken consciousness"that we struggle..., but to sap power, to take power; it is an activity conducted alongside those who struggle for power, and not their illumination from a safe distance. A theory is a regional system of this struggle.'[4] I will have more to say about what Foucault means by power/discourse later. The point worth emphasizing here is that criticism as a regional system of theory/struggle that strives to dismantle power's totalization and hegemonization of whatever (Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist) identity at the expense of difference cannot depend upon, appeal to readily available, a priori ethical grounds. That is, a criticism of particular authoritative and hegemonic discourses and practices (self-proclaimed as Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim) that compete to authorize the marginalization and exclusion of those 'Others' that are made to differ from them, cannot be done in terms of a priori distinctions of what count as religion and secularism, peace and violence. Or, put in more simple terms, the questions of whether a given religion teaches supposed universal abstractions like 'peace'—these are familiar questions echoed in relation to Islam in the aftermath of September 11 — cannot constitute a strategic practice of criticism of those whose claims, arguments, and forms of being supposedly contravene that 'religion' that they claim to uphold. These kinds of questions cannot produce a sound criticism because they are predicated on essentialist assumptions about what ought and ought not to form the parameters of peace. They take for granted that indeed such questions and answers to them, constructed and contested on varying terrains of internal debates and arguments, remain the same.

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4 Foucault, 'Intellectuals and Power: An Interview Between Michel Foucault and Giles Deleuze', in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (New York: Cornell University Press 1977 [1972]), p. 208.

Religion and Difference as Embodied Arguments

One way of bypassing this problematic is to think of religion in terms of what MacIntyre calls an 'embodied argument.'[5] That is, the questions of what count as religion, politics, and violence are products of debate, discord, disagreement, and desensus. This, I suppose, is not an entirely unorthodox point of view. But my aim here is to understand how these debates, rising and falling in altering conjunctures, can be conceptualized as making possible important ethical-political moments of criticism. I want to understand such moments as particular public spheres in which identity comes (or gets obliged) to be both for and against itself. The public spheres I have in mind are far from the Kantian or more recent Habermasian or Rawlsian versions of public spaces of rational consensus in which 'secular' subjects alone can take part and dictate the terms of the distinction between church and state, religion and secularism. Rather, as I conceive them, they are spheres in which self-designated 'religious' personnel —Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims — come to debate, battle out, and contest *not only between* (e.g., *Buddhists arguing with Muslims) but also among* (e.g., *Buddhists arguing with Buddhists) themselves* the terms and parameters of what count as religion. In so doing they interrupt and disrupt the normalized practices of exclusion of Others by virtue of their supposed intrinsic differences. In my view, in these spheres of debate, self/identity does not contend to assert its worth at the expense and exclusion of Others/differences; nor does it just abrogate its concern with, care for itself, simply for the sake of tolerating, out of compassion for, others. I have elsewhere shown how this liberal,

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5 Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). For a discussion of this, see my *Colors of the Robe: Religion, Identity, and Difference* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002, forthcoming).

Enlightenment idea of tolerance is grounded in a logic that privileges the idea of the 'majority' over the 'minority' supposedly needing toleration.[6] On the contrary, what becomes possible in these spheres of debate and criticism is the fashioning of differing religious selves and identities that do not and cannot dictate one hegemonic, totalizing way of Buddhist or Hindu being. What is important to stress is that a criticism of the totalizing religious Self does not mean — to extend the epigram by Deleuze quoted above — the end of religion, the end of Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim identity, the end of communities of the collective forms of being religious, leaving behind only hybrid, non-essential, fragmented differences. Rather, these spaces of debate and criticism make possible the cultivation of different ethical sensibilities of being, or, in the words of William Connolly, a 'fugitive abundance of being'. It, among other things, enables an 'ethic of cultivation rather than a morality of contract or command. It judges the ethos it cultivates to exceed any fixed code of morality; and it cultivates critical responsiveness to difference in ways that disturb traditional virtues of community and normal individual. It does not present *itself* as the single universal to which other ethical traditions must bow. Rather it provides a prod and counterpoint to them, pressing them to rethink the ethics of engagement, and, crucially, to rework their relations to the diversity of ethical *sources* that mark a pluralistic culture.'[7] I want to think of a space of self-fashioning in relation to a recent debate among Buddhist monks, lay Buddhists, and the state in Sri Lanka.

Before entering Sri Lanka, so to speak, I want to sound a few notes of caution about how I conceive of it as a conceptual site. For me Sri Lanka does not constitute — to

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6 Ananda Abeysekara, 'Identity for and Against Itself: Religion, Criticism, and Pluralism.' (Under review).

7 William Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. xxiii-xxiv.

use Bernard Cohn's term — an 'anthropologyland.'[8] That is, I do not think of Sri Lanka as a readily available ethnographic example of a troubled country, located in a far-off corner of South Asia, where violence between the majority and the minority has disrupted the normalcy of life. (Nor am I eliding the fact that postcolonial Sri Lanka has witnessed differing political contexts of abductions, tortures, killings and massacres on the part of many different people. Rather, such practices do not remain available *out there* for essential, disciplinary identification and explanation, particularly in terms of a conflict between the majority and the minority.) Yet this kind of narrative constitutes the typical form of (Western) disciplinary representations of the island nation.[9] Take, for instance, the following statement from the introduction to anthropologist Michele Gamburd's recent book on Sri Lankan migrant workers and transnationalism:

> Roughly the size of West Virginia, Sri Lanka, the island nation off the southern tip of India, is home to more than eighteen million people.... Rivalries between the Sinhala-speaking Buddhist majority and Tamil-speaking Hindu and Muslim minorities have disrupted the course of post-colonial government, plunging the country into an armed conflict that has claimed tens of thousands of lives since 1983. In addition to the civil war in the North

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[8] Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[9] For a criticism of some aspects of these kinds of representation, see David Scott, 'Demonology and Nationalism: On the Anthropology of Ethnicity and Violence in Sri Lanka.', *Economy and Society* 19(4)(1990): 492-510; Quadri Ismail, 'Speaking to Sri Lanka', *Interventions* 3(2)(2001):296-308; Pradeep Jeganathan, *After a Riot: Anthropological Locations of Violence* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1997); Abeysekara, *Colors of the Robe*.

> and East, two insurgencies in the South, the first in 1970-71 and the second in 1988-90, have further torn the fabric of national unity.[10]

Here one can easily see the problem of the author's attempt at making known (supposedly unfamiliar) Sri Lanka in terms of the (familiar) geography of West Virginia. What is crucial is her explanation of violence. Violence is the product of the conflict between the minority and the majority. Sinhala-Buddhists are the majority; Tamil-Hindus and Muslims the minority. Put differently, a certain kind of transparent Sinhala-Buddhistness and Tamil-Hinduness, it is assumed, defines a priori the demarcation between the majority and the minority. The majority and the minority are opposed to each other in terms of language, religion, or ethnicity, and these things form the essence of difference between them. This essential difference between the Sinhalas and Tamils, punctuated by two particular insurgencies, has eroded the 'fabric of national unity'.

What emerges from this story is the significance of 'unity' to the democratic, peaceful existence of the nation. The achievement of this unity, however, remains virtually impossible since the supposed essential religious, ethnic, and lingual differences between the majority and the minority always tend to stand in the way. Now what I want to suggest is that this is not simply a Gamburdian, Sri Lankanist anthropological problematic. This is a Kantian, and more generally, Western Enlightenment problematic. For instance, in one of his influential essays, *Perpetual Peace*, Kant saw such differences precisely as the cause of war both within and between nations. He claimed that 'the desire of every nation is to establish an enduring peace, hoping, if possible, to dominate the entire world. But nature *wills* otherwise. She

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10 Michele Ruth Gamburd, *The Kitchen Spoon's Handle: Transnationalism and Sri Lanka's Migrant Housemaids* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 3.

uses two means to prevent people from intermingling and to separate them, differences in *religion* and *language*, which do indeed dispose men to mutual hatred and pretexts for war'. (original emphasis)[11] Briefly put, seen from this Gamburd-Kantian viewpoint, the solution to this problem would be for the *majority* to cultivate tolerance towards the *minority* differences. Tolerance, then, is the only way out of resolving the differences between the majority and the minority, differences that are embedded in, and perpetuated by their respective 'religion'. So without the cure of tolerance keeping it under control, the disease of difference can wreak havoc.

Without belaboring the point, what I want to suggest is that, recognizing as we must the fallacy of this argument, differences are hardly inherent in a religion in that what religion means are often *differently* argued, battled out, and contested. Therefore, what needs to be examined are the ways in which such differences of argument and interpretation of what should and should not count as religion take place in differing conjunctures. If we understand differences in these terms we will worry less about thinking of conflicts and wars as products of 'religious' differences and more about understanding how such differences enable and indeed demand us to cultivate different ethical-political ways of being and belonging even in one religion. I want to contend that such differences of interpretation can be crucial to rethinking or *pluralizing* (to use Connolly's word) the relation between the religious and the secular, the public and the private, a

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[11] E. Kant, 'To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch (1795)', in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays: On Politics, History, and Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), p. 125. For a detailed discussion of this essay and its relation to the liberal tradition of secularism, see my 'Identity for and Against Itself'.

relation that many liberal thinkers take for granted.[12] This rethinking (and not abandoning) of the religious and the secular demarcations can also prove significant to reimagining the terms of the modern nation-state and pluralism. What I wish to do in the rest of the paper is to sketch briefly the conjuncture of a debate that made possible a different configuration of the secular\religious boundaries in relation to a particular dispute between and among monks and lay Buddhists in the late 1990s in Sri Lanka. In so doing I want to argue how such debates, albeit contingently authorized, can be crucial to fashioning critical spaces of pluralism in which 'religious' identity can come to be both for and against itself.

Religion, Criticism, and Pluralism

The dispute that I have in mind, broadly put, centered around the emergence (and later dismantling) of a hegemonic discourse of *polgahima* (lit. 'coconut breaking') in vituperative opposition to a statement made by Mangala Samarweera, the minister of media in the Peolples' Alliance (PA) government. The seeming catalyst for the debate was the release of the Interim Report, on September 17, 1997, by what is known as the Sinhala Commission. The Commission was set up about a year before by the National Joint Committee, representing forty-some non-state Sinhala commercial and Buddhist organizations, to inquire into and rectify the presumed injustices committed against the Sinhalas for the last two hundred years. Some of its umbrella organizations like Veera Vidana, overseen by successful middle- and upper-class business persons in Colombo, make no bones about their commitment to the promotion of Sinhala

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12 See Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, p. 188. For other general remarks on the inadequacy of the secularization thesis, see his *Why I am not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), particularly pp. 37-46.

commercial interests as a way of combating the threat of competing Tamil and Muslim business enterprises in the country.[13] Such commitments are animated by narratives of how the Sinhala Self always did (and will) come under attack by the non-Sinhala Others at various junctures in the history of the supposed 'Sinhala' nation. We know that these narratives are not age-old timeless realities that constitute an essential Sinhalaness, as some nationalists would have us believe, but they are recent inventions, fashioned and refashioned, invested with and divested of varying meanings in differing colonial and postcolonial conjunctures.[14]

The Interim Report sought to construct and normalize a set of such nationalist narratives. The issues of injustice against the Sinhalas that it addressed were not those that happened in the past, but those that might in the future. The possibility of such injustices, the report claimed, loomed large in the face of the government's redrafting of the constitution, granting more regional autonomy to provinces and devolving power. The government deemed this a promising political settlement to end the decade-long civil war between itself and the Tamil militants battling for a separate state in the North. Put in a nutshell, the Report opposed this state exercise, widely known as the 'Devolution Package', claiming that it would 'destroy the unitary character of Sri

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13 Some of this information is based on interviews I conducted with people like Raja Wanasundara, Arisen Ahubudu, the late Gamini Jayasuriya, and Piyasena Disanayaka, all of whom remain(ed) at the forefront of these organizations as their major spokespersons.

14 For a brilliant chronicling of some histories of the emergence of dominant forms of postcolonial nationalism in Sri Lanka, see H. L. Seneviratne, The *Work of Kings: New Buddhism in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). I have sought to spell out how nationalist narratives take on differing meanings in 'Religion, Nation, Rulers', in *Colors of the Robe*.

