Economic Liberalization and the Changing Role

of Sinhalese Women in Sri Lanka

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by

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Abstract

Macro-economic policy changes implemented by the United National Party government came into power in 1977, had a myriad of ramifications on every social institution in Sri Lanka. The new economic policies were directed towards a liberalized economy which intensely integrated the country's economy with the world economy. While the society and culture as a whole went through a massive change, this change was experienced in different ways by diverse groups within the country, depending on their social and cultural backgrounds. This social transformation had a unique impact on women. Women were increasingly included in the process of development, with increased opportunities for education, work, and other social involvements, opening up new avenues to be economically independent while liberating them from their oppressive conventional roles. Thus the new economic changes created a social structure which had potential for decreasing conventional forms of patriarchy. Nevertheless, the new social structure deprived women of traditional social support systems thus demanding their service within the household, incarcerating them within conventional gender roles. This thesis explores the impact of the new economic policies on Sinhalese women by comparing and contrasting the effects of these policies on two distinct groups: rural and urban women. Two hundred women in each location were sampled using a questionaire and from this sample sixty women from each location were interviewed in depth. The effects of the changing economic policies on the areas of education, work, marriage, family, politics and leisure activities were seen to have many different effects on rural as compared to urban women, with class adding a further important dimension.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my father who placed the value of education above everything else in our lives and to my mother who devoted her life to making that dream a reality. I also dedicate this thesis to Mrs. Swineetha Gunasekara, my dear teacher, without whose love and devotion, this would not have been possible.

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COLOMBO DISTRICT

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Introduction

The Problem

In 1977, the Sri Lankan government adopted open economic policies which integrated the country directly into the world economy. This was a result of structural adjustments implemented on the advice of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and was a conditional agreement linked to the loans granted by those institutions. These structural adjustments included, amongst others: liberalization of imports, promotion of export oriented activities, promotion of private enterprise with direct foreign investment, depreciation of the local currency in order to maintain international competition, and weakening of trade union influences on wage rates (Lakshman, 1996: 1). The state had directly regulated the economy of the country until 1977 and was it under the control of a bureaucracy marked by political patronage. After 1977, the economy was forced into an "uncontrolled free-play of market forces in all areas" (Gunasinghe, 1984: 200).

Sri Lanka had achieved independence in 1948 from British imperial rule formally enforced in 1815. Its level of national income was high compared to many other Asian countries. It had a high balance of payment with large foreign exchange reserves, a thriving export oriented plantation economy, a favourably developed economic and social infrastructure, an educated and well fed population, and a proficient public administration. There has been an average growth rate of gross national product of three percent, although this has not been consistently maintained over the years. The average growth rate in the post-1977 period, until 1983, has been 5.8 percent (Cuthbertson & Athukorala, 1991: 300). Compared to many other developing countries, Sri Lanka has sustained a quality of life that is "exceptionally good in relation to her per capita income", even with these asymmetrical growth rates (Isenman, 1980 as quoted by Cuthbertson &

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Athukorala, 1991: 302). Nevertheless, the massive economic changes that occurred in the post-1977 period entirely transformed the economic structure of the country.

A massive social transformation accompanied these economic changes. No single social institution in the country was not somehow affected by these economic policy changes. Education, the polity, marriage and family life, government, law and even religion, the arts, and literature were affected by the invisible hand of the money economy. This social transformation was felt and experienced by both men and women. However, there was a unique and conspicuous effect on the lives of women in Sri Lanka. One of the major consequences of the new economic policies was the expansion of the labour market. This resulted in a significant decline of unemployment in the post-1977 period (Cuthbertson & Athukorala, 1991: 297). Although 75 percent of the labour force comprised of men, according to the 1981 census, employment growth after 1977 attracted more women into the labour force. This occurred mainly in two forms: an expanded foreign labour market for unskilled labour in the form of domestic servants (that resulted in a massive labour migration to the Middle East) and the establishment of garment industries in many parts of the country attracting unskilled female labour (Perera, 1989: 64-65).

While both low-income urban and rural women benefitted by these changes through increased employment opportunities, they were exposed to new forms of exploitation as well as constraints. However, to realize these economic benefits, many of them (who otherwise would have continued their education) had to sacrifice their educational goals.[1] At the same time, they were highly vulnerable to many types of exploitation such as poor working conditions, low wages,

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[1] This does not mean that every Sinhalese woman who enters the labour market at a young age would have otherwise continued her education. There are many obstacles, mainly economic in nature, which women in lower socio-economic classes have experienced in pursuing their education.

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long working hours, emotional and physical abuse, without any of the provisions for protection granted by unionized activity (Hettiarachchi, 1992; Voice of Women, 1982; Dias & Weerakoon, 1995). The economic advancement of rural women adversely affected the lives of the urban middle class. This is due to the fact that many low-income women who would otherwise have become domestic help to middle and upper class urban families, either migrated to the Middle East or entered the garment industry. Although the latter type of work is sometimes both economically and socially more restrictive, it is seen as comparatively more prestigious than domestic labour. The expansion of the private sector provided more employment opportunities for educated women in the middle and upper classes. However, the tendency to live in nuclear family structures which had been the trend in the country for a few decades, did not provide urban working women with the traditional family support which it still provided for rural working women. This made urban working women the other vulnerable group.

The inclusion of women in economic development has thus created a highly complex situation that has varied depending on regional (urban-rural) and class differences. In the cities, women whose husbands earn a good income are compelled to leave their occupations and stay home in order to take care of the children and other household duties. They also dodge the burden of the `double day of work' by returning to the domestic sphere. Low-income urban women either choose to work in the local industrial sector or migrate to the Middle East as domestic helpers. In a patriarchal society where the mother is the most important figure in the lives of the children, Middle Eastern employment has created a vacuum in the family that in most cases could not be filled by any other family member, thus leading to family disorganization. In return for the severe exploitation they suffer, they face an uncertain future. Women working in the industrial sector

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face the ordeal of being exploited both at work and at home. In both cases, the social stigma attached to this type of work creates severe emotional stress for these mostly young women. In the rural sector, low-income women are mainly attracted to the garment industry which gives them a stable income. Education, which was the only source of upward social mobility for villagers, has become less important due to these economic and political factors. Thus, the short term solution sought by joining the labour force at an early age, has become an impediment for the upward mobility of these women.

Statistically, employment opportunities increased for women. In other words, women have been integrated into the development process. However, do increased employment opportunities mean an advancement in the status of women? Are they actively integrated into the process of development? How is this `development of women' perceived by Sri Lankan women? Does it hold the same meaning for Sri Lankan women as it does for western women? Do Sri Lankan women want to liberate themselves or do they think that they are already liberated? Have the new economic policies led to the emancipation of women? These are the questions that come to mind when we try to understand the impact of economic liberation for Sri Lankan women.

Basic Assumptions

The assumptions on which I based my research included the following issues: One was that the reassertion of a new form of patriarchy as a result of the social changes realised by economic policy changes. The new form of patriarchy is different from the historically prevalent Hindu Indian and the European Victorian models which subjects women to contradictory social pressures. On the one hand, the economic changes that occurred after 1977 provided women with

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better opportunities to enter the labour market, to escape from household bondage, to become economically independent and socially more liberated. However, the conflicts created by these processes have reinforced a family structure that pressures women to accept the conventional roles of women, for instance, those of `mother' and `wife'. On the other hand, the type of labour that is in high demand attracts less educated women from low income families, thus compelling them to abandon their plans for higher education and better employment and to concentrate instead on immediate economic benefits.

The second issue is whether upward economic and social mobility resulting from the new economic changes as predicted by policy makers and tests to see if women actually were the beneficiaries of this socio-economic development.

In order to investigate these hypotheses, it was necessary to focus on several different areas. My objective is to study the areas of women's education, paid and unpaid labour, marriage and family life, political and other social involvements, and leisure activities, to analyse the changes made in these social institutions with the penetration of a market economy and how these institutional changes have affected the lives of women. Each variable has been divided into several sub-categories in order to cover a wide range of experiences. Based on the hypotheses, several research questions were formulated to focus the interviews.

The Rationale

My thesis is that the source of many of the disadvantages faced by women in Sri Lanka today are not due to their exclusion from development. Rather, they have been intensely integrated despite the socio-cultural constraints of a conventional patriarchal social structure. But

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development has had varying effects on women across different social classes as well as urban and rural areas. Despite women's increased participation in wage employment and other new opportunities, post-1977 changes have brought new `pressures' on women by way of a new form of patriarchy which nullify the positive benefits of development on rural and urban women in different ways.

In order to achieve economic independence, women have been further oppressed and exploited, either by shouldering the burden of a double day of work or by giving up their future prospects to work at low wage jobs, depending on their class situation. In either case, their only way out seems to be found by sacrificing economic freedom and returning to domestic servitude. For some, this is an escape from one form of exploitation into another which they consider to be better. For others, abnegation of their talents, education and personal independence, compensate for the family chaos they can avoid by such sacrifices.

Relevant Theoretical Literature

I do not intend to adopt one theoretical model since I do not think any one theoretical framework is sufficient in understanding this complex socio-economic situation of Sinhalese women. I will review the existing literature in relation to the thesis in four major areas.

(1) Economic development (underdevelopment), economic

   liberalization and social change;

(2) Women and education;

(3) Women and the economy; and

(4) Women, marriage and family life.

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Economic Development

The development and underdevelopment of the world is viewed by many theorists as two parts of a single imbricated picture. Although there are many subtle differences, many development theories come to the same conclusion: that underdevelopment is not original or traditional, and in large part is a historical product of past and continuing economic and other relations that exist between developed and under-developed countries.[2] The penetration of European imperialist capitalism and later US industrial capitalism into the most isolated sectors of the underdeveloped world resulted in a change in the economic, political, social and cultural institutions in those countries which in turn contributed to their underdevelopment. The development of these countries is perceived to be achieved only by breaking away from those global relations, through political independence, providing the impetus for development through independent dynamics; in Amin's words, by the transition from a Eurocentric model to an autocentric national paradigm (Amin, 1974, Vol 1).

In the last two decades, the economies of many Third World countries are being converted into free market economies. This type of change unquestionably presumes a thorough integration of the national economy into the world economy which according to many development theorists would undoubtedly result in further underdevelopment. However, the main objective of free market economics is supposedly to accelerate the industrial development of these societies, in order that they may achieve rapid socio-economic development.

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[2] Here, I am referring to many studies done by various theorists on European expansion, neo-colonialism and the underdevelopment of the third world; A.G. Frank, Dudly Seers, Horowitz, Philip Reno on Latin America, Samir Amin, Paul Baran, Hamza Alavi, Amir Khusro, Malcom Caldwell, S.B. de Silva on Asia, Giovanni Arrighi, Terance Hopkins, Frank Fannon on Africa, Robert Rhodes, Emmanuel Wallerstein, Eric Wolf on European expansion.

The most affected by the process of underdevelopment are the underprivileged categories within those societies such as women and lower socio-economic groups. Women are doubly oppressed, within the underdevelopment process itself and under patriarchal social structures of their respective societies. Backwardness, sexism and new forms of patriarchy, which were part of the ideologies that were instrumental in capitalist accumulation were introduced to the Third World through colonization and continue with global capitalist penetration. The creation of concepts like `backward nature', and the ideals such as `domesticated housewife' were utilized in the further development of the capitalist model. Concepts such as `modernization' or `westernization', which have not been able to give full equality or autonomy to women in the west become worthless concepts in the development of women in the Third World (Bossen, 1975; Leacock & Etienne, 1980; Leacock, 1981 (b); Mies, 1988; Aguilar, 1993).

The Sri Lankan case adds a new dimension to this perceived contradiction. If this integration has paved the way to achieve the expected development, advancement in the position of women can also be anticipated. Yet, since capitalist development presupposes patriarchy, one can only be skeptical of such a development. The price for the development achieved has to be the further underdevelopment of women. I will argue that while the post-1977 economic policies have resulted in some economic advances for women, social pressures based on the patriarchal family system have prevented women from benefitting fully from these changes.

Women and Education

The publication of Ester Boserup's book titled Women's Role in Economic Development (1970), was a significant contribution to feminist literature. It provided a framework to evaluate

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women's contribution to development in non-remunerative terms. Boserup considers education of women to be a significant factor enhancing women's emancipation. However, Beneria and Sen (1981) argue that the significance Boserup attributes to education as an avenue for women's emancipation mystifies the reality concerning the situation of educated women. The major problems confronted by educated women are their high rate of unemployment and the double day of work (Beneria & Sen, 1981). Although many short-term strategies implemented in advancing the status of women have actually elevated the position of women, the long-term problem, the problem of class and gender hierarchies, still remains.

The literature on women's education in Sri Lanka confirms the theory developed by Beneria and Sen. Sri Lanka is a country in the Third World which has a comparatively very high level of education for women. The values regarding education seem to be extremely positive and gender neutral (Jayaweera, 1989b). Free education up to the university level was highly conducive to these high standards of education and provided the opportunity for women to become highly educated (Jayaweera, 1989b; Samarasinghe, 1989). However, there are two types of problems faced by educated women. One is the "hidden trends" which have been promoting the reproduction and legitimization of gender roles (Jayaweera, 1989b). The other is the problem of escaping from the gender stereotypes that require women's time equally at home and at work, thus creating a `double day' of work for women (Jayaweera, 1986; Gunatilake, 1987). Due to the significant availability of employment opportunities in a wide variety of fields, there is a decline of the influence of gender on the choice of education. Girls are entering more and more into once male dominated areas of study (Gunawardena, 1992). Nevertheless, the problems faced by educated women still remain and obstruct their future advancement.

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My argument here is not only that educated women have to face numerous constraints that thwart their further advancement, but women are also being urged either to give up their education totally or to ignore their educational prospects. Social class is considered to be a factor that impedes the education of women in the face of development either through domestication or by absorbing them into the labour force as cheap and unskilled labour.

Women and Employment

Theories on women and employment tend to focus on two issues: the economic nature of women's work and the political nature of women's work. Both hold that development has adversely affected women. The former argue that women are either deliberately excluded from development due to the delusion that women are incapable of actively participating in modern male-dominated scientific production or they are marginally included. The efforts made to overcome this discrimination sometimes worsen the situation. For instance, increased employment means increased cheap labour, the double day of work and the confrontation with modern values that conflict with traditional economic roles affecting feelings of fulfilment (Tinker & Bramsen, 1976; Tinker, 1990; Beneria, 1982; Gannage, 1986; Beneria & Stimpson, 1987; Faulkner & Lawson, 1991). Both theories argue that full participation of women in the development process under equal gender relations which provides them with economic independence is necessary to emancipate them. They also maintain that economic contribution is one of the major determinants of the position of women (O'Barr, 1976; Blumberg, 1988). It is also believed that women's non-renumerated productive and reproductive work in the households has to be counted in order to valuate the actual economic contribution of women (Boserup, 1970;

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Waring, 1988).

The other theory claims that development has encapsulated women in a world economic network in which they are abused and exploited. Until women organize themselves, this exploitation will continue and women's work will be meaningless for their emancipation (Peattie & Rein, 1983; Ostrander, 1973; Dobbins, 1977; Charlton, 1984). The literature on women and work in Sri Lanka provides evidence to support these views. Development creates both advantages and disadvantages for women. Although development has advanced the quality of life without gender discrimination, many development strategies which ignore conditions specific to men and women, have become extremely conducive to the further subordination of women (Logos, 1981; CENWOR, 1989; Jayaweera, 1986; Jayasinghe, 1982; Gunarathna & Herath, 1993). My argument is that within the patriarchal social structure which capitalism tends to recreate and perpetuate, increased employment for women even in their full capacity, would not benefit women, but rather, would cause their underdevelopment.

Women, Marriage and Family Life

It is a truism in feminist literature that the patriarchal family is a major oppressive institution for women. Even if women have been able to overcome male domination within the other social institutions, they are still being dominated by their husbands, mainly through a sexual division of labour that, while it is socially and culturally created, is given a psychological and biological justification (O'Barr, 1976; Leacock, 1981 (a); Hammond, 1973). Capitalist development continues to assure the roles of wife and mother as essential to the continuity of the family. The status attached to these roles continues to be subordinated to the dominant status of

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husband and father and in some cultures degraded even below the status of the son. Therefore, in order to grasp the effect of development on women, it is essential to understand the gender inequality assimilated into development by analysing reproductive and socio-cultural structures (Huston, 1979; Brydon & Chant, 1989; Neuhouser, 1989; Mallon, 1987).

Until the socio-cultural transformation caused by colonialism and capitalism, many societies possessed egalitarian as well as matrilineal social structures where women occupied equal, higher, or less oppressive statuses. The public and private spheres were reciprocal and both men and women had equal opportunity to participate in both (Leacock, 1981b).[3] Sri Lanka is one of those societies that is still considered to have a family structure which is mother centred, which provides more freedom for women and is thus not an agent of oppression (Jayaweera, 1986; 1989b). This freedom allows women to be integrated into development although the family has faced many adverse effects because of development (Dias, 1982).[4] While noting that the Sri Lankan family is `mother centred', it will be argued that it is changing and becoming an agent of oppression for women under modern development, through the recreation of the public-private dichotomy which was itself a product of colonialism. These changes have affected rural Sri Lankan women who did not experience the effects of this public-private dichotomy. The conflicting social constraints thrust upon women by the liberalized economy are examined as a major cause of a new form of patriarchal social system.

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[3] Tiano (1984) claims that the public-private dichotomy is misleading when applied to the Third World where it has to be treated as a "continuum rather than a dichotomy".

[4] Gannage (1986) has made the same observation regarding women garment workers to whom family becomes a source of support, not a means of oppression.

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The Setting

Sri Lanka is a small island with an area of 25,332 square miles in the Indian ocean, off the

southern coast of India. It is approximately the same size as Tasmania or the Irish Republic

(Jacob, 1973: 1).

> The island of Sri Lanka is an extension of the Indian peninsula, separated from the
> mainland by a narrow and shallow strip of sea, the Palk Strait, which is only about
> twenty-five miles in width at its narrowest point. The island's maximum length
> from north to south is about 270 miles and its maximum breadth from east to west
> is about 140 miles. A mountainous core in the south-central portion of the island
> contains elevations of between 3,000 and 7,000 feet, with the highest peak
> reaching more than 8,000 feet. About one-fifth of the total land area is occupied
> by the hills, mountains, and plateaus of the central highlands. From this core of
> highlands, the elevation falls to a coastal plain, rather abruptly except in the
> Southwest. Here the hills and gorges of the highlands merge more gradually with
> the ridges and gullies of the coastal plain. The remaining four-fifths of the land's
> area consists of the flat or rolling land of the narrow southwestern and eastern
> coastal plains and the broad plains to the north of the highlands (Fernando &
> Kearny, 1979: 1).

The climate varies widely throughout the country. Close proximity to the equator makes

the temperature warmer, but as the land elevates, the temperature gets cooler. The country can

be divided into two climatic regions: the wet zone and the dry zone, according to seasonal

distributions and rainfall. The mean temperature in the coastal dry zone is approximately 28

degrees Celsius and is the highest in the country. However Colombo, the Capital City, has a mean

temperature of around 27 degrees. The central highlands have the lowest temperature at around

15 degrees, sometimes dipping below 10 degrees in December (ESS, 1992: 1).

The south-west zone and the central hills contain approximately seventy percent of the

island's population, a large proportion of whom are rural villagers (UN, 1986: 2). Colombo

experienced a population density of 2,956 persons per square kilometre in 1992. In other major

cities it is approximately 600 persons per square kilometre. In Jaffna, the northernmost city, it is

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942 per square kilometre and the rest of the country has approximately between 30-400 persons per square kilometre. The average density of population is 279 per square kilometre (ESS, 1993: 12).

The population growth rate in 1992 was one percent, which is very low compared to other South Asian countries. The crude birth and death rates are twenty and six per thousand respectively (ESS, 1993: 5).[5]

In 1991/92 approximately 32 percent of the total land of the country was made up of forests and woodlands, 29 percent cropped land, 8 percent irrigated agricultural land, and 4 percent large inland water (ESS, 1993: 19-20). Textiles and precious stones are the major exports alongside crops such as tea, rubber, coconut and minor export crops. With the restoration of the major irrigation schemes after independence in 1948, the dry zone has once again become the granary of the island.[6] Tourism and temporary employment abroad are presently other major sources of income. Hydro-electricity is the only source of energy that Sri Lanka produces. Therefore, 25 percent of the country's foreign exchange is spent on importing petroleum products (UN, 1986: 6). The unemployment rate of the country in 1981/82 was 11.7 percent as a percentage of the labour force or 38 percent of the population (ESS, 1993: 14).

The ethnic and religious composition of Sri Lanka is also important in understanding the country's social, cultural, economic and political structures. A majority of the population, 74 percent, is Sinhalese; 18.2 percent of the people are Tamils; 7.4 percent are Muslims; and 2.3

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[5] The crude birth and death rates respectively for Bangladesh are 35 & 14; for India 30 & 11; for Malaysia 28 & 5; and for Pakistan 42 & 12 (ESS, 1993:5).

[6] The self-sufficient agricultural system in the dry zone of ancient Sri Lanka was based on the massive irrigation schemes. These irrigation systems were discovered and restored under the aegis of different governments starting even before independence and these areas produce a major part of the country's food crops.

percent are Burghers (Census Report, 1981). Sinhalese are mainly Buddhists (69.3%) with a minority of Catholics and Christians who were converted to these religions for various reasons during European domination. Sinhalese have been divided into two groups: up country and low country Sinhalese. Low country includes the Maritimes and adjacent areas which were under foreign rule for a very long period. The up country, or Kandyan Sinhalese, are the group of Sinhalese who live in the central highlands, the area which was under native rule until 1815. Although internal migration in the country has highly blended these two communities, the division has not completely disappeared.

Tamils can also be divided into two groups: Sri Lankan Tamils who are the descendants of the early South Indian immigrants, and Indian Tamils who were brought to the country by the British as plantation labourers. They speak Tamil which is a major Dravidian language of South India. The majority of the Tamils, who are 15.5 percent of the total religious population, are Hindus, with a minority of Christians and Catholics (Census Report, 1981). Tamils comprise a majority of the population in the northern and eastern parts of the country.

The Muslims originally were the descendants of Arab traders who came to the country from about the tenth century A.D. However, continuous migration of Indian Muslims later in the history of Sri Lanka increased the Muslim population of Sri Lanka. Most of them speak Tamil as their main language, but the Muslims who live in Sinhalese areas are also proficient in Sinhalese.[7] All of them are Muslim in religion and comprise 7.6 percent of the total religious population (Census Report, 1981).

The Burghers are the descendants of Europeans who lived in the country for several

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[7] This is common to all ethnic groups.

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centuries, from 1505 to 1948. They are Dutch or Portuguese Burghers, and Eurasians who are mainly the descendants of the British. Almost all of them are Christian and speak English as their mother tongue (ESS, 1993: 8).

The literacy rate in the country, which was 89 percent in 1990, compared to other South Asian countries, is substantially high (ESS, 1993: 94).[8] The introduction of the free government education system in 1944, (which provided free primary, secondary and tertiary education) granted the opportunity for children in lower economic levels to enter higher education. The education system of the British colonialists, geared towards the political and administrative needs of colonial rule, did not provide equal facilities to the entire community.

> English medium schools were restricted in number and were intended to meet the needs of the children from well-to-do families. Their curriculum was modelled on that of prototypes in England. Their goal was to ensure success at the examinations of Cambridge and London Universities. British concepts of equality and selectivity and fear of political unrest led to a very low growth of higher educational institutions, which at the end of colonial rule were confined to a medical college, a law college, and a university college which prepared students for examinations in London (Jayaweera, 1979: 134).

Although the British wanted to restrict English education to a small privileged group in order to prevent possible threats that could have arisen from uprisings of the masses against colonial rule, it was ironically a small group from the English educated elite who pioneered the Sinhalese National Movement in early twentieth century.

> By promoting the growth of English language schools, the government also facilitated the transmission to the Ceylonese of the writings of English social and political thinkers like Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, G.D.H. Cole, Harold Laski - whose work had a deep influence on the modern Ceylonese trend of thought. This resulted in the development of increased social awareness among the local population which led in turn to the growth of the Sinhalese Nationalist Movement

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[8] In 1990, the literacy rate in India was 48%, in Pakistan 35%, in Indonesia 77%, in Singapore 87% and in Hongkong 88%. In the same year Thailand had the highest literacy rate at 93% (ESS, 1993:94).

(Jacob, 1973: 14).

The changes which occurred in Sri Lankan society with universal suffrage (granted to women in 1931), tended to direct the government's attention to the inequality of the masses compared to the high privileges enjoyed by the elites. The change in education policy, making the mother tongue (Sinhala, or Tamil, or English for the Burghers and Muslims) the medium of instruction in primary education in 1944, along with a free system of education in 1948, brought about a high literacy rate, and a high level of education in the country.

Research Locations

In order to answer the research questions, field study over a six month period in 1994 was carried out in Sri Lanka. To include the urban/rural difference and the up country/ low country difference in the sample, two field locations were selected. One was `Pahalawela'[9], a traditional up country village in the Nuwara Eliya district. `Up country' includes the mountainous region of Sri Lanka which is situated over a thousand feet above sea level. It was the last place in the country to come under foreign domination. People believe that traditional Sri Lankan culture has been preserved here.[10] Nuwara Eliya district is the highest mountainous area in the up country region. The villages in the Nuwara Eliya district were not heavily colonized even after the area came under British rule in the eighteenth century. Nor were they much affected by the processes of modernization or urbanization in the post independence era before 1977. Thus, more or less

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[9] `Pahalawela' is the pseudonym used to refer to the traditional village where I did my field work in order to preserve the anonymity of the village and its inhabitants and the confidentiality of my respondents.

[10] At least this is the belief of the inhabitants of the area and is a source of great local pride.

traditional Sri Lankan life styles make the villages recognizably traditional.

The other location was `Melvin Town', an electoral ward in the city of Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka.[11] It was selected on the basis of its social class structure. This electoral ward included the residential areas of all the different social classes living in the city. This selection was based on census data as well as on common sense knowledge of the area. As mentioned earlier, due to the time constraints and to keep cultural differences to a minimum, the sample was selected only from the Sinhalese community which forms the majority of the population.

The city of Colombo, the capital city of the country, was considered to be the best urban location due to its heterogenous population. The population of Colombo includes all social classes; represents all the religions, different occupational groups, people from different educational levels, and enjoying a variety of life styles. The city of Colombo which is the country's metropolis and the hub of its social relations, provided the best urban location, to conduct a study on the impact of economic changes on women.

Since the population of the city of Colombo consists of more than sixteen hundred thousand people, it was necessary to select a representative sample. At the same time, it was essential to preserve the wide variety of socio-economic differences within the sample. Colombo is divided into forty-eight electoral wards. According to the common knowledge of the people living in the area, and the municipal administrators, the population in these different wards are distributed according to social classes although there are no strict rules for this division.[12] The

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[11] This area will be referred to as `Melvin Town' for the same reason of confidentiality.