Lanka...preserved for over 2,500 years [and]...will impoverish in particular the Sinhala people who are already a disadvantaged section of the population despite their comprising three-fourth of it'. (p. 2) More interesting perhaps was its claim that the Package would bring about a devastating impact on Buddhism since 'splitting the Sinhala majority areas' would divide the Buddhists, creating 'the real possibility of disputes arising between them'. (pp. 28-29) Ironically, what gave the Report the kind of national news that it sought was less the pomp and fanfare that accompanied its release than the *very disputes* (it wanted to prevent from) emerging among Buddhists about its worth. On September 25, 1997, Minister Magala Samaraweera was quoted by newspapers as saying that the Report should be put in the 'dustbin of history' (*Island,* Sept. 28, 1997). The minister charged that the report spelled disaster for all Sinhala Buddhists since 'its contents... will make people like Velupille Prabhakaram [the leader of the separatist war], arms dealers and Tamil racists happy. These people will now brand all Sinhalese alike'. The remarks flashed across the front pages of Sinhala and English newspapers and became featured aspects of the radio and TV news bulletins for several weeks. Nothing more could have infuriated the Sinhala Commission than Samaraweera's calling into question the *uniform majority-Sinhalaness* that it labored to claim and normalize for Sri Lanka in the Report. In particular, the commission's assumption about the absence of disagreements among Buddhists suffered a painful blow. A reprisal seemed inevitable. A battle was about to commence. The Sinhala Commission sent out one its most vocal and controversial monks, Maduluwawe Sobhita Thera, to the forefront to denounce and censor the minister's statement. On September 29, 1997, the monk held a press conference at the Abhayaramaya temple and stated that the minister's comments offended and disgraced the entire Sinhala race and Buddhists in Sri Lanka. He demanded that the minister withdraw his statements about the Report within the next 72 hours and make a public apology to the monks and the rest

of the country. Sobhita Thera also announced that ten thousand monks would soon gather at the Vihara Mahadevi Public Park in Colombo to protest and render visible the 'entire' Sinhala community's reprimanding of the minister's comments about the Report. Other esteemed monks like Piyadassi Thera of Vajiraramaya Temple chimed in on Sobhita Thera's self-arrogated, hegemonic right to speak for the 'entire' Sinhala Buddhist community (*Island*, September 30, 1997). This hegemony, as we will see soon, was short-lived. On October 1, 1997, over two thousand (not ten thousand) monks and fifteen hundred lay people gathered at the Public Park to stage a *Satyagraha* ('peaceful demonstration'), and I, having arrived in Sri Lanka a few days before, found myself amidst the vibrant crowd. Sobhita Thera and other monks, representing the National Sangha Council, echoed the Sinhala Commission's previous denouncement of the minister's comments in the sternest terms possible. The monks warned that if the minister failed to withdraw them they would take the protest to his hometown, Matara, and break 100,000 coconuts to coerce (*balakaranava*) him into doing so. This was followed by the Sinhala Commission protagonists' hurling incessant insults and invectives at the personal character of the minister in numerous newspapers. These warnings and threats produced not the desired effect of the minister's withdrawing his comments and apologizing to the monks but became an instrument in arousing a competing Sinhala monastic and lay force seeking to contest the National Sangha Council's and the Sinhala Commission's representation of what counts as Sinhala-Buddhist identity. As several thousand monks and lay people of the National Sangha Council and Sinhala Commission convened to protest, cite *slokas*, and break coconuts at the historic Bo tree of Matara, countless voices began to depict this as a practice that contravened Buddhism, thereby questioning the very 'Buddhistness' of the Sangha Council's *Satyagraha*. In particular, the act of breaking coconuts, in which a handful of monks did take part in Matara, came under siege.

Public Criticism of a 'Religious' Practice

What is crucial to note is that breaking coconuts is not an entirely 'un-Buddhist' practice; lay Buddhists do indeed break (husked) coconuts by hurling them onto a hard surface, sometimes in front of an image of a Buddhist (*deva*) deity, to symbolically mark auspicious occasions. In fact the practice takes place inside Buddhist temple-premises where there are shrines dedicated to particular Buddhist deities. However, the forces of opposition — from prominent university professors to monks, movie stars to journalists, newspaper editors to cartoonists — began to portray monks' breaking coconuts as an 'unBuddhist' practice of violence and separatism, contending to divest it of any previous Buddhist connotation associated with it. Mangala Samaraweera himself (backed by many Buddhist monks and lay people vociferously defending his right to disagree as a virtue of 'Buddhist democracy'), drew a direct relation between the 'nutcrackers', violence and terrorism since they were defending a document that posed a danger to the country's effort to solve the separatist war. A slew of newspaper articles, referring to the Sangha Council monks as nut-crackers, portrayed them as 'bloodthirsty', 'hate-mongering,' 'treacherous' separatists and racists (*jativadiyo*) who advocate war and hinder the peace process in Sri Lanka (*Divayina*, Oct. 5, 1997 ; *Daily News*, Oct. 6, 1997).[15]

Perhaps the fiercest opposition to the National Sangha Council's and the Sinhala Commission's hubris to speak for Buddhism and the Sinhalese became centrally visible when a different group of monks called the All Lanka Bhikkhu Organization held its own massive counter-rally. They picked the same Vihara Maha Devi Park as their public venue for

[15] The lack of space prohibits me from citing many interesting newspaper clippings about this debate. A glance at some of the newspapers roughly between Sept.20 and Oct. 20 will provide rich insights into this acrimonious dispute.

the showdown. An estimated five thousand monks attended it, spearheaded by Kamburugamuwe Vajira, Aturaliye Indaratana, and Kamburugamuwe Dhammajoti Theras. Speaking in three languages, Sinhala, Tamil, and English, the monks castigated the Interim Report and those defending it and asserted that they do not 'represent views of the majority of the people' (*Island*, Oct. 7, 1997), and that it was unethical for 'Buddhist' monks to speak of one race (*Daily News*, Oct. 7, 1997). One of the notable, symbolic features of the rally was the donation of two trucks of coconuts and woven fronds to some of the North/East families rendered homeless by the war. It was surely an explicit attack on the Sangha Council's and its lay allies' breaking coconuts in Matara. The contrast drawn here was not simply one between breaking (*polgahima)* and donating (*polbedima*) coconuts. It reflected a more general, ethical-political distinction between Buddhism and violence, separatism and peace, suggesting that 'Buddhist' monks do not and cannot stand for war and racism (*jativadaya*). The All Lanka Bhikkhu Organization also assailed the Sangha Council with seven specific questions, demanding to know why they broke no coconuts when the slaughter of monks and citizens and other atrocities reigned supreme in 1980-1990 Sri Lanka. It seemed that in the wake of these seemingly insurmountable questions about their Buddhist identity, the National Sangha Council and Sinhala Commission found themselves in the vulnerable predicament of having to defend the 'Buddhistness' of breaking coconuts instead of defending the Interim Report. The debate raged on as people continued to write to newspapers, taking varying stands on the issue. Then, on October 15, a massive truck-bomb exploded in the parking lot of five-star Hotel Galadari in Colombo, killing several dozen people and devastating the building and nearby hotels as well as other businesses. The bomb did not suddenly end the debate, but it surely began to divert the nation's focus from the debate to matters of national security. Some observed that the bomb was the work of the LTTE intending to disrupt a critical process of disagreement and dissent among Sinhala

Buddhists. One can only conjecture here that the LTTE must find such disagreements detrimental to its own separatist, nationalist campaign, vying to construct a supposed monolithic Sinhala-Buddhist Self that always stands against the Tamil Other.

Apart from the apparently significant divergence of narratives it generated about what counts as Sinhala-Buddhist identity and who can speak authoritatively about it, how might we think about this debate as presenting for us a moment of criticism in which identity gets made to be both for and against itself? What does it say about the formations of the altering relation between the religious\secular, identity\difference boundaries? How is it possible to navigate through such boundaries and conceive of them as making possible a critical space of pluralism and difference that neither the state nor other monolithic non-state organizations (like the National Sangha Councils or even the All Lanka Bhikkhu Origination) can dictate? Put differently, how can we conceptualize the contingency of such debates to pursue a critical ethos of responsibility to otherness and difference that identity (as evident in the labor of the National Sangha Council) strives to obliterate in quest for salvaging its supposed damaged Self? These are in many ways all interrelated questions, and the way I have read this debate should have already shed some light on them. But let me, by way of concluding this paper, make some remarks that address these questions.

That the government of Chandrika Bandaranike found the All Lanka Bhikkhu Organization's opposition more than congenial to its political agenda is to say the least; and this was evident in the state newspapers jockeying to represent its Satyagraha as a monumental 'Buddhist' event as opposed to the National Sangha Council's 'unBuddhist' nut-cracking (*Daily News*, October 8). In fact, widespread rumors held that the anti-Sangha Council posters carrying the question 'Buddhagama or Yuddhagama?' ('Religion of Buddhism or Religion of War?') that appeared through the city of Colombo, was the work of the government (*Divayina*, October 9). Indeed, at the outset of the debate, in an interview responding

to the monks' demands to withdraw his statements, Minister Samaraweera himself had pronounced that he belonged 'not to the religion of war, but to the religion of Buddhism' (*Divayina*, October 5). The rival, non-state newspapers like the *Island*, clearly favorable to the Sangha Council position, decried the state support for this opposition. Calling the anti-Sangha Council allies, 'nutty anti-nut crackers,' the editorial of the *Island* said, 'The sudden desire for the renaissance of pristine Buddhism in government propaganda organs, we hope, will continue long after the confrontation between Mr. Samaraweera and the Mahasangha [monks] is over. Since the PA government itself speaks of secularism, we recommend that they...stop using the members of clergy of all religions for political purposes,...for the sake of principled politics' (*Island*, Oct. 9). If these statements give us any indication of the state's support for the anti-Sangha Council force, that 'support', in my view, marks a critical reworking of the secular\religious relation. What we see in this reworking is how a self-proclaimed 'secular' postcolonial government found a particular 'religious' ally with whom it can stand and defend its proposal to enable peace. Put in more general terms, this debate is an example of how the state could not afford to not take notice of 'religious' disputes and differences (as, for example, Jefferson, Kant, or Rawls would have preferred) [16] but how it found itself *obliged* to listen to competing religious viewpoints and indeed take sides. The state's taking side with the All Lanka Bhikkhu Organization's opposition to the Interim

[16] Jefferson's well-known statement is that 'the way to silence religious disputes is not to take notice of them.': Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1954 [1987]), p. 161, cited in Owen, *Religion and the Demise of Liberal Rationalism: The Foundational Crisis of the Separartion of Church and State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) p. 169. Also see Kant, 'The Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?' in *Perpetual Peace*; John Rawls, *The Law of the People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

Report reminds us that it did not and indeed could not cultivate the kind of religious neutrality on which the liberal tradition places a high premium.

The significance of the debate in making possible the kind of reworking of the secular\religious boundary that I think is crucial to re-imagining pluralism and democracy does not simply lie in the state's mere 'recognition' of one of the competing groups as 'religious' and siding with it. The debate, in my reading of it, constituted a particular 'public' battle that one could not enter armed with a priori conceptions of what counts as religion and combat the opposing views. Rather the questions asked about religion and the answers provided to them were produced by the conjuncture of the debate. In other words, the state recognition of the All Lanka Buddhist Organization as a specific 'Buddhist' force battling the 'nut-cracking', 'un-Buddhistic' Sangha Council *did not emerge in advance of, but was made possible by, the terms of the demand of the debate*. However, if the state had insisted upon defending the conventional boundary between the secular and the religious, the public and the private, the state would have simply dismissed the critical opposition and difference of the All Lanka Bhkkhu Organization as a religious dispute deserving no 'political' investment. (After all, the major architects of this debate were speaking not as secular figures, but as contending 'Buddhist' spokespersons, including the minister himself.) So my point here is that the kind of ethos of recognition that the state cultivated in this debate is crucial to pluralizing the relation between the religious and the secular. As I have detailed elsewhere, the renewed theories of the 'accommodation of religion within democracies', grounded as they are in a priori assumptions about what does and does not count as religion, cannot critically attend to this task.[17] Rather, on the view I am

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[17] See my 'Identity for and Against Itself'. Among a number of texts I have in mind is Nancy L. Rosenblum (ed.), *Obligations of Citizenship and Demands of Faith: Religious Accommodation in Pluralist Democracies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

advancing, the politics of recognition that the secular state can cultivate towards 'religion' are not contingent upon already available parameters of democracy but one in which democracy itself gets fashioned and refashioned by the disputes about the religious and the secular distinctions. *The point I want to underscore, then, is not that secular\religious, state\church distinctions be erased, but that the debates and disputes about what they constitute, how, and in what kinds of ways, they are to be drawn, take place in discursive spaces not determined by the available distinctions between the public and the private, distinctions that animate our modern democracy and nation-state. Such debates can hold religious\secular distinctions in constitutive tension, never losing sight of their political formations, of the possibility of their reformations, to such an extent that the nation-state cannot afford to simply not take notice of certain claims because they represent 'religion'.*[18] Hence, capturing moments of such disputes is critically significant.