[12] For instance, the municipal ward of Cinnamon Gardens is an `upper class' area. Yet, my previous research demonstrated that the same electoral ward included a considerable number of low income people. Similarly

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high density of the population within the city made it impossible to choose more than one electoral ward due to time, money and many other constraints. Also it was decided to limit the study to one geographical area where accessibility to various facilities was important. The dependent variables such as social class and education could otherwise be affected by this particular factor. Therefore, I had to make a judgement call in selecting Melvin Town as my urban research location, a municipal ward that contains a mix of social classes.

Selecting a village location, although not as complicated as the selection of the urban location, presented some problems. The decision to select a traditional village in comparison to the urban location was influenced by my interest in seeing how far economic and social changes have penetrated into the rural regions of Sri Lanka. Within the rural sector itself, there were numerous locations that had already been affected by westernization as well as urbanization. Since the up country had been heavily affected by the plantation economy, it was decided to choose a village where the traditional Sinhalese culture had been preserved to a certain extent. The only way this could be done was to rely on public knowledge and make a judgement call. There were several villages in the Nuwara Eliya district which are commonly held to be traditional villages. Most of them do not have a proper road system and, therefore, a proper transportation system. However, every village has a regular bus service, although sometimes the buses run only a few times a day. Several issues had to be considered before selecting the village. It had to be accessible either by bus or by car as I had to go back and forth from Colombo to the village. I had to find a place to stay in the village as well as making the contacts necessary to conduct research in the village. Being a Sri Lankan and a Sinhalese myself, I did not face specific problems such

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Wanathamulla is a municipal ward that consists of a majority of low-income dwellings, yet, due to the increase in land values, it has become a residential area attractive to high income groups.

as language barriers and my familiarity with many areas of the country made the task of selecting a field easier.

I visited Nuwara Eliya in September 1994. Before selecting the village, I met with the officials of the Youth Services Department and the Government Divisional Secretariat who is in charge of various areas in Nuwara Eliya district. We examined the maps and statistics of the area. After staying three days in Nuwara Eliya, we managed to obtain adequate information about several villages in one electorate in the district which were considered to be `traditional' by people knowledgable about the area. We started visiting these villages one by one. Some of the villages on our list had to be omitted after visiting them for various reasons. We found that some of them were not traditional according to our definition of traditional villages which was based on the accessibility through a transportation system that could have affected the traditional social system of the village. Some of them could not be reached by a vehicle so that we had to walk miles to get there. Since I had only a limited period of stay in the country, the time constraint had to be considered a top priority. Therefore, we decided to select the village `Pahalawela' which was a traditional village and one of the first villages in the electorate to have a bus route.

Methods Used

The primary methodological tools utilized in gathering field data were sampling, questionnaires, in depth interviews, archival reports, government statistics and other official reports. In analysing the data, statistical analysis of field data was used to supplement the case studies and other qualitative data.

It was necessary to consider the fact that Sri Lankan society cannot be perceived as an

egalitarian society. Although the study was based on the Sinhalese community which is the majority ethnic group, there are important variations within it. These variations include rural-urban differences, as well as differences based on social class, religion and caste. These differences had to be taken into consideration since it was expected that they would have a profound impact on women. Therefore, the sample had to be selected in a way that included all of these categories.

A random sample of two hundred households was selected from each location. In Colombo, the total number of households was approximately two thousand. Therefore, it was decided to include a ten percent sample. To have a comparable number of cases and a representative sample, two hundred households were selected from the village where there was approximately a total number of three hundred and fifty households. In the city, although a stratifying procedure was not used, the non-Sinhalese households had to be taken out from the initial sample, and the next Sinhalese household on the list was added to it. This was done just by reading the names of the household list which gave a clear idea of people's ethnic identity. In the village, sixty households were randomly selected for in depth interviews. In the city, however, the preference was given to those who agreed to further involvement in the research.

As the assumptions are somewhat value laden, it was necessary to uncover the attitudes of the respondents themselves regarding those values. For instance, the category of women and education was subdivided into parental influence on their education, childhood aspirations regarding education, past educational achievements and obstructions, present involvements and obstructions, future hopes and expected barriers, expectations for children's education, problems, and the education of women as a whole. A discussion based on these themes was expected to

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provide a wide range of data related to the respondents' own experiences, values and attitudes regarding education.

Before entering the field, I decided to administer an attitude questionnaire touching on every category and sub-category. However, during the pre-test I found that the best way to understand women's feelings was to let them express these in their own words. Therefore, it was decided just to have sub-themes to make it easier to focus the conversations and to probe when necessary. Each category was similarly divided into sub-themes and questions were based mainly on the respondents' own experiences and aspirations, the expectations regarding their children, and attitudes related to women in general. Sometimes, it was found that the ideas expressed in different sections contradicted one another. It was very important to identify these diverse feelings.

Questionnaires were administered to gather basic data from all four hundred households.[13] The basic demographic data of the respondent and other basic and socio-economic information about the family were gathered using a short questionnaire which took only five to fifteen minutes to complete (See questionnaire in Appendix).

In depth interviews were the main method of collecting data. These interviews were carried out with one hundred and twenty women, sixty from each location. Women in both locations, in the village and in the city, can be divided into three generations: the older generation of women ages 65 and over, most of whom are grandmothers; the generation of middle aged women who are between the ages of 45 and 65; and young women both married and unmarried

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[13] The statistics that follow are from the survey carried out in the village and the city, with 200 women in each location.

who are below 45 years of age.[14] I divided the women in the study locations into these three categories since the life experiences of women in these three groups vary from each other and are of the utmost importance for the purpose of my study. The case studies of these women were prepared on the basis of questionnaires and in depth interviews. The reason for using in depth interviews was to give more freedom to the respondent to reveal her life story in the context of a friendly conversation. Sometimes it took several hours to build up a rapport in order to get enough information. There were times when I had to stop the conversation in the middle because the respondent had to go somewhere or she was not feeling free to talk in front of other people who were present. Many women did not feel free to talk in front of their husbands. During those occasions, another appointment was made to complete the interview. Although I used a structured list of questions as a guide to direct the interviews, the respondents were allowed to talk freely about anything they wanted. This type of conversation was very helpful in probing areas of their lives which I thought were important. In this manner, it was easier to build up a friendly atmosphere before getting into the subject, especially since I was a woman and the respondents were also women. There were times when the women were prepared to reveal very personal information about themselves.

Archival reports consisted mainly of newspapers that I used in gathering information about women in the past. I collected most newspaper citations about women from 1948, the year the country achieved independence from British rule. Historical documents were used in framing the

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[14] For the convenience of the analysis, hereafter, I will be referring to these women as first generation, second generation and third generation. Yet, it is important to note that they are not the first or second generations of the village or the city, since both locations have longer histories. This age division was considered since women over 65 were born and grew up in the colonial era, while women of the second generation matured under the post-independence influences. The lives of women below 45 years began with the new economic system after 1977.

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historical position of women in Sri Lanka. Statistics from the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Colombo municipal council and the Nuwara Eliya divisional secretariat were used as background information.

The Structure of the Thesis

In the next chapter, a historical description of the status of Sinhalese women is provided as a framework from which to analyse the changing position of Sinhalese women. The third chapter provides a detailed description of the village, its history, and its present socio-economic situation. A similar discussion of the city constitutes the fourth chapter. As the thesis is a comparative study of the city and the village, a detailed discussion of my field experiences with women across three generations in both locations in relation to major social institutions will form the bulk of the next four chapters. Chapter five will discuss the effect of the changing structure and attitudes regarding education on the lives of women in both study locations. Chapter six details the changes that occurred in the area of women's work. Chapter seven provides a comparative analysis of marriage and family, as it affects the status and roles of women. Chapter eight deals with political and recreational involvements of women in both locations and questions whether these involvements mean an improvement in the socio-political status and increasing awareness among women. These four chapters will analyse the changing roles of women within these social institutions, and how these roles change the lives of women. The final chapter contains the conclusion to my thesis and analyses the findings of this study in relation to the existing literature. It focuses on the question of whether the increased opportunities for women within the liberalized economy have succeeded in emancipating women or have expanded their

consciousness of the impediments that hinder their development.

Chapter 1: A Brief History of the Position of Sinhalese Women

Given the political history of the country, Sri Lankan women can be classified into several categories. As a result of centuries of foreign domination, by the time of independence in 1948, Sri Lankan women formed a highly stratified group who belonged to different communities based on ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status as well as regional variations. Since this is a study of Sinhalese women, this chapter offers a brief historical background. It includes a discussion of the position of women in Buddhism, the foundation of Sinhalese culture, and how cultural attitudes regarding women were transformed due to various foreign influences.

The early history of Sri Lanka cannot be separated from the history of Buddhism in the country. Sri Lanka, in every aspect, was a Buddhist civilization. Therefore, the social and spiritual upbringing of Sinhalese women was moulded in a strictly Buddhist tradition which provided them with a relatively liberal social position.[15] Buddhism, which emphasizes salvation through individual effort, presupposes the spiritual equality of all beings, male and female (Devaraja, 1991: 4). Compared to the position of women in other south Asian countries, Sri Lankan women did not experience such oppressive social practices as sati (widow burning), purdah (the veil), child marriage, female infanticide, or a ban on widow remarriage (Jayawardana, 1986: 109). Buddhism considers marriage not only to be a mundane event that lies completely outside the religious sphere, but also a totally reciprocal relationship (Devaraja, 1991: 6-7). Unlike the inferior position of wives in many other religions, a Buddhist wife can treat her

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[15] Buddha lived in India 2540 years ago, and it was about 300 years later in the third century B.C., that Buddhism was delivered to Sri Lanka by the Indian king `Ashoka'. Buddhism has been the dominant religion of Sri Lanka since its introduction to the country The country underwent Hindu influences from about the second century B.C. Despite many foreign invasions, when Buddhism was deliberately suppressed, Buddhism has remained the religion of about 70% of the country's population (Census Report, 1981).

husband as a friend, as an advisor, as a mother, and also as a handmaid (Anguttara Nikaya)[16]. This ideology provides women with some options which are closed to women in other religions. Therefore, Buddhist women do not have to adhere to a strict code of religious conduct. During the independence movement of Sri Lanka, a cultural revival was launched which, among other things, promoted Buddhist principles. The ethical conduct expected of a Sinhalese woman was this same ethical conduct prescribed in Buddhism. An ideal Sinhalese wife was considered to be one who performed six roles: Goddess of prosperity and pleasantness; mother; friend; faithful hand maiden; beloved wife; teacher and counsel (Sirisena, 1985). Thus in her `private' capacity within the home, she exercised a great deal of power.

There is no other Asian religion which supports the well-being and equality of women as does Buddhism. In Buddhism, it is human life, and not the state of being a man or a woman, which is valued. According to historical data, Buddhist women compared to women in other religious groups in South Asia, were highly emancipated spiritually and socially. The woman of pre-Buddhist India was considered to be a part of her husband, had no life alone without a male figure attached to herself such as her father, husband or son (Manu, 1970: 195), and had no solace in the other world unless she fulfilled her duty to her husband (Manu, 1970: 153). The position of a widow was even more pathetic. Manu's laws condemned remarriage and prescribed for her an austere life which was essential for the "dead man's spiritual welfare" (Basham, 1954: 188).[17] With the emergence of Buddhism, women began to understand their own capacity as a separate

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[16] Anguttara Nikaya is a part of the Buddhist chronicle Tripitaka, which lay out the Buddhist code of discipline.

[17] Manu is considered to be the law-giver in Hinduism. Manusmriti (The Laws of Manu) provides Hindu Brahmin society with its social and moral order. There is much evidence to prove that in Vedic Hindu religion, the situation of women was not as degraded as it was under Brahmin dominance.

person, and to realise their wholeness apart from the male figure. Within Buddhist ideology, women were not spiritually or socially different from men.[18] The woman was respected as a complete human being, not only as a "glorified mother", as is the case in many other religions.

There are numerous instances in Buddhist literature where Buddha discussed the equality of the female. When King Pasenadi was dissatisfied with the news of the birth of a daughter, Buddha preached, "A woman child, O lord of men, may prove even a better offspring than a male" (Dhirasekara, 1982: 137). At the passing away of `Gothami', Buddha's aunt and the first Buddhist nun, Buddha asked her to give proof of the religious attainments of the Bhikkunis in order to convince the disbelieving sceptics. Buddha said "O Gothami, perform a miracle in order to dispel the wrong views of those foolish men who are in doubt with regard to the spiritual potentialities of woman" (Dhirasekara, 1982: 139-140). In the sixth century B.C., five hundred women, heavily inspired by the teachings of Buddhism, under the leadership of Gothami, approached Buddha clamouring for the initiation of the order of Buddhist nuns. Devaraja (1991: 13) claims this incident to be the first time in recorded history that women marched in procession demanding equal rights.

The establishment of the order of nuns was a challenging task undertaken by Buddha, which liberated women from domestic subservience and cultural repression, suppressing all the barriers of caste, status and sex. The freedom that women obtained under Buddhism is obvious in the verses contained in Teri Gata or The Psalms of the Sisters. There were instances of women confronting the sacred Brahmins, challenging them in intellectual debates (Psalms, 1949: 117-118).

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[18] My unpublished paper on "Women in Buddhism - A Historical Foundation for Feminism" provides a fuller discussion of this issue.