Care for the Self as Care for the Other

I want to think of the above dispute as constituting such a moment of the political in which identity gets obliged to be both for and against itself. For me, this moment of the political is also a moment of agonism (or agonistic democracy) as opposed to antagonism. The moment of agonism is simultaneously a moment of freedom and liberation. For instance, writing about power, subject and freedom in the early 1980s, Michele Foucault argued, 'Rather than speaking

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[18] Talal Asad has pursued this line of inquiry in interesting ways. See his 'Religion, Nation-State, Secularism,' in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); *idem*, 'Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion*,' *History of Religions* 40(3)(2001): 205-222.

of an essential antagonism, it is better to speak of 'agonism', of a relationship that is at the same time mutual incitement and struggle less of face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation.'[19] As we know now, here Foucault is alluding to his reformulated 'productive conception' of power/discourse that does not simply dominate, constrain, and negate but produces, enables, and authorizes individuals to break away from, undermine particular modes of power-domination and to practice different forms of being and freedom.[20] This is why Foucault thinks that power and freedom should not be understood as mutually opposed to each other and that power simply gets exercised where freedom does not exist. They should be thought of as 'a much more complicated interplay' in which freedom may make possible the very exercise of power ('Subject and Power', p. 342). Put alternatively, as Foucault argues, 'To say that there cannot be a society without power relations is not to say either that those which are established are necessary or that power in any event constitutes an inescapable fatality at the heart of societies such that it cannot be undermined. Instead, I would say analysis, elaboration, and bringing into question of power relations and the 'agonism' between power relations and the intransitivity of freedom is an increasingly political task — even, the political task that is inherent in all social existence.' ('Subject and Power,' p.343)

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9 Foucault, 'Subject and Power,' in his *Power*, James D. Faubion (ed.) (New York: Free Press, 1994), p. 342. As the editor's footnote to the word explains, 'Foucault's neologism is based on the Greek *Agonisma*, meaning 'a combat.' The term would hence imply a physical contest in which the opponents develop a strategy of reaction and mutual taunting, as in a wrestling match.'(ibid. p. 348). For more on agonism, see Gray, 'Agonistic Liberalism,' in his *Enlightenment's Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

20 I have attempted to track the emergence of this idea of productive power in Foucault's writings in my *Colors of the Robe*.

This conception of power/discourse is evident in the final Foucauldian attempts at understanding the forms of fashioning of the self in relation to oneself. For Foucault, such a fashioning enables 'the ethic of care for the self', as outlined in the third volume of his *History of Sexuality*. This caring for the self (far from the Cartesian notion of the self or, for that matter, John Stuart Mills' preoccupation with the freedom and liberty of the individual[21]) involves one's forming, changing, and modifying oneself to attain 'a state of perfection, of happiness, of purity' and so forth.[22] This care, however, does not privilege Oneself/one's Self over Others, self's domination over others.[23] Caring for the self is the 'development of an art of existence that revolves around the question of the self, of its dependence and independence, of its universal form and of the connection it can and should establish with others' (*History* 3, p. 238). So in this process the other is never lost sight of, always standing near the self in so far as the fashioning and refashioning of the self becomes possible in relation to the other. Or as Heidegger said, 'The others whom one designates as such in order to cover over one's own essential belonging to them, are those who *are there* initially and for the most part in everyday being-with-one-another.'[24] Therefore, folding Heidegger into Foucault, as it were, I would argue that an ethic of care for the self has to be an ethic of care for the other.

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21 For a fine discussion of how Mills' version of freedom in relation to the individual self differs from Foucault's, see Michael Clifford, *Political Genealogy After Foucault* (New York: Routledge, 2001), particularly chapter 4.

22 Foucault, 'About the Beginning of the Hermeneutics of the Self,' in his *Religion and Culture*, Jeremy R. Carrette (ed.) (New York: Routledge 2000), p. 162.

23 Foucaull, *The Care of the Self* (New York: Vintage, 1986), pp. 65-68, 238.

24 Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: SUNNY, 1996), sec. 304.

I want to argue that the cultivation of such an ethic of care for the self\other, identity\difference became possible by the demand of the above debate. The National Sangha Council sought to authorize a certain kind of Buddhist Self/ Identity (distinct from Tamil and Muslim Others), laboring to arrogate to itself a space in which it alone and no 'others' could make claims about it. These claims, of course, operated in a conjuncture — a field of power, if you will — that enabled their being undermined by the rival claims of the All Lanka Bhikkhu Organization. To make the rival claims and arguments it did, the All Lanka Bhkkhu Organization did not arrive in the field of the debate as an unrecognizable difference/other insofar as it represented itself as 'Buddhist'. However, the 'Buddhistness' of this opposition appeared differently in that its claims about what counts as Buddhism clearly differed from those of the Sangha Council. The opposition demanded representing and caring for a particular kind of '(an)other-Buddhist-self'. This moment of the demand for caring for a differently argued, differently stylized, differently authorized '(an)other Buddhist-self' is the moment of identity's being both for and against itself. Caring for this kind of other-Buddhist-self, I think, can open up new ways of cultivating new ethical-political relations to non-Sinhala-Buddhist Muslim or Tamil 'Others', recognizing, as Heidegger says, that the 'other' being 'itself has the kind being of Da-sein' (*Being*, p. 117). This care for the self, then, is a way of 'being a self and being with others' (*Being*, p.37). So here the self does not abandon its care for itself. Or, as Nietzsche would have put it, the self does not 'negate and deny [itself] something', does not 'strive with open eyes for [its] own impoverishment'.[25] Nor does it seek to validate itself by denying the other/difference. This art of cultivating care for the self, which in turn produces a care for the other, is one way of thinking against our normalized present of pluralism, tolerance and democracy. My labor has been to read the conjuncture of a debate in which such cultivation

[25] Friederich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage 1974), sec. 304.

became possible. This sort of reading for me constitutes a practice of criticism that we can fold into the postcolonial study of religion and difference, and it allows us to move beyond what Foucault called the conventional disciplinary labors of 'their illumination from a safe distance'.[26] Such a criticism for me constitutes not just a virtue of negation but an ethic of affirmation, affirmation of different ethical political sensibilities that can reconfigure the relation between identity and difference, self and other. Finally, I want to end this paper by quoting the reverberating words of Nietzsche calling for the imagination of such an ethic of affirmation:

> *In favor of criticism.* — Now something you formerly loved as a truth or probability strikes you as an error; you shed it and fancy that this represents a victory for your reason. But perhaps this was as necessary for you then, when you were still a different person — you are always a different person — as are all your present 'truths', being a skin, as it were, that concealed and covered a great deal that you were not yet permitted to see. What killed that opinion for you was your new life and not your reason. *You no longer need it*, and now it collapses and unreason crawls out of it into the light like a worm. When you criticize something, this is no arbitrary and impersonal event; it is, at least very often, evidence of vital energies in us that are growing and shedding a skin. We negate and we must negate because something in us wants to live and affirm — something that we perhaps do not know or see yet — this is said in favor of criticism.[27]

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[26] Foucault, 'Intellectuals and Power, p. 208.

[27] Nietszche, *Gay Science*, sec. 307. For an interesting take on Nietzsche's concept of affirmation, see Tyalor T. Roberts, *Contesting Spirit: Nietzszche, Affirmation, Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

Honour Crimes and Honourable Justice

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(Paper presented at the Second Experts' Meeting on 'Women and Justice' convened by the Asian Women's Fund, 20-22 January 2002, Kyoto, Japan.)

The reality

In March 1999 a 16-year-old mentally challenged girl, Lal Jamilla Mandokhel, was reportedly raped several times by a junior clerk of the local government department of agriculture in a hotel in Parachinar, North West Frontier Province, Pakistan. The girl's uncle filed a complaint about the incident with the police, who took the accused into protective custody but handed over the girl to her tribe, the Mazuzai in the Kurram Agency. A tribal council decided that she had brought shame to her tribe and that honour could only be restored by her death. She was shot dead in front of a tribal gathering. (Amnesty I,1999,8)

Honour crimes take place in Pakistan (originally a Baloch and Pashtun tribal custom, honour crimes are now reported not only in Balochistan, the North West Frontier Province and Upper Sindh but also in Punjab province as well), Turkey (Eastern and South-eastern, but also Istanbul and Izmir in Western Turkey), Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, Morocco and other Mediterranean and Gulf countries. It also takes place in countries such as Germany,

France and the United Kingdom within the migrant communities.[1]

Honour crimes are usually practised by husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles or tribal councils. The killing is mainly carried out by under-aged males of the family to reduce the punishment. They are then treated as heroes. The action is further endorsed by their inmates in prison if they are sent there. The inmates wash these young boys' feet and tell them that they are now 'complete' men. The act is regarded as a rite of passage into manhood. But it is not unheard of for female relatives to either carry out the murder or be accomplices to it.

It should be stated here that it is extremely difficult to collect accurate statistical data on honour killings in any given community. As honour killings often remain a private family affair, there are no official statistics on practice or frequency, and the real number of such killings is vastly greater than those reported. Every year more than 1000 women are killed in the name of honour in Pakistan alone. During the summer of 1997, Khaled Al-Qudra, then Attorney General in the Palestinian National Authority, stated that he suspected that 70 percent of all murders in Gaza and the West Bank were honour killings. They are usually attributed to natural causes. (Ruggi, S) In Lebanon 36 honour crimes were reported between 1996 and

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[1] The Nottingham crown court in the United Kingdom in May 1999 sentenced a Pakistani woman and her grown-up son to life imprisonment for murdering the woman's daughter, Rukhsana Naz, a pregnant mother of two children. Rukhsana was perceived to have brought shame on the family by having a sexual relationship outside marriage. Her brother reportedly strangled Rukhsana, while her mother held her down. (Amnesty 1,1999,4) There is also the case of Zena Briggs who had married an English man against her parents' decision to marry her to a cousin in Pakistan. To this day, a death sentence is hanging over the couple as Zena's parents have employed people to kill them. (Amnesty 2,1999,8)

1998, 20 honour killings in Jordan in 1998, 52 similar crimes in Egypt in 1997; and in Iraq more than 4000 women have been killed since 1991. (Washington Post Foreign Service, May 8,2000) The same report stated that between 1996 and 1998 in Bangladesh, about 200 women were attacked with acid by husbands or close relatives for honour-related incidents, but the number of deaths is unknown.

Honour as a concept

Cleansing one's honour of shame is typically handled by shedding the blood of a loved one; the person being murdered is typically a female, the murderer is typically a male relative, and the punishment of the male is typically minimal. Most significantly, the murderer is revered and respected as a true man.

Honour is a magic word, which can be used to cloak the most heinous of crimes.[2] The concept of honour is especially powerful because it exists beyond reason and beyond analysis. But what masquerades as 'honour' is really men's need to control women.

Honour killings emerged in the pre-Islamic era to control women. These murders are not based on religious beliefs but, rather, deeply rooted cultural ones. Family status depends on honour. In a patriarchal and patrilineal society maintaining the honour of the family is a woman's responsibility. In these societies, the concept of women as commodity and not as human beings endowed with dignity and rights equal to those of men is deeply embedded. Women are seen as the property of men and they have to be obedient and passive, not assertive and active. Their assertion is considered as an element which would imbalance the power-relations in the parameters of the family unit.