Although Buddha could not eradicate all the social barriers forced on Indian women living in a restrictive Hindu society, a Buddhist woman was not supposed to be submissive to any one, not even her husband. To make her life successful, it was not adequate for a woman to be a good housewife. She was supposed to have qualities such as religious devotion, moral virtue, as well as liberality, wisdom, and learning regardless of her sex (Dhirasekara, 1982: 138). The relationship of husband and wife was considered to be a reciprocal one, with special roles attached to each status. For the continuation of the relationship, these duties had to be fulfilled by both parties.

The status of women in Buddhist societies provided evidence of the freedom women achieved through Buddhism. Referring to the works of foreign writers on Buddhist societies, Devaraja notes that most of them have commented favourably on the position of women.

> One can go a step further and see the situation in Burma which is also a devoutly Buddhist society. Lieutenant General Albert Fytche, Late Chief Commissioner of British Burma and Agent to the Viceroy and Governor General of India, wrote in 1978, "A woman holds among them a position of perfect freedom and independence. She is with them not a mere slave of passion, but has equal rights and is the recognized and duly honoured helpmate of man, and in fact bears a more prominent share in the transactions of the more ordinary affairs of life than is the case perhaps with any other people either eastern or western". These and several other references by European writers to the women of Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet which are all Buddhist societies, make it clear that long before the impact of westernization was felt women held an honourable place within the institution of marriage (Devaraja, 1991: 8).

As explained earlier, Buddhism is the religion which formed the basis of Sri Lankan culture from approximately the third century B.C. The inscriptions (found on rock or in caves as well as on pillars) and the chronicles form the major sources for the study of women in early Buddhist Sri Lanka (Munasinghe, 1985: 1). The order of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka was established with the arrival of the Buddhist nun `Sangamitta' and the ordination of Queen Consort

Anula followed by thousands of other women. According to the chronicles, in the first three centuries of Buddhist history, the ratio of nuns to monks was from 10:9 to 10:5. This is a clear indication of the rapid expansion of the order of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka (Munasinghe, 1985: 6). Many nuns were recognized as experts on Buddhist philosophy. There are many references to nuns as thoroughly self-controlled, free of passion and possessing great miraculous powers. Some of the nuns became known as great historians. During the reign of King `Dutugemunu' between 101 - 77 B.C., was found the first recorded instance of assigning a nun with the task of teaching religious history. "The combination of the teaching of the Buddha with the knowledge of cultural traditions would have exerted a powerful influence in fashioning the life-styles and value systems of women in ancient Sri Lanka" (Munasinghe, 1985: 6). Buddhist nuns had established an international reputation by the fifth century A.D. There is historical evidence that Sri Lankan nuns travelled to China in order to establish an order of nuns there (Munasinghe, 1985: 6-7). There are many inscriptions which talk about female devotees. The most interesting fact is that these devotees included not only royalty and ladies of high position but also ordinary women who engaged in religious activities and made various donations, ranging from places of abode to a piece of cloth, according to their wealth. Women engaged in politics, religion, economics and other social activities more or less equally with men. Women not only participated in higher learning and intellectual activities, but there was also provision of institutions for such learning (de Silva, 1989: 1).

In the public domain outside the home, both her education and her spirituality were highly valued. Indeed, women were considered equally capable of attaining the highest spiritual levels, and sometimes women excelled men in higher learning, an accomplishment that was greatly

appreciated. Although there is no evidence that women attended formal educational institutions (de Silva, 1989), the knowledge displayed by the women of the royalty as well as by ordinary women in different subject areas such as literature, languages, and religious studies has been well documented (Herath & Kulasuriya, 1985: 215-216).

Although there is no reference in Sri Lankan history to any law or practice that prevented women from participating in politics, the records document only a few instances of such involvement. The written history of the country begins with the subordination of a reigning queen. Since then, for almost two thousand years of the country's history, only four sovereign queens have ascended the throne, and few women have been endowed with ranks and titles within the non-royal political and social elite of the society. The role of women in politics, other than in the position of the monarch, is scarcely mentioned, but it is important to note that male participation in politics was also limited mainly to the royal family (Kiribamune, 1990: 15-28). Among the women who ruled the country, there have been lecherous and despotic queens as well as queens and queen consorts who excelled in the knowledge of statecraft (Mahavamsa, 1950). They are praised even today as national heroines and symbols of Sri Lankan womanhood. The importance given to the female members of the royal family enabled the more charismatic royal ladies to exercise substantial power in public matters (Kiribamune, 1990: 24). According to Paranavithana (a renowned archaeologist and historian of Sri Lanka), from 972 to 982 A.D., matrilineal elements can be identified in kingship lineage, not only in legitimating the sons of the queens but also in conferring legitimacy on the husbands of queens (Kiribamune, 1990: 22).

All this evidence of women's status in ancient Sri Lanka does not necessarily mean that

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patriarchy never existed or that women were complete social equals to men.[19] In fact, two

different systems of patriarchy can be identified within Sri Lankan history: the one influenced by

the Indian ideals of womanhood and the other by the western form of male domination (to be

discussed later). I would argue that Sri Lankan women were subordinated to their men folk who,

in practice, dominated most fields of activity. But Sri Lankan women never suffered from the

servility imposed on their sex as women in the neighbouring sub-continent. In Hindu India, for

example, women were treated as perpetual minors requiring protection and were relegated to a

servile position (Wolpert, 1992: 136). The patriarchy so widespread in India was never adopted

totally within Sri Lankan society, although its modified influence filtered into what were

considered to be wifely virtues. Nevertheless, unconditional surrender to the husband's will is

abhorrent to Sri Lankan women. Although attempts were made to inculcate a Brahmanic code of

wifely duties, as expounded in Manusmriti, a code of law compiled in the era before 200 B.C., this

code was never accepted, except for those laws agreeing with the Buddhist code of virtues.[20] The

private and the public spheres were not clearly separated, and women were never barred from

participating in the public sphere. The pre-colonial history of Sri Lankan women thus delineates

complete spiritual emancipation, but only a partial social liberation.

The motivations behind the South Indian invasions from the second century B.C. was not

only the extension of South Indian power, but also the establishment of Hinduism on the island.

Contrary to the Buddhist ideology of equality, Hinduism is a hierarchical religion which admits

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[19] According to Jayawardana (1986: 113) there is much evidence in Sinhalese literature (quotes are from 13th century literature) that shows the prevalence of patriarchy. Although most of these stories take place in India, the Sri Lankan authors seem to be adopting some of the Indian attitudes towards women.

[20] As in Kavya Shekaraya Canto XX 17-37, to which Jayawardana (1986) also refers as evidence of patriarchy.

inequality among castes as well as between men and women. Hindu influence changed the

position of Sri Lankan women towards a more subordinated status. In the Kandyan kingdom,

which was the last Sri Lankan kingdom subjugated by the British, Sinhalese women were more

subservient in the domestic sphere, but still retained some of the social privileges they had enjoyed

prior to the Hindu invasion. Despite the massive influence of Hinduism, it is surprising to

discover that laws protecting woman's rights lasted even into the Kandyan era. Although we

cannot say that the social situation during the Kandyan period was very favourable to women, all

through Sri Lankan history, Buddhist women had been comparatively more liberated than other

Asian women.[21]

Robert Knox, an English prisoner in the Kandyan Kingdom for twenty years, explains in

his An Historical Relation of Ceylon (1681), the nature of the Kandyan Sinhalese woman and the

Kandyan marriage. Knox (1911: 104) notes: "The Men are not jealous of their Wives, for the

greatest Ladies in the Land will frequently talk and discourse with any Men they please, although

their Husbands be in presence". Knox (1911: 149) further remarks:

> But their Marriages are but of little force or validity. For if they disagree and
> mislike one the other; they part without disgrace...Both Women and Men do
> commonly wed four or five times before they can settle themselves to their
> contentation. And if they have Children when they part, the Common Law is, the
> Males for the Man, and the Females for the Woman.

Many other foreign writers also took note of the favourable position enjoyed by Sri Lankan

women. "A British visitor in the late nineteenth century says, `The Sinhalese women are not

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[21] According to Mahavamsa and other historical records, ancient Sri Lankan history, especially the Anuradhapura and Pollonnaruwa periods, is full of stories of queens who ruled the country, of brave and patriotic females who sacrificed their lives to save the country and of women who were famous for their knowledge and spiritual achievements (Munasinghe, 1987: 12).

merely the slaves and mistresses but in many respects the companions and friends of their husbands... The Sinhalese neither keep their women in confinement nor impose on them any humiliating constraints'" (Jayaweera, 1991: 8). Referring to Sinhalese widows, Knox says, "These women are of a very strong courageous spirit, ... never overwhelmed with grief or love" (Knox, 1911) ideas which accords well with Buddhist teachings.

Jean Grossholtz mentions two reasons other than Buddhism which allowed Sinhalese women an easy and flexible status: their matriarchal past, and ideas regarding land use rights. Referring to Hayley's A Treatise On Laws And Customs Of Sinhalese (1923), Grossholtz (1984: 20) notes that there is much evidence, especially records on marriage customs, which support the fact that Sri Lankan society had been matriarchal. Yet, since these records are from a much later period in history, it is not certain whether these customs are remnants of Dravidian matrilineal kinship systems such as that of the 'Nayars'. Nevertheless, during the Kandyan period (17-19 centuries A.D.), marriage customs provided much flexibility for the woman (Yalman, 1971: 267). There were traces of polyandry[22] as well as the special marriage custom called 'binna', where the husband upon marriage, lived with the wife on her property (Peiris, 1956: 195-230; Yalman, 1971: 130-135).[23] According to this custom, the woman had more rights to the property as well as to the children, and even the maternal name was passed to the children of such a marriage.[24] Providing a vivid description of women's property rights in Sri Lanka, Risseeuw (1988: 19) notes:

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[22]   Fraternal polyandry was a marriage custom practised only in the up country area. It was related to land tenure which prevented the allocation of land between several families (Peiris, 1956: 195-230; Yalman, 1971: 263-266). This custom was not practised or accepted but was frowned upon in other areas of the country.

[23]   It is important to note that ethnographic studies on Sri Lanka contains very little information on the position of women.

[24]   It was said that the binna husband had to keep his walking stick, his umbrella and his lantern handy by the bedroom door.

"The original Sinhalese system carried an exceptionally high degree of which `primitive' peoples were previously considered to be incapable". Even the property rights of divorced and widowed women were protected to a high extent by Sinhalese law (Risseeuw, 1988: 16-30, Yalman, 1971: 263-266).

In regards to property rights, in feudal Sri Lanka[25] all the land was owned by the state. Within the "rajakariya" system,[26] the land was given to the people to cultivate under the scrutiny of the state. The rent for the land was paid to the government treasury in the form of material production. Grossholtz (1984: 4) notes:

> The idea of freedom and human rights embedded in Buddhism was completely opposite to that embedded in British law. Buddhism considered property as the cause of disunity, and self-seeking and material gain as distorting human personality. Individualism was not valued- rather, the individual should strive to merge with the group so as to be one with the universe and nature.

There was no difference between men and women regarding property rights, and in the Kandyan Kingdom lands which were inherited by women were exempted from taxes (Knox, 1911: 150). The woman not only had independent property rights, but within the feudal land tenure system she was also eligible for tenancy rights (Goonesekere, 1993: 7).

The changes which had the most adverse effects on women's rights occurred under European domination. Although the country was already a patriarchal society under Hinduism and European religions, the "capitalist patriarchal" social system was introduced when the British

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[25] Sri Lanka was a feudal society from about the third century B.C., based on agriculture, which was built upon a state controlled irrigation system.

[26] Under this system which meant `duties to the King' people were assigned with certain duties according to their castes Thus the cultivators and the aristocrats within that caste received land which they cultivated by themselves or gave to the tenants. The tenants received a part of the harvest for their labour. The people in other castes either became tenants or received crops in exchange for their services.

transformed the patterns of land use, labour and capital accumulation. With the era of colonialism (from 1505 - 1948), we notice a clear diminution in the status of women, especially in their confinement to the domestic sphere. The socio-cultural changes that came with colonialism included the introduction of a new religion, changes in the legal system, new marriage laws based on Victorian morals, a new educational system, and a new economic system based on state plantations, all of which completely changed the social, cultural, political and economic structure of the country.[27] In order to control the labour force the British colonial administration had to change the distribution of power, promoting male domination, thus subtly changing the system of power within the family (Grossholtz, 1984: 5). This completely changed the supple, easy-going life style of women, substituting a rigid and controlled Victorian image of femininity, requiring women to be docile and innocent in their behaviour, and thus in need of protection (Jayaweera, 1979: 167). The attitudes of women in the upper levels of society were malleable, especially through adoption of Christianity, encouraging them to admire and embrace this new image of women. Although Buddhist marriage was still a purely mundane occasion with no religious component involved, other religious ideologies inevitably influenced the Buddhists. The establishment of British marriage customs in the low country further aggravated the situation. Education and employment outside of the home were no longer deemed appropriate for the `ladies'. The consequence was the emergence of a new image of woman, especially among the upper social strata: one happy and content in her roles as daughter, wife and mother.

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[27] The introduction of Catholicism by the Portuguese, who ruled the maritimes for about 150 years, and the replacement of the traditional legal order of the country, which had provided more space for women's rights, by the patriarchal Roman-Dutch law (from 1656 to 1796) and English common law, had a massive effect on Sri Lankan society and culture. It brought about drastic changes in social behaviour, education, the legal system, marriage rules and customs (Goonesekere, 1993; Metthananda, 1990; Jayaweera, 1990).

The Effects of Colonialism on Sri Lankan Society

Colonialism in the third world has been analysed by many social scientists: Samir Amin (1974; 1976); Frank (1967; 1978, 1981), Wallerstein (1966), Rhodes (1970), Wolf (1982), and De Silva (1982).[28] These scholars agree that European colonialism is one of the key factors in the underdevelopment of the entire third world today, an underdevelopment which continues through the links of these countries with the world capitalist system. According to De Silva (1982), exploitation and subjugation prevail within the context of class structures, both in the centre and in the periphery, between centre and periphery, as well as between settler and non-settler colonies. In non-settler colonies like Sri Lanka, the plantation economy was the basis of underdevelopment. De Silva argues that the labour intensive plantation system did not encourage technological development and thus retarded industrial development by preventing the transformation of merchant capitalism into industrial capitalism. Gunasinghe (1990) points out that the underdevelopment of a particular social formation[29] is tied to the destruction of old production relations by the colonial power. The question is what old elements were destroyed and which ones were reactivated. In the Sri Lankan Kandyan region, the destruction and dissolution occurred through the breakdown of the feudal monarchy, wiping out the old Kandyan ruling aristocracy. Regional self-sufficiency was lost by opening up a market economy in the area, and the appropriation of `waste lands' for large-scale plantations led to efforts to extract the highest surplus value. At the same time, certain archaic relations were reactivated when they were in line with

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[28] I will not summarize these theories here, but it is important to mention that they all relate in varying degrees to colonialism and underdevelopment in Sri Lanka.

[29] His analysis is based on the Kandyan region of Sri Lanka, which predominantly featured a feudal mode of production until it was dismantled under British colonial rule.

profit making or necessary to ensure class alliances. According to Gunasinghe, these relations included `rajakariya' (or unpaid service to the state), the restoration of aristocratic authority, and temple services.[30] The mode of production was transformed from feudalism to a distinct form of capitalism, in which archaic relations were reproduced in order to cater to the economic and political requirements of the capitalists.

Bandarage (1989) makes a similar argument pointing out that underdevelopment in Sri Lanka cannot be understood only at the level of economic structures, but must also be studied at the political and ideological levels. Specific features of the colonial era were pivotal in underdeveloping the country: the British plantation economy, surplus appropriation, political control of the population, and legitimation of the colonial social order, accompanied by state mediation between opposing modes of agricultural production and social classes. However, it is integral in an analysis of the effect of colonial policies, she writes, to uncover the hierarchical structures of "the pre-colonial Sinhalese society and the differential impact of colonial policy on the diverse social classes" (Bandarage, 1989:12). Bandarage posits that, to complete such an analysis, we have to discover the cultural and psychological changes that accompanied the expansion of market forces, the effects of missionary activities on education, and the impact of colonialism on the sexual division of labour.

Those most exploited through colonization were women. The western ideals of womanhood were imposed upon urban upper class women through English educational

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[30] These were the caste related obligatory duties to the temple and its land which were clearly in decline at the time. The reactivation of these duties and the aristocratic rule in a new form under the colonial power protected colonial rule from the threat of revolt which was ever present during periods of anarchy.

institutions. Women were also influenced by western women who lived in the country.[31] They acted as role models for local women. The change of attitudes regarding women was more conspicuous in the maritime areas, where western influence was stronger. Among up country women, in the last area to come under European domination, this change was not quite as noticeable.

Both Leacock (1981b) and Mies (1988) treat this kind of situation as typical of the colonial exploitation of women. Through colonization women were systematically excluded from the benefits of capitalist development by being categorized as 'backward', thus taking women out of the realm of social production, and designating them as mere means of production. More egalitarian attitudes towards women were not appealing to many Victorian males. Leacock and Etienne (1980) see this situation as common to all colonies where there were previous signs of egalitarianism. In fact, several practices were regarded as repulsive: women's work outside the home; their freedom to divorce and remarry; marriage practices such as polyandry and binna; Kandyan laws which provided more equal rights for women in marriage and land tenure; the regular dress of women which were deemed to lack feminine elegance;[32] and the dress of men which was not very different from that of women (Harris, 1994: 12-29). The confusion in sexual roles and appearances made it difficult to treat women merely as sexual objects and seems to have greatly disturbed Western men[33] (Harris, 1994: 15). Traditional laws which included more

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[31] A few western women were either married to Sri Lankans or came there as teachers, social reformers or revolutionaries. They participated in anti-imperialist movements, and leftist political activities and fought for radical social reform and women's rights (Jayawardana, 1986).

[32] There are occasions when women's dress and beauty were admired by some colonialists as elegant and feminine (Harris, 1994).

[33] Western women's attitudes to local women were more favourable and tinged with romanticism (Harris, 1994:17).

egalitarian values were replaced by patriarchal Roman-Dutch law and English common law principles (Goonesekere, 1993: 1). British interest in Sri Lankan education lay in their goal to educate a certain number of Sri Lankans in English to enable them to occupy government posts (Baker, 1985: 39-40). Yet the British had a specific goal in establishing female education. Some missionary educators had a true interest in educating women to alleviate their illiteracy.[34] However, another major goal according to the curriculum of girls' schools and the beliefs of women educators, was to provide "fittingly intelligent" and "disciplined" Victorian wives for the local bureaucrats (Jayaweera, 1990: 210-225; Harris, 1994: 30-39). Since the principals of girls' schools were recruited from England, western and Christian ideas about gender roles were inculcated in Sri Lankan girls. The vernacular schools were also alienated from the local environment through a curriculum oriented to the needs of colonial rulers. Domestication of women was glorified, and the Victorian norms of patriarchy were superimposed upon the traditional patriarchal norms of the society. All these were incorporated as part of the process of "civilizing" indigenous women (Jayaweera, 1990: 210-225).

This type of education for women could not be considered to be an opportunity for women to escape from patriarchal oppression as Boserup (1970) suggests,[35] but it certainly instilled western patriarchal attitudes in local women. This process of domestication helped to change the sexual division of labour according to the newly created cultural values, making the husband the sole breadwinner of the family (Hammond, 1973). According to Blumberg (1988) control over

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[34] We do not find any traces of the highly developed education system of the country by this time. While men received their education at the temples, women did not have any formal education, a fact which may be attributed to the disappearance of the female priesthood.

[35] Boserup (1970) argues that education is a major tool in advancing the status of women.

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income is the main source of male authority within the family. In the Sri Lankan family where the authority of the father was based on respect, not on control over resources which on many occasions was controlled by the mother or both spouses, the 'breadwinner' concept elevated the status of the father as sole authoritative figure (Rogers, 1980). Evidence suggests that it was women who most resisted colonization, especially the new religion (Harris, 1994: 45). Therefore, the attitudes of women most certainly had to be changed.

Independence and National Development

After being under the complete domination of an alien power for more than a century, the dawn of a new era seems to have held new promises for Sinhalese women with the introduction of universal suffrage in 1931. The free education system introduced in 1948 also held promise.[36]

> Women in Ceylon were enfranchised on the same basis as men in 1931, well before women in any other Asian country. The reason given was that women's services would be of special value in coping with the high infant mortality rate on the island and with the need for better housing and improved child care, midwifery, and pre-natal services (Myrdal, 1968: 344).

These factors, combined with better health care initially produced two vital results: a dramatic decline in mortality rates, and high rates of population growth.

After political independence in 1948, and during the independence movement leading up to it, a social cultural revival brought many women back into the public sphere. Women increasingly engaged in higher education, politics, paid employment and many other social

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[36] At this moment how and why universal suffrage for women was introduced and whether there was a women's movement behind it.

activities.[37]

The second phase of population transition started in the late 1950s and "accentuated in the 60s, when the decline in the death rates was accompanied by a reduction of birth rates caused by a decline in marital fertility and postponement of marriages due to economic reasons, and the impact of family planning programmes" (Socio-Economic Trends, 1989: 2). In 1975, Sri Lanka's birth and death rates were the lowest in the Asian region (ibid). Not only was population growth the lowest in Asia, but also below the world average (Socio-Economic Trends, 1989: 3).

One of the major factors in this population transition was that an increasing number of women entered higher education. The female literacy rate almost doubled between 1946 and 1981 (UN, 1986: 54-55). In 1975, 40.7% of those who enroled in the university were females (Jayaweera, 1993: 40). Due to the free education system, a large number of educated youth entered the labour market. The country could not provide food and employment for this dramatic increase in educated youth. Combined with other factors, this led to a youth insurrection in 1971 (UN, 1986: 9) with many young educated women also taking part. This was a new trend for Sinhalese women who "unlike their other Asian counterparts, did not play an active part in the pre-independence nationalist movement" (Jayaweera, 1979: 165).[38]

It is clear that changes in education have greatly helped reduce socio-economic and gender disparities over the last few decades (Jayaweera, 1993: 46). Sri Lankan women entered the

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[37] Most of the changes relating to women began in the late nineteenth century or the early twentieth century, with the independence movement which was also connected to the leftist political movement, the theosophical movement, the influence of British women activists and the cultural revival within the country (Jayawardana, 1986). Some writers (Metthananda, 1990) view these outcomes as a positive result of colonialism.

[38] It is not clear to me at this point why this contradiction, political non-activity of women after being enfranchised, occurred.

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scientific professions in the early part of the twentieth century, especially the field of medicine. Sri Lanka produced her first woman science graduate in 1945, and an engineer in 1958. In 1984, 71.6% of science students in high schools were girls (Amarasuriya, 1993: 62-74). Compared to female students from other ethnic groups, female Sinhalese students seem to be inclined toward the sciences (Gunawardena, 1992: 4). The undergraduate population in the universities has consistently been higher among females (Jayaweera, 1993: 50).

Two immediate results of the aforementioned processes were increasingly higher rates of employment for women, and delayed marriages. In 1975, women's participation in the labour force in the country was 29.9% when the world mean was 32%. During the period 1963-71, the growth of the female labour force was 6.2% per year. Activity rates between 1946-53 and 1963-71 showed a very steep increase (UN, 1986: 62-65).

The consequence was that the percentage of young never married women rose from 1946 to 1963. This increase was evident especially in the age group of 20 - 24 in which the percentage rose from 29.4% to 41.1%. The mean age at marriage increased between 1953 to 1963 by more than a year (UN, 1986: 14-17). The number of currently married women decreased significantly, thus escalating the percentage of late marriages. Between 1963 and 1975 the percentage of currently married women decreased from 81% to 68%. At the same time, marriage dissolution rates were very low. The mean age at marriage was considerably higher among urban educated women, and a high rate of remarriage was apparent among women with lower educational qualifications (UN, 1986: 71-72). Since almost all births occur within marriage in Sri Lanka, the result was a clear decline in fertility rates. A wife's higher education level was found to have a high correlation with low fertility, and this made the authors of the UN report speculate that the

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decision not to have a child lies primarily with women (UN, 1986: 72).

With independence, some of the adverse effects of colonization on women were eliminated, but a patriarchal social system continued. A large increase in number of women entering higher education, the high rates of female employment, and also enhanced political awareness could be recognized as positive steps in regaining women's status, yet educated or employed women could seldom overcome male dominance. As Tinker and Bramsen (1976) argue, the traditional mythical beliefs about women that were transferred from the west together with development, such as her inability to participate actively in the US model of male dominated industrial production, incarcerated her within the domestic sphere or in marginal work. Risseeuw (1980) claims that this has been the case in Sri Lanka since the 1950s, as the country attempted to adopt modern industrialism in its development.

New agricultural technology kept women off the farms, where the handling of new machinery became the domain of men. In industry, long hours and lack of skilled labour pushed women into marginal work. However, even this marginal work was not available to every one but only to "mobile and younger women" (Risseeuw, 1980: 16). Thus, development deliberately excluded women from industrial production. The higher rates of employment for women thus meant an increase in cheap labour. Although the independence and nationalist movement conspicuously changed the position of women in Sri Lanka, freeing them from stringent household bondage to a certain extent, with a few exceptions women's work remained mainly restricted within areas that were considered "proper". The public-private dichotomy, which solidified under colonialism, thus began to blur, becoming "a continuum rather than a dichotomy" in the Sri Lankan situation as Tiano (1984) argued referring to the situation of women in the Third World.

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Women's movements and women's development programmes were started both in rural and urban areas. They were either professional women's groups or those focused mainly on increasing awareness of women's legal rights, equality in education, occupation, or in their political and religious involvement (Jayaweera, 1989a). In short, although the women's movement became "a nationally recognized movement and a widely debated discourse", women's activities were aimed at improving (or regaining) their participation in the public sphere (Jayawardana, 1995: 396). As in the situation among Philippino women (Aguilar, 1993), the Sri Lankan women's movement was also linked to the national struggle (Jayawardana, 1986, 1995). Sri Lanka, however, never developed a feminist movement that was completely influenced by western ideologies, as was the case, for example, in the Philippines. From the early 1900s, Sri Lankan women were active in movements such as the Buddhist theosophical movement, which challenged foreign and missionary cultural domination; the labour movement, in which urban working class women actively struggled against imperialism; and the leftist political movement, which concentrated on anti-imperialism and national independence all of which were influenced by western women activists living in Sri Lanka. However, except for working class struggles, the women's movement was limited to bourgeois and petty bourgeois women.