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2 In the English language *honour* means high esteem, respect, recognition, distinction, privilege, reputation or a woman's chastity or purity.

Women are seen to embody the honour of the men to whom they 'belong', as such they must guard their virginity and chastity. Honour killings have its roots in the crude Arabic expression 'a man's honour lies between the legs of a woman'. By controlling women's sexuality and reproduction, men become the custodians of cultural and ethnic purity. But male control extends not just to a woman's body and her sexual behaviour, but also to all of her behaviour, including her movements and language. In any one of these areas, defiance by women translates into undermining male honour. (Amnesty 1,1999,5) The woman's body is considered to be the 'repository of family honour'. Alarmingly, the number of honour killings is on the rise as the perception of what constitutes honour and what damages it widens.

'Justice' meted out

Women are both perpetrators and victims, depending on from what side one looks at them. They have violated the 'laws' that govern their communities but they are victims in the eyes of human rights activists. The concept of honour and its translation in different societies has brought about many forms of violence against women.

In Sindh, Pakistan it takes the form of Karo-Kari killings. Karo literally means a 'black man' and a Kari means a 'black woman'. They are people who have brought 'dishonour' to their families through various forms of behaviour. There is no other punishment for a Kari but death. They are more often ritualistically killed and hacked to pieces, usually with the explicit or implicit sanction of the community. In cities and towns, such killings usually take place by shooting, mostly in private, based more on individual decisions. In Karo-Kari killings, a man's honour is only partly restored by killing the Kari. He must also kill the man allegedly involved. But, in reality, as it is the Kari who is first killed, the Karo hears of the killing and flees. In order to settle the issue, an agreement can be made if both the Karo and the man whose honour is defiled agree. But justice is not sought

by finding out the truth and punishing the culprit. It is done by restoring the balance by compensating for damage. The Karo has to pay compensation to the family of the Kari in order for his life to be spared. Not surprisingly, the compensation can be in the form of money or the transfer of a woman or both. (Amnesty 1,1999,5) This practice has now even become an industry. Fake honour killings are committed in order to get compensation or conceal other crimes. Men kill other men in murders which are not connected with honour issues, and then kill a woman of their own family as alleged Kari to camouflage the initial murder as an honour killing. They may even go as far as killing a woman in their family to lend weight to the allegation.[3]

Another form of violence that is inflicted on women because of honour comes as a result of a 'satta-watta' or 'addo baddo' marriage, as it is known in Pakistan, or 'Berdel', as it is referred to in Turkey. This concerns a tradition of marriage which involves the exchange of siblings. As it is an exchange of unmarried young girls for a lesser dowry between families, it puts an additional burden on a woman to abide by her father's marriage arrangements. If one of the couples that got married in this way decides to divorce, the other couple has to separate as well.[4] Many advocates of honour crimes

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[3] The case of Amanullah illustrates this point. Amanullah married a woman who had earlier been fond of her cousin Nazir, a married man with eight children. As Nazir was unable to obtain consent from her family to marry her, Nazir murdered Amanullah and then killed his own innocent sister and declared the two of them as Karo and Kari. After a brief prison term, Nazir was given Amanullah's wife in compensation for the supposed infringement of his honour. (Amnesty, 1999,9)

[4] In the case of Shaheen, she was allegedly set on fire by her husband in December 1998 in a 'satta-watta' context. Their marriage had run into trouble and Anwar, her husband, wanted to send her home. But, Shaheen's brother, married to Anwar's sister, refused to send his wife home as well. Anwar found no other way to remove his shame than to kill his wife. (Amnesty1,1999,6)

believe that the more brutal the murder is, the more honour the family will receive.[5]

It is not only women's right to life that is violated because of honour. Their right to liberty and movement is also restricted if they are endangered women. The predicament of women of the 'golden cage' is another form of violence towards women. These are the women who are being kept in jail in protective custody because their families had either vowed to kill them or tried and failed to kill them. According to Jordanian law, a woman cannot be released from prison unless a male relative comes to sign for her. Since these women's male relatives had rejected them in the first place, they are left to languish for years in jail. Some women even believe that they deserve such punishment. Some families sign a pledge not to harm the woman but they kill her nevertheless.[6]

Many women resort to suicide due to reasons of honour. This could be voluntary or involuntary suicide. They may commit suicide because of the social implications of dishonour to one's self or to one's family. They may also be invited to commit suicide by the family, and in most cases, they do commit suicide.

Honour crimes are not confined to Muslim communities only. It occurs in various parts of the world. In Brazil, men

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5 A Jordanian case tells of a man who killed his sister and then decapitated her and paraded her head for all the villagers to see. The 18-year-old sister had brought 'shame' to her family because she kept running away from an abusive husband. (Sati, N)

6 Sirhan, a 35-year-old Jordanian is proud of killing his sister by shooting her four times in the head. Her crime was to report to the police that she had been raped. Sirhan signed a pledge not to harm her. According to him, his sister committed a mistake even if it was against her will. He considers it better to have one person die rather than to have the whole family die from shame. Sirhan served only six months in jail. (Beyer, L)

who kill their spouses after the wife's alleged adultery are able to obtain an acquittal based on the theory that the killing was justified to defend the man's 'honour'. Wife murder cases soon came to be defended as crimes of passion. The emphasis in such cases was placed not on the nature of the crime itself, but on the degree to which the husband intended to commit it. But the present Penal Code explicitly states that emotion or passion does not exclude criminal responsibility. In order to overcome this hurdle, the defence lawyers devised the defence of honour as a new exculpatory strategy. This brings about the idea that the wife is the property of the husband. In Brazil, there have been contradictory decisions on honour defence.[7] Not surprisingly, this defence is rarely used when women are the murderers. This stereotypes men as impulsive while women are not. One of the most well-know cases that deal with the concept of the honour defence is the case of Joao Lopes. Lopes stabbed to death his wife and lover after catching them together in a hotel room. The highest court of appeal in Brazil overturned the lower and appellate court decisions of acquitting Lopes of the double homicide by saying that homicide on the grounds of defending one's honour is legitimate. But, when the case was re-tried, the lower court ignored the high court's ruling and again acquitted Lopes. (Turgut, P) Such defences, partial or complete, are found in the Penal Codes of Peru, Bangladesh, Argentina, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, West Bank and Venezuela. The attitude that a man's right to kill when faced with adultery has not disappeared even in Texas. In October 1999 Jimmy Watkins was sentenced to only 4 months in prison for murdering his wife and wounding her long-time lover in front of their 10-year-old son.

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[7] A couple were married for sixteen years and all was well until the wife got a job and started to come home late and refused to 'pay her conjugal debt'. The husband killed her and was acquitted on the legitimate defence of honour. The decision was upheld on appeal. (Turgut, P)

Many reasons have been put forward by the perpetrators for these honour killings. They could vary from supposed 'illicit' relationships to marrying men of their choice (as expressing a desire to choose a spouse and marrying a partner of one's choice are seen as major acts of defiance in a society where most marriages are arranged by the family), to divorcing abusive husbands, to even being raped (as a victim of rape is deemed to have brought shame on her family). Not surprisingly, men often go unpunished for such crimes. Mere allegation is enough. The truth of the suspicion does not matter as what impacts on the man's honour is the public perception. Even if the crime is dreamt by the perpetrator, it is enough. But even when a woman is proven 'guilty', neither the domestic law nor the various international human rights conventions the states are party to would tolerate the kind of extra-judicial executions meted to them. In a frequently cited case, a teenager's throat was slit in the town square because a love ballad was dedicated to her over the radio. (Turgut, P) This case shows that any reason is good enough to kill a woman.

Other reasons include serving food late, answering back, undertaking forbidden family visits etc. These women's lives are circumscribed by traditions which enforce extreme seclusion and submission to men. Male relatives virtually own them and punish contraventions of their proprietary control with violence. It is not necessarily for love, shame, jealousy or social pressure that these crimes are committed. Economic benefits also play a major role in the decision to kill a woman. The Amnesty report claims that reasons such as progressive brutalisation of society, the increased access to heavy weapons, the economic decline that results in increased exploitation of the honour system for compensation and pervasive corruption, have also impacted on the increase of honour killings. (Amnesty 2,1999,31)

Inaccessibility of justice

Honour crimes violate many of the human rights provisions found in international law. When the life of a woman is taken

away arbitrarily, the right to life is violated. Freedom from torture and ill-treatment is violated when women are forced to commit suicide, left in cells indefinitely and when various punishments are given for dishonouring the family. The perpetrators of honour crimes blatantly violate standards of equality before the law, equal protection of the law and non-discrimination. The right to freedom of choice in marriage is also denied to these women. The lack of an appropriate remedy is a violation in itself.

Although many of the countries in which honour crimes take place are parties to one or many of the international human rights instruments, they continue to violate those standards. The situation is compounded by state indifference and complicity in women's oppression.

Even when there are domestic laws that make honour killings illegal, the practice continues. The perception of honour crimes as a violation of the family's honour and man's honour and not as an offence against the physical integrity of the woman reinforces her unwillingness to come forward and report the crime. In Pakistan, the Constitution in several articles guarantees gender equality.[8] But there are laws that directly violate these fundamental rights and thereby condone the custom of honour killings. The law of Pakistan does not explicitly sanction honour killings but it does so implicitly. The Pakistani Law of Qisas and Diyat 1990 covers offences relating to physical injury, manslaughter and murder. The law re-conceptualised the offences in such a way that they are not directed against the legal order of the state but against the victim. There have been many cases where the sentence was reduced because the family of the victim dropped charges. It

[8] Article 25 says, 'All citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of law' and Article 27 states, 'there shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex alone.' Article 8 of the Constitution states, 'Any law or any custom or usage having the force of law, in so far as it is inconsistent with the rights conferred by this Chapter, shall, to the extent of such inconsistency, be void.'

is common practice worldwide that public interest is the overriding factor in the investigation, prosecution and punishment of crimes whether they are committed within the family or outside of it. Under international norms, victims of crimes are not goods and chattels of their families whose rights can be dispensed with at the discretion of their immediate family. Therefore, it is incomprehensible how the punishment that is meted out to a criminal can be reduced to half merely because the family decides to forgive and forget. This gives out the signal that it is a family affair and judicial redress can be negotiated.

Another such legislation that violates the Pakistani Constitution is section 300 of the Pakistani Penal Code that deals with mitigating circumstances. Even though sudden provocation was formally removed as a mitigating circumstance, the courts have gradually reintroduced this provision in their interpretation of the law and have sentenced men charged with crimes of honour to lighter sentences even when the murderer did not claim to have been suddenly and severely provoked.

Under the 1979 Zina law, men and women can be stoned to death or publicly whipped 100 times for committing zina (adultery or premarital sex), but such charges are brought almost exclusively against women. This violates the gender discrimination clause and treats women as second-class citizens by intimidating them and preventing them from demanding their rights. It also encourages men to abuse women with impunity.

Article 98 of the Jordanian Penal Code states that 'he who commits a crime in a fit of fury caused by wrongful and dangerous act on the part of the victim benefits from a reduction of penalty'. Article 341 considers murder a legitimate act of defence when 'the act of killing another or harming another was committed as an act in defence of his life, or his honour, or somebody else's life or honour'. Rights activists argued that this article violated the Jordanian constitution where all Jordanians are equal. They wanted to eliminate the item altogether, but now it has been amended so that the right to

kill has been extended to women as well. This confirms the primacy of honour over life.