However, the patriarchal social structures or subordination of women within the family were accepted and never questioned (Jayawardana, 1986). The absence of overt forms of oppression also led to a passive acceptance of male dominance in the domestic sphere. Women were expected to be ideal mothers and wives regardless of their accomplishments in education and career which also was an image popularized by these nationalist and religious movements.[39] To

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[39] Thiruchandran (1988) posits this type of subordination of women was two fold, occurring within nations as well as across nations. To continue imperialism, the British were not reluctant to criticize the indigenous practices

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be successful in their lives, they had to be efficient in maintaining their double day of work. Boserup (1970), Beneria (1982), Gannage (1986), and Tinker (1990) all agree on the importance of analysing the domestic economy and women's double day of work in order to evaluate their contribution to economic development. Nevertheless, as Beneria and Sen (1981) argue, educated women confirm that, instead of improving their status, education and employment have made women more vulnerable to exploitation. In a country where education is highly valued and where there is a free education system for everybody, regardless of gender, women might be expected to qualify for better employment. Yet, due to class and gender discrimination, even with equal educational levels, women have fewer advantages than men. Nevertheless, many women have become highly successful with the help of traditional support systems, such as the extended family or domestic helpers. As Gannage (1986) points out, in such situations, the family becomes not so much a locus for working-women's gender oppression, but a resource for easing her double day of work .

By the latter part of the 1950's, with the establishment of Sinhalese as the national language, Sri Lankan women at every social level were increasingly becoming involved in politics, education, the arts and other economic activities.[40] They tried to regain the freedom they had lost under foreign influence (although this change affected women from different religious and ethnic backgrounds in different ways). Urban upper and middle class women rejected

regarding women, yet, the practices that provided a considerable autonomy for women were equally criticized. Within the nations, injustice to women was continued in the name of cultural identity, through antipathy to westernization.

[40] Because of free education, many Sri Lankan women, including women in the lower socio-economic classes, were able to receive university education. Throughout its history, university students in Sri Lanka have been politically active. The establishment of Sinhalese as the national language increased the political awareness and participation of women as it provided the opportunity for those who were educated in Sinhalese to enter universities and engage in social and political activities without facing a language barrier.

"Victorian" attitudes, while peasant women and women from the rural elite were rejecting domestic subservience and seeking a more "privileged" position in society.

By 1977, Sri Lankan women had realized significant gains, recovering some of the freedom they had enjoyed in the ancient past. They achieved a higher level of education and a higher employment rate. While women's involvement in mainstream politics was very low, they were very active in politics as voters, and involved politically at the local level (de Silva, 1993: 75-96).[41] It is in the area of wages that exploitation of women was most apparent (Jayawardana, 1976: 16). Although women who were involved in middle class white collar jobs generally earned the same wages as their male counterparts, in the rural agricultural sector and the wage labour sector exploitation of women could be clearly seen(ESS, 1993: 61-62).[42] Sri Lankan law has always protected women's rights.

Patriarchal values introduced in English common law and Roman Dutch Law, have largely been revised by the Sri Lankan legislature. The legal constraints binding women's personal status, custody of children, and inheritance and property rights have been eliminated. Except in a few professions that are reserved for men or women, Sri Lankan legislation provides women access to all professions and employment in the public sector. The 1978 constitution ensured women freedom from gender discrimination. As early as 1933 the Sri Lankan legislature introduced the Sex Disqualification Removal Ordinance which enabled women to enter the legal profession, the

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[41] Political involvement at the local level includes local government elections and such other involvement as women's organizations, social work, rural development projects and religious organizations.

[42] However, it is worthwhile to note that in some administrative districts in the country where the main economic activity is agriculture, women earn far better salaries than men in their areas of specialty (PWS, 1993: 305-306). But the majority of female agricultural workers and wage labourers earn lower salaries than their male counterparts.

then important area of discrimination. In 1988, women were granted new maternity leave benefits, as well as nursing intervals (Goonesekere, 1993: 1-16).[43] These achievements clearly indicated that women's status was improving, liberating them from the Hindu and Victorian ideology of `subservient womanhood'.

This chapter addressed the problem of social change and transformation of the status and role of Sinhalese women that occurred historically over many centuries due to foreign invasions and colonialism. It also discussed the situation after colonialism, the changes that followed the independence movement as well as later political and economic transformations. In order to carry out the comparative analysis of the situation of Sinhalese women after economic liberalization in 1977, the next two chapters will discuss the socio-economic background of the two study locations.

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[43] Nursing intervals is the time that breast feeding mothers were given to go home from work to feed the babies. This was compulsory in the government sector while some of the private sector organizations also adopted this rule.

Chapter 2 : The Village - Tradition or Change

The term `traditional village' in the Sri Lankan context presupposes the existence of traditional cultural traits as well as traditional socio-economic patterns. This chapter delineates my observations of the research village along these lines. These findings are then placed in the broader framework of the village's geo-physical characteristics, its climatic variations and its history, all of which have contributed to its social and cultural structures. It will attempt to establish whether the socio-economic structures of the village still conform to the traditional normative patterns or whether it indicates change from these norms, which has a relevance for analysing the position of its women.

`Pahalawela' is a village in the Nuwara Eliya district. With its very pleasant climate, natural beauty with forests, mountains, rivers, and waterfalls, and with paddy fields and tea plantations adding to this beautiful scenery, the whole district of Nuwara Eliya is considered to be one of the finest holiday resorts in Sri Lanka.

Nuwara Eliya district is geographically located in the central province of Sri Lanka which includes the highest mountain ranges in the country. It has the coldest climate of the country with an average of fifteen degrees Celsius (ESS: 1993). Although Nuwara Eliya district is considered to be a place with heavy rain and cold weather, part of it belongs to the dry zone, the area that receives rain only in the rainy season and thus depends on various irrigation systems.

The economy of the area is mainly agricultural. The climate is suitable for the growth of rice, fruits and vegetables as well as many other food crops. British colonists established the city of Nuwara Eliya as a holiday resort and it remains a well developed city with many tourist attractions. Nuwara Eliya has extensive tea plantations which produce some of the finest tea

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Map 2:   PAHALAWELA VILLAGE

N

P Paddy Fields

Foot path

S School

Village Boundary

1/2   1/4   0 Mile
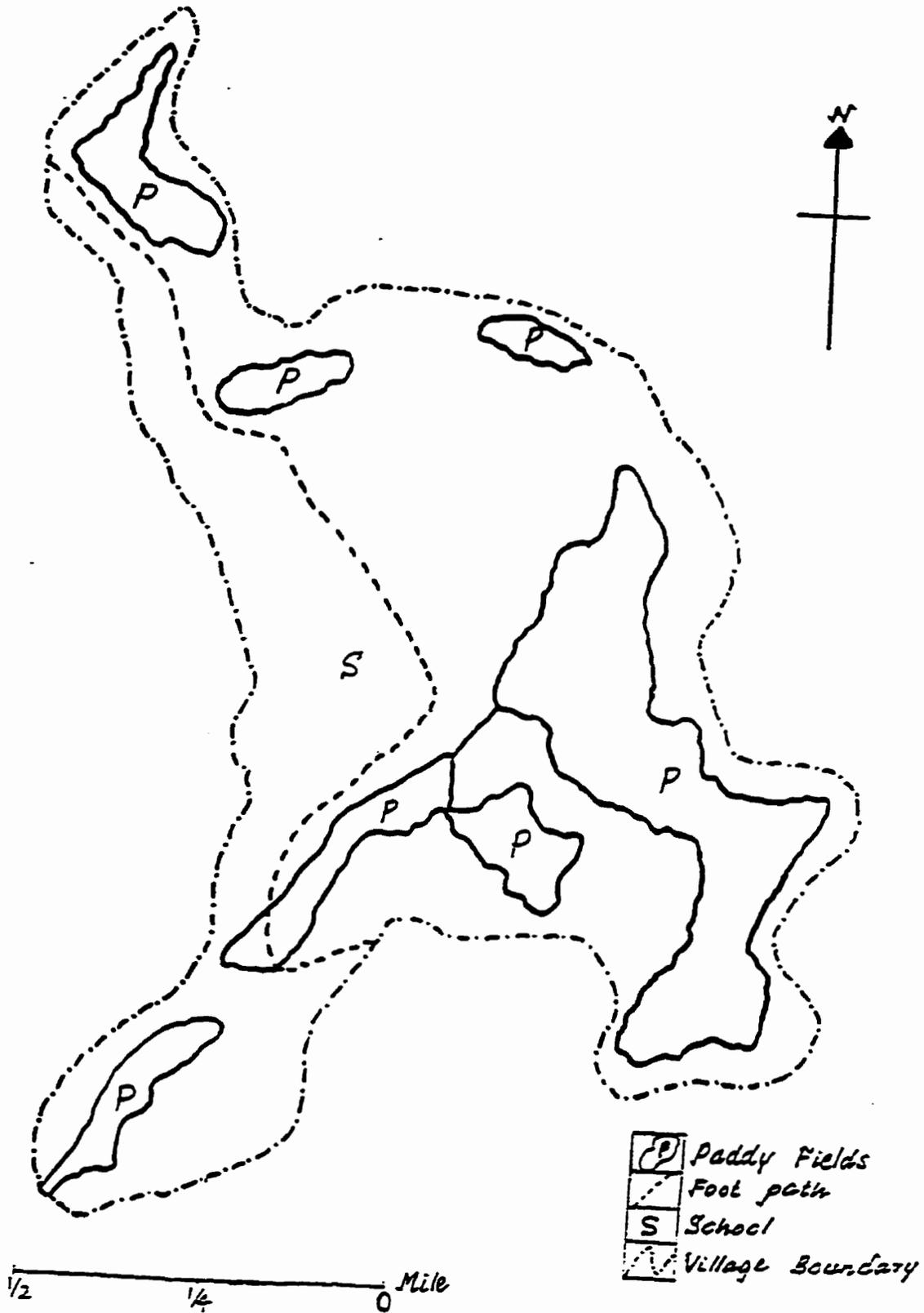
Map 3: LOCATION OF PAHALAWELA WITHIN THE ELECTORATE
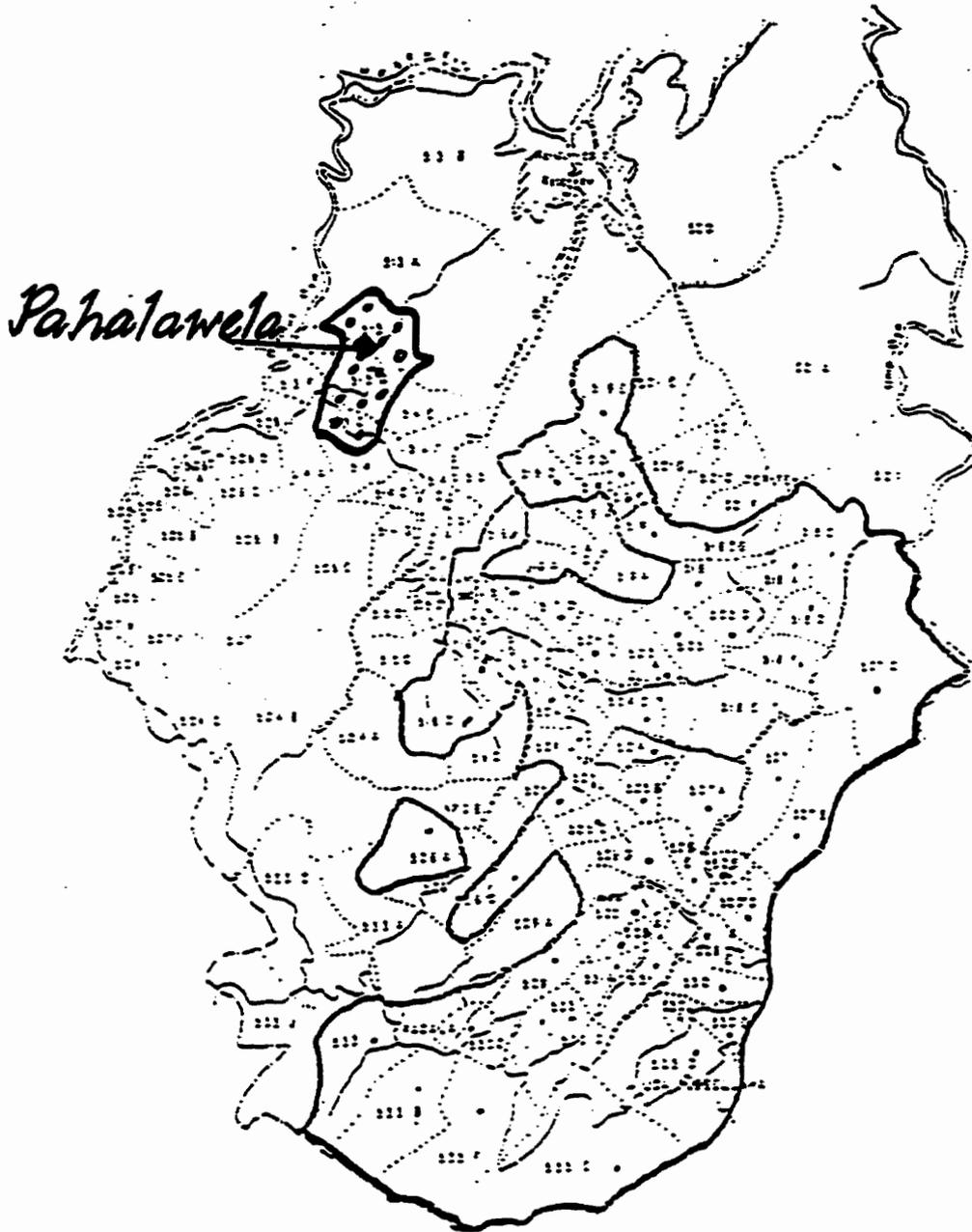
Pahalawela

SCALE . 2 MILES TO AN INCH (appr.)

Source ; IRDP Annual Report-1995, Sri Lanka

Map 4:   NUWARA ELIYA DISTRICT

— N —

To Kandy

To Pussellawa

To Hawaeliya

Hanguranketa

Pahalawela

Kotmale

Ginigathena

Watagoda

Nuwara Eliya

Talawakela

Hatton

Nuwara Eliya

Agarapatana

Ambagamuwa

Dickoya

Bogawantalawa
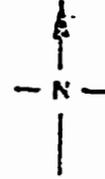
KEY

DISTRICT BOUNDARY   — — — — —

D.S. DIV. BOUNDARY   — — — — —

MAIN ROADS   —————————

SCALE - 1:46,000 (approx)

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products in the world.

Pahalawela is a remote village in the Nuwara Eliya district and is located in the dry zone. It rains for six months while the rest of the year is normally dry. Although not as cold as the wet zone of the district, Pahalawela enjoys a very nice, cool climate during the rainy season. However, in the dry season, it becomes very dry and hot during the day while cooler at night.

Due to these weather patterns, the agriculture of the area is somewhat different from the rest of the district. Although paddy cultivation is the main form of agriculture, paddy can only be grown in the six rainy months. Thus, during the rainy and dry seasons different vegetables are grown. In the dry season, the main form of agriculture used to be `chena' cultivation which is the slash and burn form of agriculture. People leave their houses and go to the forests in the mountains, cut down trees and burn them. They build houses either on the ground or on top of the trees for protection from wild animals. Sometimes, men leave their families in the village and go and stay in the `chenas' by themselves. But, most of the time, the whole family, or, if they have small children, only the husband and wife go and stay on the farm. If the farm is not very far from home, wives normally come back to the village at night. Men have to stay awake during the night and light fires to keep away wild animals.[44] At present, chena cultivation is not very common because the environmental protection laws prevent the cutting down of trees.

Pahalawela is situated in a separate electorate in the district on a main bus route. Before the bus service was started, the foot path leading to a distant sacred place called "Mahiyangana", which was a very popular place of pilgrimage, ran through the village. Villagers still recall the days of the pilgrimage season when hundreds of people in big groups used to walk through the

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[44] Lighting wood fires all through the night and singing and talking aloud to friends in the other huts helps them to stay awake and protects them from attacks by wild animals.

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village singing `Tunsarane'.[45] These pilgrimages linked the villagers with other villages and with centres of pilgrimages for a long period of time.[46] The climate and other physical features prevented tea plantations from spreading to the village. Therefore, the traditional Sinhalese culture of the village was not affected by colonial plantation culture. The village community remained Sinhalese Buddhist, with no external interference.

For government administrative purposes, Pahalawela is divided into three sections which reflects the traditional division of the village. While each section is headed by a different administrative officer, villagers consider all three sections to be one village. Pahalawela is situated in one of the remotest areas of the district. The high mountains and its isolation have prevented the area from receiving the attention of the authorities. The tea plantations, and later, tobacco plantations, attracted the attention of foreigners as well as local elite groups who were involved in the trade. It thus became essential to have a road system. Later, a member of parliament who represented the village pioneered many road construction projects in the remotest sections of the electorate. According to people living in the area, some of the roads are still not in good shape for two reasons. One is that after the former member of parliament there was no one who took an interest in developing the road system. The other is that during the rainy season, land slides are very common and they cause heavy damage to the road system. The electorate as

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[45] `Thunsarane' is a special kind of religious song sung mainly on pilgrimages. Since the pilgrimages were made on foot, these songs provided the strength needed to keep walking the long days they needed to reach their destination. Also the loud noise of hundreds of people singing kept away the wild animals.

[46] For about two thousand years, since king Dutugemunu renovated the pagoda, Sri Lankan Buddhists made pilgrimages to Mahiyangana. Pilgrimages made to this sacred place by the people from the Nuwara Eliya district were known for over five hundred years through two routes. People from Pahalawela took the route which is called `lower Badulu route' along the village and Mahaweli river. Pilgrimages were made in the month of June. In July, a sport called `Ankeli', which involved an offering to the deities, made Pahalawela devalaya (Devalaya is the Sinhalese name for the temple of deities) very popular in the area (Mahavamsa,1950, chapter 1: 3-5 & 170-171).

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a whole is considered to be one of the underdeveloped areas in the Nuwara Eliya district.

The electorate consists of 117 village administrative areas called `Grama Niladhari' or village administrates's divisions. Each area is administered by a government officer who is called `Grama Niladhari', the officer in charge of all the initial administrative duties. S/he occupies the lowest rank in the official hierarchy of the government administrative system. The electorate has 23,925 families and 20,224 households. The total population of the electorate is 116,229 of which 59,548 are women and 56,681 are men; out of this population a total of 46,377 are employed, 21,136 of whom are women. Of the 13,553 unemployed, 8926 are women. Three thousand seven hundred and ninety five families are considered to have an income below the standard and are living on government welfare. However, this is not a feature specific to this area. Many families who earn sufficient income by work such as agricultural labour do not report their real earnings. Nevertheless, poverty is not an uncommon feature in the area.

Pahalawela consists of three grama niladhari divisions. Traditionally, this was one village governed by a village headman, but villagers always identified these three sections of the village by three different names.[47]

In 1992/93, the total population of Pahalawela was 1,437; 743 men and 694 women. There are 280 households and the total number of families is 353. About one hundred families live below the poverty level, which, according to the central bank report (1992) is Rs.750. It is important to keep in mind that some of these families have a considerable income generated by their land while others meet consumption needs by cultivating their own land. Many villagers are

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[47] In many large villages in the country, there are several hamlets known by different names. Since household numbers did not exist, this made it easier to identify land and people by referring to the specific hamlet. Although at present houses are numbered for administrative purposes, people never use these in identifying households, even for mailing purposes.

agriculturally self-sufficient. Many do not spend money on rice and vegetables. They grow them on their own or on leased lands. While some tenant farmers have small land holdings, many do not have enough to survive. They work as tenants on other people's land. Still others have enough to survive, but work as tenants for extra income. The tenant system is called `Andaya'. The tenant is responsible for cultivating the land. The land owner provides the seeds and manure. He gets a portion of the harvest in exchange for the use of land. In Pahalawela, there are only seven people who can be considered to be fairly large land owners. Each owns between 15 and 45 acres of land, with between 10 and 35 tenants. There are about 125 tenant farmers in the village.

Paddy cultivation in the village is threatened by wild elephants. Due to the construction of a massive irrigation scheme in a distant area, some forests had to be cleared and wild animals were transferred. Since elephants normally do not leave their natural habitats, they started coming back to where they used to live. Food shortages resulted in the eating of village crops by these wild elephants. The life of one section of the village was completely disturbed by this when I was doing field work. Huge sections of paddy lands were left unused because of the threat of elephants.

Land slides are another natural disaster. During heavy rains, villagers live in extreme fear due to the possibility of land slides. People know the most vulnerable places according to their practical knowledge and some people move in with relatives during the heaviest rains and sometimes for the whole season. Villagers whose houses are situated in such locations have no other recourse than to leave and return to their houses after the heavy rains.

The Layout of the Village

The houses in the village are located on either side of the road which runs through the village. One side of the road is next to ascending hills that continue up to a high mountain range. There is a foot path running through the hills that connects with the main road a few miles away on the other side of the village. Many villagers take the foot path instead of waiting for the bus. It also prevents a long walk along the road. The hills descend down to the stream from the other side. To get to another part of the village, people have to go down the hills, cross the stream and again go up and down the steps to get to the houses. There are stairways constructed by the authorities to make it easier for people to travel. As the foot paths get extremely muddy during the rains, these stairways are a great help. The other side of the road abuts the descending mountain. Paddy fields are located on both sides at the bottom of the hills. Dwellings are situated on either side of the road or up and down the hills. Some houses are close to each other, while others are located on hill sides far away from the village.

During the rainy season people start planting vegetables and other crops. They grow both up country and low country vegetables according to the season.[48] During the rainy season, mainly up country vegetables are grown. Both farmers and non- farmers grow vegetables during the rainy season. The fertile soil and good climate of the area are considered to provide good quality crops so that most villagers try to make an extra income during the six rainy months. Most people have at least a small patch of land which they usually cultivate during this time. Those who do not have

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[48] In Sri Lanka, traditionally grown vegetables are called low country vegetables as they can be grown not only in cool weather but also in dry and hot weather in the low country. Vegetables such as carrots, beets, cabbage and cauliflower were introduced by the Europeans and are mainly grown in the up country which has cool weather. People still call them `rata elavalu' which means foreign vegetables.

land either lease land or work as agricultural labourers. Chena cultivation[49] which was the most popular and traditional form of agriculture during the dry season, is not common any more due to the environmental policies that prevent the villagers from clearing the forests. Instead, according to the availability of water, people cultivate home gardens.

Even during the rainy season, many people experience problems acquiring water. Most of them use the stream or the fountains. Usually, fountain water is used for drinking. Some people have fountains in their home gardens and some use pipe lines to get water to their houses from the distant fountains. Those with an affordable income have built tanks in their back yards that are continuously being filled with fountain water. The village has several fountains that carry water even during the dry season. Nevertheless, some people have to walk a long way carrying big vessels to fetch water. They collect water in the morning for the day. Even little children carry a small bucket of water. They go down to the stream for all their other needs such as washing clothes and bathing.

Social events are very rare in the village. Normally, in many Sri Lankan villages, the temple is the main community centre where people gather not only for religious activities, but also for other community events. I stayed in the village for over a month in December and January, the time of heavy rains, but I never learned of any event that occurred in the temple. During the rainy season, people are extremely busy with their agricultural chores, and do not have time for other activities. Before certain dates they have to plough the fields, prepare them for planting and plant the seeds since the specific dates are important for good crops. Therefore, during the rainy season, even on full moon days which are government holidays, as well as religious days for

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[49] The crops that are grown in chenas do not require much water except at seeding. This type of agriculture was thus popular in the areas that did not receive much rain.

Buddhists, many people do not go to the temple. They come home from the fields after dark, cook and take care of other household activities. Every single day is a busy day for farmers during the planting period.[50]

The village does not have any recreational facilities. Whenever they have time, villagers go to watch a movie or do a little shopping in the rural city about five miles away. There is another town about eight miles away. It has larger shopping facilities and a high school that many village children attend. The bus that goes through the village takes them to one of the main cities up country. Although not very often, some people make trips to that city which is about 32 miles away from the village, for shopping or for their other needs. On the other hand, many people do not leave the village for years. Once in a while village youth get together for local recreational activities. The most common activity is to bring a movie to the village, using the school hall. It is one of the events when many people gather together. The school stages a concert at the end of the year. At least one of the parents tries to attend to encourage and admire the talents of their children.

The few events that do take place in the village occur in the dry season. Pilgrimages are one of the main events. As mentioned earlier, until about fifteen years ago, a pilgrimage was made to a distant sacred place once a year. This was a very important event for the villagers. They had to prepare months beforehand and make arrangements at home, especially if they were leaving children. The trip was very long and undertaken by foot since there were no transportation

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[50] Religiosity in rural areas is usually higher than in urban areas. In some other traditional villages in the area which are also agricultural communities, I noticed that people have a very close relationship to the temple. Usually, it is women who spend more time in religious activities. Although in other traditional villages, women are as involved in agricultural work as in Pahalawela, they seem to spend more time on religious activities. The limited time they get for agricultural work during the rainy season seems to be affecting their involvement in religious activities.

services. The route was through fields, forests, and mountains. They had to carry food, cooking utensils, clothes, water and even dry fire wood in case of rain. They sometimes walked through the night, but they knew the distance and the time it would take to reach different locations where they normally camped.[51] To have their meals and to rest, they stopped by the rivers or fountains where they could fill their water vessels and wash or bathe. The foot path went along the river most of the time, and they spent the nights in temples or camped at various places. These trips are now only memories among the older people. Some young people can also remember joining them as little children. Those pilgrimages are not made any more because there are no enthusiastic people as in the old days who would take the lead in arranging them, even by motor vehicles.[52] At present, villagers are stuck within the village unless they have the money, time and the desire to undertake this kind of journey by themselves. As money and time have become extremely important, people try to cut down on expenses in order to save money for their material needs.

At present, electricity is supplied to many of the houses in the village. Until the initiation of the "Mahaweli" development project in the late 1970s which included several hydro power projects, they mainly used kerosene oil lamps. Many of the houses were wattle and daub with thatched roofs of straw or coconut leaves. Within the last ten years, some houses have been built in brick and cement and roofs are tiled. There are still a few mud houses with straw thatched roofs. The floors are nicely cemented with a mixture of cow dung and mud. Once in a while, on sunny days, they renovate their floors with a new layer of cow dung and mud. As they were

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[51] According to one route, Mahiyangana temple was 52 miles and according to the other it was 42 miles.

[52] These trips are expensive nowadays, and many people cannot afford to go as families.

getting ready for the new year while I was there, many of these renovations were taking place.[53]

Many of the houses do not have attached washrooms or toilets. Although most of the houses have proper toilet facilities, toilets are located a little distance from the house, in accordance with traditional customs of building outhouses.

The Village's History and Its Present Situation

Because the village has such a long history, no one knows its origins. Villagers only know that their ancestors have lived there for generations. Folk tales contain a story of a leader who was sent to the area over a thousand years ago with his men who irrigated and cultivated the land. There are a few archaeological sites that provide some evidence for some of these folk tales. A small reservoir is still there which is no longer used to irrigate the paddy fields. Legend holds that this leader committed suicide because he received news, erroneously, that his king had lost the war.