In Turkey, fornication, either by women or men, is not defined as a criminal offence. But the custom of honour killings is in direct contrast to this when the 'fornicator' is given a 'death sentence'. Furthermore, killing a blood relative is punishable by death according to Turkish law. But when it is an honour crime, committed on witnessing an adulterous act or suspicion of an illicit liaison and is caused by heavy provocation, the sentence is reduced to an eighth of its severity.[9] The Iranian Penal Code 'recognises the right' of a father or brother to murder a girl found guilty of pre-marital sex 'by subscribing a maximum sentence of only six months in jail or a fine', adding that 'in the case of a husband murdering an adulterous wife, there is of course no sentence'. The Iraqi Penal Code was also amended to effectively condone honour killings a few years ago.[10] The Moroccan Penal Code in Article 418 states that 'murder, injury and beating are excusable if they are committed by a husband on his wife as well as the accomplice at the moment in which he surprises then in the act of adultery'. The Syrian Penal Code in Article 548 states the above and further says, 'he who catches his wife or one of his ascendants, descendants or sister in a suspicious state with another benefits from a reduction of penalty'. Any law which provides a defence to a crime based on gender is a violation of human rights and also violates not only international agreements but also the equality provisions in the constitutions of the countries. These specific laws hamper redress as they discriminate against women. The question to be asked here is if the law does not set the death penalty for adultery, then why should it encourage the male relative to deliver the death penalty for the same thing?

An example of state inaction can be seen throughout the case of Samia Imran in Lahore, Pakistan, who was killed

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9 Article 462 of the Turkish Criminal Code.

10 WLUML Newsheet Vol. XI No.1.

on 6 April 1999. She was murdered in the office of the AGHS legal cell in front of lawyer Hina Jilani when she came seeking help in securing a divorce from her first cousin-husband who had thrown her down stairs when she was pregnant with a child. She was also subjected to high levels of domestic violence in her ten years of marriage. Her mother, a lady doctor, Sultana Sarwar, accompanied by Samia's father-in-law uncle Yunus, entered the office with a gunman who shot Samia through the temple. The gunman was shot by a police constable doing guard duty at the office while he was trying to escape. Samia's parents were opposed to her decision to seek divorce and had gone to the last extreme of eliminating her. (*Friday Times* ,3-9 Sep, 1999) Although a First Information Report (FIR) was lodged immediately against Samia's parents, Ghulam (president of the NWFP Chamber of Commerce and Industry) and Sultana at a Lahore police station, and the press covered the murder and reported it objectively, the administration adopted a policy of delay and prevarication when dealing with this case. A counter FIR was allowed to be registered after a meeting with religious leaders. Here, Ghulam Sarwar accused Hina Jilani and Asma Jehangir (the UN Special Rapporteur on extra judicial, arbitrary and summary executions, and then chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan) of abducting his daughter while he was away on Haj and murdering her along with his driver. No one was arrested for the murder of Samia and her parents were able to get bail before arrest. The lawyer, Hina Jilani, was also forced to seek bail before arrest from the Lahore High Court. While allowing bail for a month, she was asked to seek a similar bail at the Peshawar High Court. This was an absurd charade of prosecuting the two human rights lawyers. The fact that the killing was carried out in the presence of well-known lawyers indicates that the perpetrators were convinced they were doing the right thing, were not afraid of publicity and felt no need to hide their identity as they felt sure that the state would not hold them to account. (Amnesty 1,1999,7) There is also some evidence that the investigating authority

actually forced the security agency, which witnessed the escape of the killers, to change the testimony of the personnel. The police also forced the rickshaw driver in whose rickshaw the killers escaped to change his testimony. The police try to act or allow themselves to be used as guardians of tradition and morality rather than impartial enforcers of the law. They become mediators or counsellors rather than registering complaints and taking necessary action. The killers are rarely prosecuted and lawyers are very often hired prior to the incident for the offender to get a lighter sentence. Financial corruption also seems to contribute to police inaction before such crimes. If the culprit is convicted, the judiciary ensures that they usually receive a light sentence, forcing the view that men can kill their female relatives with virtual impunity.[11]

This reinforces discriminatory customary norms rather than securing constitutionally secured gender equality. Parts of the judiciary and even other educated citizens hesitate to interfere in the patriarchal structure of society as they believe any such interference will disrupt society and betray their religion. Religious rulings were issued against the two lawyers and head money was promised to anyone who killed them. Asma Jahangir lodged a FIR with regard to this and also called the government to set up a judicial inquiry headed by a Supreme Court judge to investigate cases of honour killings. But no action seems to have been taken on either issue except for declaring the act 'dishonourable'.

After the murder of Samia, 24 senators from the main political parties in the Senate signed a joint statement

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[11] In a Jordanian case, a 38 year-old man was sentenced to only one year in prison after he killed his two sisters. The tribunal said that Mohammad Ahmad benefited from a reduction in penalty because he committed the crime in a fit of fury and because he killed his sisters, Kifaya ,23, and Nadia, 32, to cleanse his family's honour after finding a strange man in the house. (*Jordan Times*, June,1,1996)

condemning the killing and expressed themselves against the hateful and primitive custom of killing women in the name of honour. The statement later developed into a draft resolution for passage though the Senate. But the majority opposed the resolution saying that the Samia case was sub judice. The resolution was changed four times to accommodate the objections. The final draft asked the Senate to condemn the practice of honour killings as it was clearly in violation of the law of the land and the Islamic edicts. But when the resolution was put before the Senate, the ruling party senators and senators from the NWFP-based ANP objected to it being tabled. The Senate then voted 20 to 2 that the resolution should not be tabled at all. The Pakistani representative at the UN Human Rights Commission at Geneva stated his government's position by saying that the government of Pakistan could not approve or support such hateful practices and promised that all efforts will be taken to protect Asma Jehangir and Hina Jilani. But the above inaction simply shows that Pakistan is not able to stand by the commitments it makes to international organisations and institutions. In 1998 when the annual report of the HRCP was released, the Information Minister had reportedly said about allegations of violence against women and of child labour, 'these are a feature of Pakistan society, they are not part of any government policy or a consequence of any law...' But, when no action is taken to make women aware of their legal and constitutional rights or to give remedies when those rights are violated, it does become the responsibility of the state.

There are only a few support systems for victims of honour. NGOs and other women's organisations strive to provide practical services to protect and assist women in need. These provide services such as counselling, mediation, help with legal issues and correspondence with the police, an emergency hotline and rehabilitation shelters for abused women. But lack of access to such services for most women, lack of resources and specially trained staff to deal with specific issues result in many problems. Women in these societies rarely know their way about in the outside world due

to their strict upbringing. They are unused to public transport; they have no money of their own; and they are vulnerable to further abuse when they are moving around alone.

The concept and practice of honour crimes and the failure to punish the perpetrators have resulted in the violation of international, constitutional and legal guarantees of women's rights. A false value of honour and the customary domination of women have resulted in the guarantee of women's rights being conditional on many issues. The preservation of these values at the cost of women's lives is proudly claimed as the preservation of 'our culture'.

State responsibility

The UN Special Rapporteurs on Extra-judicial, Arbitrary and Summary Executions, the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, and on Violence against Women have expressed their concern over honour killings and its result in violations of human rights. The state has a dual responsibility- it is not only required not to commit human rights violations, but also to prevent and respond to human rights abuses unlike in the past. Systematic failure by the state to prevent, investigate and to punish perpetrators contravenes the international responsibility of the state. Failure to take measures to prevent and end honour killings, failure to eradicate traditions which prescribe honour killings, not attempting to end the impunity of perpetrators of such killings, failure to abolish discriminatory laws and the failure of the police and the judiciary to apply the law in an unbiased manner, signalling official indifference if not approval of the system, results in the state sharing responsibility for these crimes. Recently, the UN member states were forced to vote on a Netherlands-sponsored revised draft resolution on honour crimes entitled, 'Working towards the elimination of crimes against women committed in the name of honour'. It was adopted by the Third Committee on 3 November 2000. The text declares that 'states have an obligation to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and punish the perpetrators of such crimes, and to provide protection to the victims, and

the failure to do so constitutes a human rights violation'. The concept of state responsibility has expanded in the recent years to include violations by private actors.[12] The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women confirmed in the General Recommendation 19 that 'States may also be responsible for private acts if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent violations of rights or to investigate and punish acts of violence, and for providing compensation'.[13] So, although in the international human rights arena honour crimes against women are understood as a form of domestic violence or violence against women in the family or community, it comes within the responsibility of the state.

Real justice

The Criminal Court of Jordan sentenced a 40-year-old man to life in prison with hard labour after finding him guilty of killing his wife and four children in May 1997. According to the prosecution charge sheet, the defendant plotted to kill his wife and children after ten years of marriage because he suspected that the children were not his. Paternity tests performed on the child victims proved that they were his children. It was later revealed that it was financial reasons that were the actual reason for the murder of his family. (*Jordan Times*, Sept. 1998) This case sends out the message that a woman's life is worthy of real justice.

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12 See the Velasquez Rodriguez Case. (Inter American Court of Human Rights)

13 See also the Human Rights Committee General Comment 20, CEDAW Article 2(e) and the Preamble of DEVAW.

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Bandit Queen and Formulae in Conventional Indian Cinema

Emma Aller

(Dedicated to the memory of Phoolan Devi)

Phoolan Devi, bandit queen, was a low-caste woman who took the law into her own hands, becoming a dacoit after a series of injustices. She is a figure of great popularity among the lower castes in North India. Phoolan's most famous exploit is her alleged leadership of and participation in the Behmai Massacre. Twenty-two Thakurs (high caste landlords) were killed in the name of retribution against Lala Ram and Sri Ram, gang leaders who had murdered her beloved mentor, Vikram Mallah. Phoolan established her own gang, and evaded the police for three years in the ravines of the Chambal River, until she negotiated the terms of her own surrender in 1983. In 1995, a year after her release from prison, a Bombay filmmaker, Shekhar Kapur, made *Bandit Queen*, loosely based on the diaries she dictated while in prison. Phoolan filed suit against the release of the film, claiming that it was a gross distortion of her life.

Bandit Queen deals with many issues and contains many elements that conventional Hindi films never show because of censorship. The film was banned in India because of brutal rapes, nudity, and violence. Kapur knew that the film would probably not be shown in India and, therefore, had a western audience in mind as he made it. For this reason, he admits that some dramatization of Phoolan's life occurred. While Kapur consciously distanced himself from the conventional Indian film, he nevertheless was influenced by that genre. Phoolan Devi contains many elements of the Bollywood formula film, which seem to have crept into it, deliberately or inadvertently.

First of all, rapes are ubiquitous in all types of formula films as eroticized violence.[1] Also, aspects of two seemingly opposing formulae co-exist within the film. These are the 'avenging woman' role[2] that has been increasingly depicted in Indian cinema and elements of the 'angry young man' role.[3] While Kapur uses features of these formulae and other stock elements, he subverts them simultaneously, since the narrative is based on a true story and thus must conform to harsh reality. The conventional role of the victimized woman is not used in *Bandit Queen* because Phoolan was both a victim and a perpetrator. *Bandit Queen* both employs formulae from conventional Indian film and overrides them at the same time because of the uniqueness of the story itself, and the fact that the central protagonist is a woman in a traditionally male role.

Rape is the central narrative string that structurally binds *Bandit Queen* together. In conventional film, rape ties into the dominant culture of sexual repression. Although censors only allow kissing scenes to be suggested onscreen, rape scenes are acceptable 'as long as the camera conceals as much as it reveals'.[4] Rape is a common part of women's existence in India and is believed to be particularly rampant among tribal and lower-caste women. According to some who defend the prevalence of rape scenes in Indian film, art is imitating life. However, according to one moviegoer who was interviewed, '...in men's fantasies, force is the only way to get women who are otherwise out of reach.'[5] Rape is included in many

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1 Dissanayake, Wimal and Malti Sahai. *Sholay, Cultural Reading*. New Delhi: Wiley Eastern Limited, 1992. p. 63.

2 A new role for women in the 1980s and a term for films that primarily employ a rape-revenge scenario.

3 The trend epitomized by Amitabh Bachchan's role of the underdog who takes the law into his own hands; this role reflects the frustration of many with the political climate in India during the 1970s.

4 Pratap, Anita. 'Romance and a Little Rape.' *Time*. 1990, v 136. p.69.

5 Ibid, p.69.

films as a way to augment the conventional depiction of Indian heroines as victims, who can only be saved at the last moment by a man. Women's characters that are traditional throughout the movie are usually spared the brutality and humiliation of rape, while those who are independent and have subverted patriarchy are punished by not being saved as readily or at all. The independent women are condemned by society's values that see them as deserving rape because they were 'corrupt and immoral'.[6] In *Bandit Queen*, the sequence of rapes which define the conflict of the film are not meant for 'an ugly kind of titillation'[7] like those in conventional Hindi films, but at the same time are being committed against someone who is not following her prescribed role and is therefore not saved from the rapes.

The beginning of the movie introduces two important concepts. The first thing the viewer sees is a quote from *Manu Smriti*: 'Animals, drums, illiterates, low castes, and women are worthy of being beaten.' Soon after, the eleven-year-old Phoolan, feisty and buoyant, is sold in marriage to a man twenty years her senior, amid her father's saying that 'a daughter is always a burden'. These two lines seem to indicate that Kapur will be proving how wrong and unjust these underpinnings and beliefs of Indian society are. However, he does not go about it in a way that supports a feminist reading of the film, precisely because he uses the aforementioned *filmi* formulae and because the film has received such denouncements from many who criticize it for straying from the original story. Phoolan threatened to immolate herself if its release was not stopped, because of its graphic depiction of her rapes, which she has only mentioned in terms of a man 'having *mazaak* [fun] at her expense'.

The opening scene of Phoolan's marriage ends with her father shoving her off, and her mother resignedly knowing that her daughter must go. The mother is identified with the long-

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6 Pratap, p. 69.

7 Ibid, p. 69.

suffering victim role that is so common in Indian films. As Phoolan starts the journey to her new home, a song begins, with a group of women singing a traditional tune. This is a far cry from the orchestrated breaks that punctuate conventional films and interrupt the narrative for the sake of entertainment. The soundtrack in *Bandit Queen* serves to underscore the settings and movement of the characters.

The first rape occurs after her marriage. Phoolan's husband is punishing her for disrespecting his mother. This initial violation sets the tone for the depiction of rape in most of the other scenes in *Bandit Queen*. The child's face is shown with expressions of horror and sadness, and her screams and whimpering are vivid. The husband's actual act is not shown. The camera keeps shifting as well to the husband's mother who listens to what is taking place; she seems to have mixed feelings about the occurrence, but ultimately does nothing to stop it and seems satisfied that her rebellious daughter-in-law has been sufficiently punished. Phoolan runs away though, back to her village, growing up there as an outcast who lives by working in the fields. The men of the upper castes harass her. The headman's son tries to force himself on her, as he projects his own desires onto her and claims 'she's itching for [him]'. This is a major turning point in Phoolan's character because the village council, representative of legal institutions in general, is unjust and sends her out of the village, rather than punishing the real perpetrators, who blame the victim.

Another formula is introduced by these plot developments. According to the real Phoolan, the reason why she was sent from the village was because she stood up to her cousin Maiyedin who had illegally seized her father's land. She says this is what turned her into a dacoit. However, in Kapur's film version, the 'avenging woman' role, or rape-revenge formula, is used. Lalitha Gopalan writes that in this formula, the 'miscarriage of justice' after the initially happy female character is raped is the turning point and ushers in the rape-revenge scenarios. Many famous actresses have played the 'lady avenger' role, including Hema Malini, Rekha,

and Dimple.[8] These movies focus more, as Carol Clover showed in her research on similar Hollywood B-movie horror films, '...on the reaction (revenge) than the act (rape)...but to the extent that the revenge fantasy derives its force from some degree of imaginary participation in the act itself, these films are predicated on cross-gender identification of the most extreme, corporeal sort.'[9]

The film which began the avenging woman trend was *Insaaf Ka Tarazu* (Scales of Justice), which followed a growing feminist movement in India and came soon after the Emergency government from 1975-1977.[10] The inefficiency and injustice of governmental institutions, as perceived by many, particularly lower castes, was embodied in this new trend. The films are critical of rape, but it is still used throughout the narrative as a way to fully justify the indictment of the prevailing institutions and officials who represent the breakdown of law and order which has allowed the rapist to get off free. Only after the turning point in the movie, in which this justice system has fully failed, and after an unambiguous rape has occurred, which makes the perpetrator unequivocally bad to the viewer, can the revenge scenario begin. 'Vigilante revenge...must equal, or even surpass, the horror of the rape.'[11]

The avenging woman role as seen in conventional Indian rape-revenge films is present to a degree in *Bandit Queen*. Phoolan's life is defined by rape because it coincides with every new stage and struggle. She is dealt injustice from her village council. Her family is not happy before the conflict begins, as most families in this genre are. But Phoolan is shown as a strong-willed and feisty child, having fun with her

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8 Gopalan, Lalitha. 'Avenging Woman in Indian Cinema.' In: *Making Meaning in Indian Cinema.* Vasudevan, Ravi S. (ed.), New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 216.

9 Ibid, p. 219.

10 Ibid, p. 219.

11 Gopalan, 'Avenging Women in Indian Cinema'. p. 225.

playmates in the river, thus enjoying a degree of naïve happiness. The plot of these films usually emphasizes the lack of paternal influence as a reason why the character could not be protected; in *Bandit Queen*, the father is very much a part of Phoolan's life, although in a negative sense. He proves weak and unable to help her later on in front of the headman in the village, and he sits silently, again forsaking his daughter as he had first done by forcing her marriage. This loosely fits into the genre's theme of 'paternal abandonment'.[12] Phoolan ultimately gets her revenge in the Behmai Massacre.

Despite the feminist strain detectable in avenging woman films, the actual act of rape is depicted the same way as in most Indian films of other genres that contain gratuitous rapes. Gopalan terms the way rapes are depicted in popular films as 'coitus interruptus'.[13] In sexual encounters in conventional films, filmmakers use various techniques to appease the censors. An overview of the landscape is spliced with a kiss, or natural events serve to symbolize sexual happenings, or extreme close-ups of the female body allude to sexual action. The last , the extreme close-up, is most often used in *Bandit Queen*. Because 'visual representations of rape in Indian cinema also remind us of the authority of censorship regulations', even the scenes in Kapur's film tie back to the usage of rape in conventional Indian films.[14] In *Bandit Queen*, rape scenes generally focus on a part of Phoolan's body, usually her face, but alternately her legs or back. Often Phoolan's face is shown in pain as men rape her, but the actual act is not shown. The perpetrators' shoes or legs generally indicate their presence as they enter and exit the location of the rape. In the scene in which the gang rapes occur, the rapists are shown as they come and go from the room where

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12 Ibid, p. 218.

13 Gopalan, Lalitha. 'Coitus Interruptus and Love Story in Indian Cinema', in: *Representing the Body*, Dehejia, Vidya (ed.), New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1997, p. 126.

14 Gopalan, Lalitha, 'Avenging Women in Indian Cinema', p. 219.

Phoolan lies half dead. The scene with Babu Gujjar, the gang leader who initially kidnapped Phoolan, differs from the other rape scenes because the exposure of his full body is a device the filmmaker uses to further the plot. Because his whole body is exposed, symbolizing his inner weakness, Vikram Mallah, soon to be gang leader, can easily take aim at his leader in order to protect Phoolan and promote his own ambition. Although Phoolan's anguish–ridden face is not shown in this scene as the rape is taking place, the filmmaker cuts to an expansive shot of the sky overhead, a classic use of interspersed landscape.

In conventional Indian films in which the female character is the victim who must be saved by the male hero, the villain embodies absolute evil. Kapur uses these traditional roles in order to simplify the characters and their portrayal, and make audience reaction more clear-cut. In *Bandit Queen*, Babu Gujjar is given the villain role, whereas Vikram Mallah, who was described by Phoolan in her own prison diaries as a jealous abusive person, is portrayed as her benevolent protector. While this may have been a facet of his real personality, it is a convention of the popular Indian film to assign all the evil to one character. The villain who inherits the role after Babu Gujjar is killed is Sri Ram. He is represented by his sunglasses, which signify western elements that are often equated with corruption in Indian films. Kailash, Phoolan's cousin, embodies another stock character from conventional film, the agent of comic relief. Although he is not as much the classic comic character as the villain is the traditional villain, he still provides a few laughs as the 'fat slob' and 'baldy' who Phoolan laughs and flirts with.

Violence is present throughout *Bandit Queen*, and this on the surface aligns it with action films, particularly those of the 'angry young man' genre. Kapur wanted to avoid the standard show of violence, in which the viewer sees the fight from the side of the hero and watches as he brutally knocks down his opponents. In *Bandit Queen*, the constantly moving camera angles create a sense of uncertainty and almost paranoia because the viewer, just like the characters in the

movie, does not know where the next bout of violence will come from. An example of this is when Vikram and Phoolan are sitting in the middle of a field of flowers on a mound of dirt that seems like a protective barrier. A shot rings out unexpectedly, without a clear place of origin, and Vikram is killed. The perpetrators are the villains, the Thakur brothers, but the actual shooter is never explicitly shown.

In another action scene, Kapur again tries to distance himself from the action sequences of conventional films. Directly preceding the Behmai massacre, as Phoolan's gang is rounding up men from the village, the camera uses aerial shots to show the action from above rather than face to face.[15] Kapur does this in order to emphasize the return to Phoolan Devi's point of view; she was not participating in the rounding up, but stood waiting in the village center. The camera returns to her perspective, literally her eye level, when the men have been lined up and she begins her tirade. Kapur strives to keep the viewer seeing the film through Phoolan's eyes, therefore avoiding stock action sequences which detach themselves from the character's perspective for the sake of an audience-pleasing fight.[16]

The dramatization of some events, which Kapur admitted to employing in *Bandit Queen*, is exemplified in recurring images that, while film-worthy, do not usually exist so conveniently in real life. The well is one such image, which enters the film four times, marking significant moments in the forward movement of the plot and in explaining Phoolan's development and actions. In the first scene, the well is not shown but is mentioned by the child Phoolan. Her sister tells her to get out of the river where she is playing, and Phoolan thinks her father wants her to draw him water from the well. She has already done this, she says, but her sister explains that her bridegroom has come. This introduces the marriage

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15 Prasad, Udayan. 'Woman on the Edge.', *Sight and Sound*,. London, 1995, v 5. p. 17.

16 Prasad, p. 17.

scenes. Once Phoolan is at her husband's village, the well confirms a caste clash because the Thakur women chastise her for trying to use the well that is reserved for their caste. This shows her first direct experience with caste discrimination at the hands of the upper castes and sets the tone for the development of her hatred. The third image based on the well is the most traumatic, when Sri Ram horribly shames Phoolan, forcing her to draw water from the well for him after he has stripped off her clothes. He reinforces not only the inferiority of women but Phoolan's humiliation as a low-caste rape victim. The well imagery traces the trajectory of Phoolan's path from child bride to powerful bandit, culminating in the final well image. In the village of Behmai, where the massacre will soon take place at her behest, Phoolan sees a baby sitting at the well in the middle of the village, having been deserted or forgotten. Her face betrays hints of sadness that this little girl's fate may be one of degradation like her own, but at the same time, the child implies hope that things may turn out differently. The repetition of the well creates an image structure that comes full circle, from Phoolan as a child to Phoolan looking at a child. Kapur suggests that Phoolan wonders if what she has done, in overturning traditions within her life, will have any effect on the traditions imposed on this child. While this makes for a nice element in a movie, people's lives do not fit so perfectly within such a framework of recurring images. Phoolan's claim that this movie distorted her life rings true, not merely for the numerous changes Kapur made to the main events, but also because of the emphasis placed on certain elements of the film for dramatic effect.

Bandit Queen echoes certain aspects of the angry young man genre, as epitomized by Amitabh Bachchan in *Sholay*.[17] Phoolan's portrayal in *Bandit Queen*, and the myth

[17] Kazmi, Fareeduddin,. 'How angry is the angry young man? Rebellion in conventional Hindi films.' In: *Secret Politics of Our Desires* Nandy, Ashis, (ed.), Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998. p. 143.

surrounding her, seem to fit into this formula in certain ways. A man from a subordinate class eventually raises himself up, based on a combination of strength and cunning, to equal his oppressors. This character brings justice to those deserving it because the legal and law enforcement institutions do not. He is an extraordinary individual who hands out quick justice. Villains are eliminated by killing, but only with the perceived help of the gods and a mother's blessing. These stories focus on the biography of the main character. Although the system is criticized as weak and ineffective, the institutions themselves are not attacked, but only the personal flaws of individuals within them.

The plot of *Bandit Queen* follows along these general lines. However, there are many divergences from this formula, mainly because of the constraints of the true story. *Bandit Queen* does not just condemn the individual Thakurs who harm Phoolan, but the entire caste system that has created the environment in which such a situation could be allowed to occur. Violence, in *Sholay* and *Bandit Queen*, stems from the social order. Although the problem is solved at the end of most films in this genre, there is no real resolution in *Bandit Queen*. The reality of Phoolan's situation is that there can be no happy ending until an overhaul of the entire social system takes place. Unlike the retribution that can occur through the agency of a *filmi* actor, like Bachchan who embodies conceptions of a male hero, a real live female bandit cannot conjure up so easily a simple ending.

Also, the angry young man is just that, always a man. Phoolan Devi is obviously not, and this is the most important distinction that disrupts the application of this formula. However, Bachchan's Jai in *Sholay* feels no real emotion, and Phoolan tries not to in order to maintain a tough exterior in the ravines. Of course, her hardships and torments do not allow her to maintain this veneer at all points, because she is ultimately not a *filmi* creation like Jai. Phoolan, like Bachchan's portrayal of Jai, is not prone to self-reflection[18],

[18] Dissanayake, p. 62.

because she cannot really afford to look back. The one time that she recalls painful memories from her past, she is overcome by the desire for revenge and savagely beats up her husband. This is also part of the cleansing of her honor and a rite of passage in joining Vikram's gang as an equal member. Lastly, like the angry young man in *Sholay*, Phoolan wants to be defined by her physical actions, rather than what she says or what has been done to her. She wants to be feared and wield power as a dacoit leader of her own gang.

The angry young man and avenging woman genre are both highly popular film genres in India, particularly the former that can claim nine of the top twelve spots for the biggest moneymakers in Indian film history. *Bandit Queen*, to the extent that it adopts the conventions of these genres, can be looked at as part of the trend in commercial cinema to use formulae to ensure a high-grossing product. Likewise, the immense popularity of Phoolan Devi among the lower classes that go to films time after time brought the movie publicity from the beginning.

The ties that remain between Phoolan's prison diaries and *Bandit Queen* lie in the unremitting severity of the movie's vision. The viewer is never allowed to 'distance [himself] from the atrocities. At a time when screen violence is becoming increasingly stylized...Kapur takes us right back to the basic article: stupid, sickeningly repetitive violence that bludgeons and degrades'.[19] Kapur's position on the issue of censorship is along these same lines of loyalty to the original power of Phoolan's story. Despite changes to the plot and character content that have evoked major protest from Phoolan Devi herself, along with her outrage at the inclusion of so many prominent and brutal rape scenes, Kapur maintains that 'when we are showing something that does happen on a regular basis in India, why should we censor it out?'

Bandit Queen, as a film about a very popular, almost mythic, figure, inevitably takes some liberties with the details

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[19] Kemp, Philip, 'Bandit Queen.', *Sight and Sound,*. London, 1995, v 5. p. 40.

of the story as Phoolan's life begins to approach legend status. Besides, Kapur's version of *Bandit Queen* applies aspects of conventional formulae that further alienate the story from reality. The film shows the brutality of rape and violence in a way that popular films would never attempt to because of the censors. As already noted, it is clear that reality has been molded to fit the formula of the avenging woman (rape-revenge) and angry young man genres. None of this in any way detracts from the powerful impact of the film's depiction of the almost super-human survival and resilience of Phoolan Devi.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Leon Trotsky, *Rusiyanu Viplavaye Ithihasaya* (History of the Russian Revolution), Volume I, translated by T. Andradi (published by the translator).

During the years of the Second World War, as a young university student, I was working for the LSSP, then proscribed by the colonial government. One of my jobs in the early months of 1941, as I have narrated in *Working Underground*, was to act as a courier between the party and Leslie Goonewardene who was living under cover after evading arrest.

One afternoon Leslie showed me a copy of his summary in Sinhala of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revoilution*. It was, if memory serves me right, under a hundred pages (the original was a massive three-volume work). Inevitably, therefore, Leslie's abridgment was a bald summary of historical narrative and analysis, with nothing of the colour, the drama or the literary power of the original.

If anyone had told me, then, that there would be a time when somebody would attempt a complete translation into Sinhala of this classic work, I would have been sceptical. But this has now happened: T. Andradi, a translator with several other translations of both political and fictional writing to his credit, has brought out the first volume of what is to be a full and unabridged translation of this — one of the major historical works of world literature.

What wouldn't historians give to have had an account by Cromwell or Fairfax of the English Revolution, or of the French by Robespierre or Danton? But with the Russian Revolution, we do have such a narrative by one of its two principal leaders. That alone would be sufficient to make the *History* a precious historical document. But when we add that the author was not only armed with a theory of history that guided him in interpreting the revolution just as much as it did

in helping him to make it, but was also a writer of literary genius, then we have to recognise that the *History* is a book that is literally unique.

Yet Trotsky would probably never have had the time to write this book but for the melancholy fact that he had lost out in the post-revolutionary struggle in the Soviet Union, and had been exiled by the victor, Stalin. It was on the island of Prinkipo, off the coast of Turkey, which was his refuge in the opening years of the decade of the 1930s, that Trotsky wrote his *History*.

I have never had access to the original Russian text of the *History* (which now survives only in a few specialist libraries abroad), except for some brief excerpts published in a Soviet historical journal during the Gorbachev years. Fortunately, Trotsky's book received a superb English translation at the hands of Max Eastman, and this is the text from which Andradi translates. He has approached his exacting task with great care and scrupulousness, striving to be faithful not only to the sense but even, as far as possible, to the structure of each sentence, and to approximate to the stylistic dynamism of the original.

This first volume already contains an abundance of riches. The five days of the February revolution are re-enacted by Trotsky with an almost cinematic vividness: his biographer, Isaac Deutscher, has compared the technique of this account, moving between long shots of mass action and individual close-ups, to that of Eisenstein's *Potemkin*. Or, in a different mode, the pioneering theoretical discourse on dual power that illuminates the unstable division of power, following the February Revolution, between the Soviets, the organs of people's power, and the Provisional Government.

Let me quote a passage from this chapter, which is replęte with historical examples and analogies, as an example of the vigorous rhythms, the metaphorical richness and the dramatic force of Trotsky's writing. He is recapitulating the intervention of the common people of Paris in the struggle between the old regime and the bourgeoisie during the French Revolution:

'How striking is the picture — and how vilely it has been slandered! — of the efforts of the plebeian levels to raise themselves up out of the social cellars and catacombs, and stand forth in that forbidden arena where gentlemen in wigs and silk breeches were settling the fate of the nation. It seemed as though the very foundation of society, tramped underfoot by the cultured bourgeoisie, was stirring and coming to life. Human heads lifted themselves above the solid mass, horny hands stretched aloft, hoarse but courageous voices shouted!'

Trotsky as a Marxist, of course, saw history as determined by objective 'historical laws', but in the book he never loses sight of the fact that it is human beings who make history. The characters who people the pages of the *History* — whether the anonymous masses on the street, their leaders and would-be leaders, or the representatives of the old order — are not theoretical abstractions but flesh-and-blood beings, as alive as in the pages of a good novelist. The half-chapter in which he compares the personalities of the doomed Romanov imperial couple with those of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette is a penetrating demonstration of the weave between individual character and social circumstance in the web of history.

The one major actor in the events who is missing in the foreground of the narrative is Trotsky himself. Excessive modesty was never one of his failings; yet in the writing of the *History*, he carried impersonality to the point of referring to his own role sparingly, and then only in the third person. This was all the more striking since the Stalin regime had been engaged for several years in defacing his name in the historical record.

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Today, when the social order to which the Russian Revolution gave birth has passed into history, one cannot conclude a review of Trotsky's work without considering a further question: How well does the book stand up in the perspective of the seventy years since it was written?

By a pure coincidence, it so happened that when Andradi's translation reached me, I had just finished reading the Cambridge scholar Orlando Figes's book *A People's Tragedy* (1996). Figes's is perhaps the only alternative account of the Russian Revolution that invites comparison with Trotsky's in depth and comprehensiveness, though it doesn't even attempt to compete with the latter in literary distinction.

It's striking that although Figes is non-Marxist and strongly anti-Leninist, his analysis tends to confirm Trotsky's on two fundamental points. One is the historical inevitability of the Russian Revolution. This is in marked contrast with the attempts made by right-wing Western scholars, both during and after the cold war, to argue that Russia could have had a peaceful democratic development but for certain misfortunes. If only Witte's or Stolypin's reforms had been allowed to take their course... If only Russia hadn't been involved in the First World War... If only the last tsar and tsarina had been wiser...

Against these speculations, it is evident, as much from Figes's as from Trotsky's history, that the stubborn insistence of the last tsar on upholding autocracy in the face of a rebellious people was rooted in the imperial system that he inherited. The liberals, while dreaming of a Westminster-style monarchy, were impotent in the face of the tsar's obstinacy, and the moderate socialists trailed behind the liberals. These weren't the weaknesses of individuals merely; they were by-products of Russia's belated political development and the shallowness of its representative institutions.

Trotsky has been much criticised by some Marxists (including his biographer Deutscher) for asserting that Lenin's role in 1917 was so decisive that if circumstances had prevented him from being there, the October Revolution might never have triumphed. Yet reading Figes's history — and in spite of the author's relentless hostility to Lenin — we cannot help coming to the same conclusion. Of the other leaders only Trotsky perhaps had the same single-minded strength of purpose, but he couldn't possibly have filled Lenin's shoes because he was a newcomer to the Bolshevik party.

Yet on the part of both Lenin and Trotsky there was an element of grievous illusion in the enterprise of the October Revolution — a socialist revolution launched in a country with an overwhelming peasant mass. They both assumed that Germany in particular, and Europe in general, was ripe for revolution, and that an advanced socialist Europe would soon rescue the Russian workers' state from its isolation and economic backwardness. These optimistic hopes did not materialise, and the Soviet Union was left to pull itself up by its bootstraps. For this endeavour it paid a heavy price for decades to come, not only in the material privations but also in the iron party dictatorship imposed on its people. Historical reality took a very different course from the roseate dreams of the makers of the revolution.

If the Russian Revolution in its outcome was, as Orlando Figes terms it, 'a people's tragedy', it was also one that, like any classical Greek tragedy, was immanent in its very antecedents and beginnings, and to which there was perhaps no realisable alternative.

Regi Siriwardena

Ayathurai Santhan, *In Their Own Worlds* (S. Godage and Brothers).

The bilingual writer has been a rare phenomenon in Sri Lankan culture. As far as I know, there has been nobody at all who has written creatively in both Sinhala and Tamil. But even the number of people who have written with any distinction in either Sinhala and English or Tamil and English can probably be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Ayathurai Santhan is a recent newcomer to this select group. The Jaffna-based literary critic A.J. Canagaratna says of him in the introduction he has contributed to the new collection: 'He began writing short stories in his mother tongue, Tamil, and then later transcreated them into English. Now he writes both in Tamil and in English.' Distinguishing Santhan from previous Tamil writers in English such as Alagu Subramaniam and Rajah Proctor, Canagaratna says, 'The latter were educated in the English medium during the heyday of British rule. Santhan is a product of the post-independence era when the mother tongue was the medium of education.'

Since I was myself brought up under the linguistic apartheid that has divided our two communities, I can't attempt any comparison between Santhan's writing in Tamil and in English. But his new collection shows that he's a writer who uses the genre of the short story in an individual way. Nearly all the stories are very short indeed, as will be evident from the fact that in this slim volume of 80 pages there are 24 stories. In length, these stories are comparable to the popular magazine or newspaper story, but that's all they have in common with that mode of writing. Santhan doesn't build his stories on the surprising twist as the final resolution of the plot — the stock-in-trade of the popular magazine-story writer — nor is there any element of sensationalism in his writing. Where, as in some of his stories, the ending is unexpected, it isn't because the writer has held back some hidden element of the plot in order to spring it on

us at the end. Instead, the effect of many of his endings is to reveal some facet of human character or behaviour that we have probably not foreseen. Thus, in 'Fellow Traveller' Ragu, taking a train journey with his wife, is disturbed by the fact that the old man in the corner isn't eating breakfast, as everybody else in the compartment is doing. Ragu even puts off having his own breakfast although he is hungry. When the old man takes a parcel out of his bag, Ragu is momentarily satisfied, but it turns out to be only some betel and lime paste. But it's the concluding sentence of the story that rounds it off in a way that is unexpected. When the old man ultimately gets off the train, what Ragu feels is relief. There's a sharper edge to the conclusion of the story titled 'The Worry'. Siva feels guilty because it's four days since he heard that Sella was in hospital and he hasn't been to see him, although he's a good man to whom Siva is much obliged. He finally makes it to the ward, carrying a kilo of grapes and a packet of biscuits, goes to bed 14, where he has been told Sella should be, but he isn't. Then he tries the other section of the ward, but Sella isn't there either. Finally the patient in the next bed tells him,

'Oh, he?...yes, he was on that bed. But he was alright and he was discharged yesterday. He has gone home.'
'Alright? Gone home? What a pity!' said Siva.

As one may see from these two examples, what is characteristic of Santhan's writing is the quiet, sympathetic, but often gently ironic, contemplation of life and human behaviour. The characters who are in the foreground of these stories have no major villainies or heroisms; it's their small egoisms but also the little expressions of empathy or compassion of some of them that engage his attention. Like that of Vasu paying seven rupees for the small globe he buys at a pavement stall when he could have had it for six because he is touched by the child 'who must have come straight from school to look after this shop'. But there's no oversweetening sentimentality in the story: Vasu's friend Giri who accompanies him bursts out laughing in the last line.

As is natural in the work of a Tamil writer today, several of the stories are set in contemporary war-ravaged Jaffna. Reading them, I was reminded of the title of a book that the English poet Edmund Blunden wrote about his experiences in the First World War, *Undertones of War*. In Santhan's book, too, war is present in undertones and not in fortissimos and crescendos. However, this doesn't make them any the less effective in bringing home to the reader the quality of life in a place where the risks of destruction and death are constantly present. Rather, his very indirection and his avoidance of any forcing of the emotional tone enhance the strength of these stories.

In 'The Cuckoos' House', the unnamed character, anxious about the fate of his house under the continual shelling, bursts into sobbing when the tree that had been 'a multi-storied house' for the cuckoos is being felled. In 'An Endless Journey' the lonely rider on the motor-bike, looking forward to reunion with his friends and relations, is terrified by a helicopter which he believes is closing in on him. In 'Health is a Luxury' Siva starts laughing when his friend Bala, who has been an expatriate for ten years, tells him that he shouldn't have roofed his house with asbestos because it's bad for the health. In 'Life's like that' there's a sudden wave of panic, and people start vanishing off the street and shops put up their shutters, and then by the time Mani finds a bus, the alarm is over and life starts moving again. In these stories, like all of Santhan's, the narrative makes its point without obtruding authorial judgment.

The collection could, however, have benefited from some editorial care in production. There are occasional roughnesses in the text that should have been smoothed out; the introduction in several places has 'form' for 'from' and 'from' for 'form', which seems the outcome of typesetting from a handwritten manuscript; and there are throughout oddities in the setting out of matter on the page. I make these points not for the sake of nitpicking, but because I think the book was worthy of more attention in production.

Regi Siriwardena

Chandani Lokuge, *If the Moon Smiles* (Penguin India).

Chandani Lokuge's novel *If the Moon Smiles* is a promising first novel, which on the one hand explores the predicament of expatriates, a life style that to some Sri Lankans would seem extremely attractive. Yet how that life could be a mixed blessing! On the other hand the author intricately carves out the female protagonist's quest for fulfillment and how the more powerful bonds that shape her life paralyse this process; a tedious process which unconsciously shifts from disillusionment to a negation of her individuality. Lokuge's novel does not assert the expatriate's success in an alien land but failure.

The plot evolves around a young conventionally brought-up woman and her family who migrate to Australia. Manthri, the protagonist is the only daughter of an aristocratic Sri Lankan family, brought up in a conservative family background She gains her education in a Buddhist girls' boarding school which would later equip her to be a good wife. After her arranged marriage she emigrates to Australia with her rigid and insensitive husband. Trapped in an unhappy marriage in an alien land, Manthri's despair deepens as her Australianised children transgress conventional norms which she conformed to and slip from her grasp. The growing estrangement from her two children Nelum and Devak increases her sense of isolation. As Manthri continues to suffer from disillusionment with what her present life has to offer, she inevitably take refuge in her memories of an idyllic past.

When reading the novel the reader cannot overlook the author's preoccupation with Manthri's inability to prove her virginity on her wedding night. 'The crushed sheet bears no stain.' This implicitly dominates the complex and many-stranded plot. Placed in a situation, as Manthri, a conventionally brought up young woman who is subjected to an arranged marriage, is, it is very like;y that a friction may arise between the husband and the wife. It is possible that

this would leave a permanent tattoo that can damage their marriage life. But the cause for every problem that arises as the plot develops finally narrows down to Manthri and her failure. Its aftermath not only affects Manthri and Mahendra but is passed on to the next generation. The effect one incident, in the primary stages of their parent's marriage, has on the other characters is extreme. The reader cannot fail to note how the protagonist's incompetence seems to be the driving force behind the plot. Manthri has to take treatment in a psychiatric hospital, while Mahendra who, after loosing hope in his wife, insensitively plans out the future of his two children, is isolated in his own home. His hard-earned money in the land of opportunity is to be spent on his wife's hospital bills. He is doubly punished when his ambitions for his children work vice versa. Devak, for whom he plans a medical career, fails to exhibit such potential for an academic calling, while Nelum, who is not seen as anything more than marriage property, enters medical college. To her father's frustration, Nelum is an independent young woman driven by self-will.

Just as Mahendra inflexibly holds high expectations for his children and maps out their future, the novel from the very beginning forecasts great events that the reader is to expect. The characters have great expectations for themselves or for their children. Yet the novel does not evolve around such expectations coming true but on their reversal. The expectations parents have for their children become fragile sandcastles that would soon be washed away. Manthri's parents bring her up in the loving cocoon of their household to give her away in marriage to a suitable partner. Even though outward factors may facilitate her marriage with Mahendra, Manthri is caught in a loveless marriage very much removed from the life she led at her parents' home. Manthri's expectations for her children too are crippled as they change and she fails to compromise. Manthri withdraws from the harsh present-day realities by taking refuge in blissful childhood memories. The bleakness of her life in Australia

stands in stark contrast to the lush green hillside village of her parents.

The gaiety and the happiness of Manthri's carefree childhood the reader is made to experience at the very beginning of the text are frozen after the protagonist's marriage. The lyrical narrative one would observe at the beginning of the novel is very suggestive of Manthri's childhood. Her despair and agony in not being able to come up to her husband's expectations and her children's betrayal of their father's ambitions drives her to a condemnation of herself. Her spirit is crippled and her outlook towards life is darkened by gloom. The staccato narrative of the latter part of the novel complements perfectly the mood of the protagonist whose sense of dislocation increases.

The protagonist's narrative voice is dominated by her pessimistic and patriarchal outlook towards life. However much the author may attempt to withdraw her involvement with the narrative voice, the author too at times seems to be confused when her narrative is affected by Manthri's despair and pessimism. Lokuge's perceptions are overshadowed by the more dominating despondency that has taken over Manthri's household. Nelum's intellectual brilliance is not seen as a celebration, but as a defiance of the more overwhelming patriarchal values. Driven by a strong sense of will-power, Nelum takes her life into her hands, breaking away from the ties that paralyse her mother.

Being a migrant herself, the author has firsthand experience of the expatriate's life in the newly acquired homeland. But more than the predicament of the expatriates, the simple yet insightful manner in which Lokuge explores her female protagonist's psyche from her childhood is noteworthy. Even though not strongly expressed in words by Manthri, Lokuge's deep understanding of Manthri's lively yet confused inner self in childhood and of the deeply agonized and spiritless Manthri as she is forced to encounter the more tedious obstacles life has in store for her is noteworthy.

Manthri's childhood is one of carefree happiness, which is cherished even after marriage. She is an energetic child

who constantly encountered her parent's sorrow at their lack of a son. As the young protagonist attains puberty she is forced to bid farewell to her childhood and enter a new adult world — a world strictly confined to the company of females that sets limitations to her freedom. Though Manthri experiences the biological changes taking place in her body, she fails to understand these changes. For Manthri they only deprive her of the untroubled childhood she longs for on entering the protected adolescent world. The education she gains at the Buddhist school remains theoretical and detached from her own world, which she tries hard to understand but without any success.

Lokuge's portrayal of her protagonist is noteworthy. She brings a deep insight to the physical and biological growth of the protagonist. The reader is well aware of the protagonist's past and present, her longings and her desires, and how she continues to fall back on her prescribed role as a mother and a wife — the absolute opposite from Mahendra who does not seem to possess a past or any deep emotion. This helps the author to clearly distinguish between the husband and the wife. He remains a one-dimensional flat character just as in Manthri's life he remains a detached husband-figure.

Buddhism and traditional values are two aspects that dominate Lokuge's novel. The introduction to the novel that falls on a poya day is not a mere coincidence. Manthri's childhood is enriched by the principles of Buddhism. Mahendra and Manthri's visit to a Buddhist temple with Mahendra's mother during one of their visits to Sri Lanka shows that Mahendra too comes from a family that believes in religious rituals. Though both their lives and the family backgrounds from which they come are deeply influenced by religion, it is ironical that both husband and wife fail to understand themselves or their partners. The difference of the children's and parents' cultural backgrounds results in a strain. The parents fail to overcome the traumatic process of adjusting. Once the children fail to live up to their standards, the parents fail to make compromises. Both

Mahendra and Manthri are trapped in a frustrating situation. Religion remains in their lives, only theoretically.

The traditional values that Manthri and Mahendra uphold do not support them; yet their relentless effort to inculcate cultural values that belong to a society they left behind, do not spread beyond the artifacts, which sustain Mahendra's pride in being a Sri Lankan.

The unexamined and unquestioned mentality that a multitude of conventionally brought-up young men and women carry continues to burden their migrant experience, and the burden is intensified when they are forced to encounter the new socio cultural milieu. This makes one wonder to what extent religious or traditional values can equip one to encounter the new challenges. Can traditional values that have existed over generations support one to overcome the diverse obstacles life has to offer? Or are such values to remain merely a theoretical reflection of our heritage?

In a plot that is strictly confined to the household of the protagonist, Lokuge introduces abrupt diversions. The author focuses on different situations or introduces new characters. These turning-points seem abrupt and fail to complement the continuity of the plot. They leave the impression that the author on second thoughts has tried to create diversity by inserting momentary turning-points.

When the family falls apart and when each of its members takes refuge in their own worlds, Manthri has no world of her own to fall back on.. She remains mother and wife. The only alternative the migrant protagonist is offered is to come 'home'. But what actually is meant by 'home' in this context is ambiguous. One's desire in migrating to an alien land is to settle in a new homeland, leaving behind everything the original homeland has to offer. Yet if the migrants fail to totally submerge themselves in the adopted society, the outcome is an acute sense of dislocation, not essentially within the society they live in but within themselves. For Nelum and Devak Sri Lanka remains a 'memory' of a distant faraway land which once used to be their home but now has no claim over them that they can

accept. It is merely a fragment of their parents' past. While for Mahendra Sri Lanka is a 'war zone' which is not suitable for decent living, Manthri too tries to break away from the confinements of her home by going to Sri Lanka. But her retaliation is a momentary solution and offers no alternatives to the patriarchy that oppresses her.

Even though the author writes of a very familiar issue, the subtle manner in which she presents her story is very authentic. The author is inevitably made to feel the traumas and the dilemmas the protagonist undergoes. This is the darker truth of migrant experience, which to the outside world may appear happy and successful. The seemingly attractive life the migrant experiences could be a mixed blessing. Manthri's plight, her confusions, her failure, are represntative of a multitude of her contemporaries. Though not a success story with a happy conclusion, Lokuge's *If the Moon Smiles* is very much a story of our times.

Sreemali Herat

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