Before the new administrative service was started, under British rule, there were elite families in the village who undertook village administration with all the official, legal and police powers. These families are not only officially, but also socially, highly respected. Most of them are comparatively wealthy land owners (among the seven land owners, four belonged to these families while the others did not own the land by heredity, but had bought land later), who have

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[53] Traditional villagers do not normally celebrate the first of January as the new year since the traditional new year for Sri Lankans comes in April after harvesting. Yet, in the village, people accept the first of January as the official new year and they try to do some cleaning and redecorating of their houses. On the morning of the new year, they make milk rice as the first meal of the year which is considered auspicious at the beginning of any important work. Usually that is the end of the new year celebrations in the village for the first of January. The city is quite different in this regard since city dwellers usually celebrate the first of January as similarly or more importantly than the traditional new year.

many tenants working for them.[54] They have maintained a reciprocal relationship rather than an exploitative one, because elites had to both help and depend on their tenants. The quality of the relationship depended on the nature of the person who held power. Villagers believe that most of the time it was a pleasant relationship. These elite families, despite the loss of power and wealth from landownership, still maintain a high standard of living in the village. One of the reasons for this is that most of the younger generations within these families are well educated and have left the village or remain within the village maintaining a good social standard in different professions.

Other than these elite families there are no wealthy land owners in the village except those who bought land. This new landowning elite although economically better off, is not as respected as the hereditary land owners. Some of the traditional elites have sold their land to the `new elite' because of the difficulty of maintaining traditional patron-client relations with the tenant farmers due to lack of family members who hold the power, wealth, or interest. The other category of the elite class structure in the village consists of educated government workers such as teachers and officials in various government offices. Since most of them have at least small land holdings, and they cultivate them to get their basic food supplies, their expenses are much lower and they tend to be richer than those who hold the same positions in other parts of the country. Because of their education and economic status, they also enjoy a higher social position in the village. The rest of the villagers are either farmers, agricultural labourers, or businessmen who run small boutiques in the village. These businessmen form most of the non-traditional wealthy elite. Having a

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[54] The land owners of the village cannot be compared to the wealthy land owners in many other agrarian societies such as the Jajmani system in India or latifundia in Latin America, because of the comparatively smaller size of the land holdings and the small number of tenants.

village boutique is a profitable income source since many commodities are sold at black market prices. Villagers have no other choice unless they travel all the way to the rural town where the prices are not much different. Price controls have much less effect in distant areas like this one.[55]

Most of the villagers are related to one another. There were many inter-marriages among relatives in the old days, especially cross-cousin marriages.[56] At present, cross-cousin marriage is rare although when it occurs it is fully accepted. People refer to each other in kinship terms and even non-relatives are addressed using these terms.[57] The villagers still help each other, regularly visit each other and live together as a closely knit community, although the society is much less integrated than in the past.

The caste system still operates in the village. The people who do not relate as kin to one another are the ones who belong to different castes. Although people who belong to the lower ranking castes also enjoy equal social opportunities in the village, inter-marriages between

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[55] A maximum retail price is fixed upon many essential goods under the authority of the Commissioner of Internal Trade. There are assistant commissioners who have jurisdiction in certain areas of the country. The maximum penalty for breaking the law regarding price controls can vary between Rs.100 to a seven year prison sentence. In distant areas usually these price controls are not actively implemented since there are fewer complaints and bureaucrats tend to be more lenient (Government,1956 revised 1980).

[56] Cross-cousin marriage was a highly accepted form of marriage in Sri Lanka in which a girl was married to her father's sister's son or her mother's brother's son. The other cousins were regarded as consanguines and considered to be parallel to brothers, and therefore taboo for marriage purposes.

[57] Traditionally this was the customary form of addressing people everywhere in the country. Kinship terms are used according to the age of the person. An elderly person is never addressed by name without adding a kinship term like aunt or uncle, even for non-relatives, or using an honorary term such as Mr. or Mrs. For instance, usually a male friend of the parents in the same age category are addressed as "mama" which is the kinship term for mother's brother. A female friend thus would be called "nenda", the term used for father's sister. The use of these terms also depends on the social position of the person. It is important to note that every kinship term in Sri Lanka connotes marriageability between people.

different castes are still very rare and are condemned.[58]

There are several castes in the village. The majority of the villagers belong to the `Govigama' caste which is the caste of the cultivators. This caste is the highest in the caste hierarchy. Unlike the Indian caste system where the higher castes are smaller in number, in the Sri Lankan caste system, higher castes are much larger in number than the lower castes. The Sri Lankan caste system cannot be justified by the predominant religion, Buddhism, which thoroughly rejects any kind of social segregation. However, caste hierarchy is justified by some of the Sinhalese Buddhist ritualistic practices.

The caste system of Sri Lanka is an occupational system in which the people in different castes are ascribed certain tasks as careers. Just like `Govigamas' are cultivators, `Navandanno' are the gold, silver, and blacksmiths; `Berava' are the drummers and dancers; `Rada' are the washer caste who do other people's laundry.[59] While the caste system is not as rigid as before, and many lower caste people have been successful in hiding their caste identity by adopting new names and getting into different occupations by means of higher education, still the social hierarchy created by the caste system is visible in the village setting.

In Pahalawela, there are groups of people who belong to three castes. The majority are `Govigamas'. There are only three families who belong to the `Navandanno' caste who still perform their caste duties as blacksmiths and are economically in a very poor position. There is

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[58] Unlike the Indian caste system, the Sri Lankan caste system does not have a religious origin. It is an occupational system which is similar to the barter system in medieval Europe, yet is a closed system. One is born to a certain caste and has no mobility within the caste system. It is believed to have originated with the arrival of the sacred Bo tree when people of 18 castes arrived in charge of different duties to the tree. However, the caste system could not be justified under Buddhism, and existed as an occupational system.

[59] There were no `Rada' families living in the village. Apparently, they commute to Pahalawela from nearby villagers.

a cluster of twelve houses at one end of the village separated from the other houses which are the dwellings of the `Berava' caste, the drummers and dancers. Although dancing is considered a very respectable occupation, and many higher caste children are allowed to learn it, the `Berava' people, from their occupation, are expected to play drums in temples and `devalas', and dance in the temple and devala processions. They are considered lower on the caste hierarchy. These castes were normally given tenancy in the land belonging to kings and aristocrats, and they could cultivate this land for subsistence needs but were expected to do their `rajakaris' (duties to the king) in return for land. Although the few `Navandanno' families live in poverty, accepting their caste and socio-economic status, the `Berava' caste people who live there as a community (since there are enough families to form a small community) seem to be making an effort to overcome their ascribed social position. Only a few elderly drummers still perform their caste duties. There are two school teachers in the `Berava' community. They have much better houses, newly built up in the middle of the old wattle and daub houses. They seem to be trying to ignore their caste positions and occupations and by educating their children enable them to overcome the traditional social barriers.

Other people in the village have not completely forgotten caste differences, although they have no severe prohibitions in mingling with these people.[60] However, they are still loathe to take food from those houses and most of them are extremely opposed to inter-marriages between the castes.

The traditional structures of the village are no longer independent of the wider socio-

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[60] Even my research assistants, both of whom were from respectable Govigama families, were not at all reluctant to visit these houses with me.

economic transformations of the country which made even its remotest village a microcosm of the larger structure. Pahalawela, as noted earlier, never was an isolated remote village. However, the economic structure of the village was not heavily affected by the results of the green revolution as in the low lands where the use of advanced agricultural technologies were made possible, nor was it affected by a few villagers commuting or leaving the village for work or marriage purposes. After 1977, many new changes occurred in the village which increasingly integrated it with the wider socio-economic structures. There were three major changes that had a massive impact on the village. One was the development of electricity which brought the outside world to village homes through the introduction of the television. As in many other societies, this audio visual media opened a whole new world for many villagers who had never stepped outside their own small world. Second, the beginning of new bus routes closely integrated the village with the major cities. The third and the most important change on women was the establishment of a garment factory on the outskirts of the village which increasingly attracted young village women. These changes facilitated the penetration of the money economy into the village, significantly affecting the traditional social structures and women. The impacts of these changes on women will be examined extensively in later chapters.

This chapter presented an account of the village; its geographical, historical, administrative, and population characteristics. Current economic, social and religious structures can now be compared to those that existed in the past as mapped in later chapters. This broader picture of village life within a changing historical context helps to facilitate a comprehension of the changing position of village women within the wider social transformations in the post 1977 period. Chapter four provides a description of the city location in the greater Colombo area.

Chapter 3: The City - A Changing Urban Scene

The purpose of this chapter is to provide background information on Colombo city in order to assess the impacts of the post-1977 economic liberalization policies on the various categories of urban women. Melvin Town is an electoral ward in the city of Colombo which is the capital city of Sri Lanka. This chapter presents the socio-economic background of Colombo city of which Melvin Town is a microcosm.[61]

Geographical Background

Colombo city is situated on the west coast of the country within the south west wet zone in the western province. The boundaries are the coastal belt on the west, Dehiwela canal on the south, Dematagoda canal on the east and the Kelani river on the north.

Being in the wet zone, it gets plenty of rain throughout the year from the south west monsoon. The climate of Colombo is usually warm with an average of twenty-seven degrees Celsius throughout the year. Geographically, the entire area of Colombo is flat land extending to the Indian ocean.

Social Stratification

Colombo forms the heart of all socio-economic activity in the country. It is Sri Lanka's administrative and commercial centre. Colombo developed into a city centre because of its harbour. During the long periods of colonial rule, the city took its shape according to the various

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[61]Demographic and other characteristics of Colombo city are much the same in every electoral ward except for some minute details. The only apparent distinction among different locations is the social class variation. Melvin Town was selected mainly for this purpose, to include all class categories.

Map 5:   MELVIN TOWN

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Stadium

	Municipal Boundary
	Roads
	Main Road

16 12 8 4 0   16   32   48   Chain

1/12,072
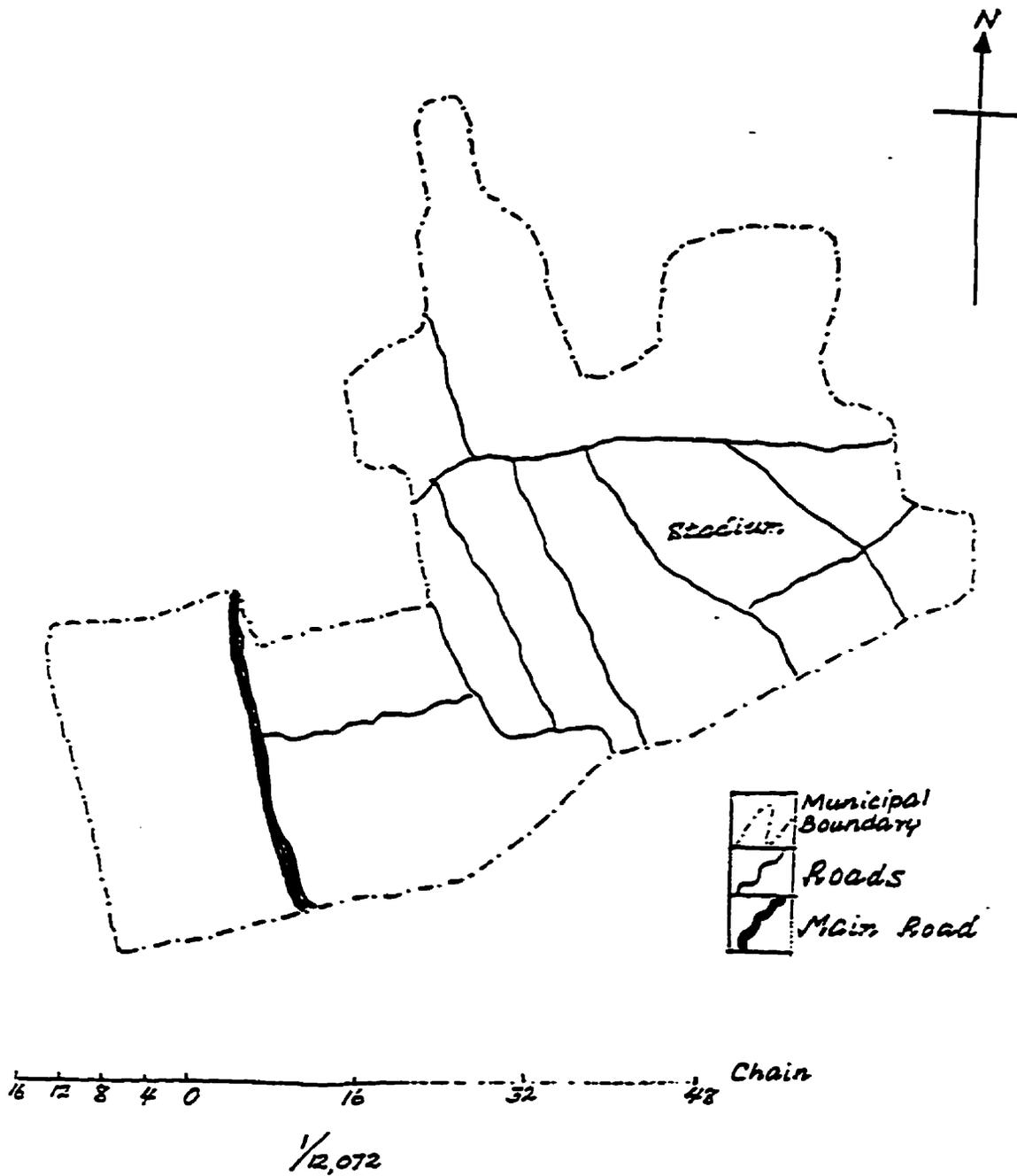
Source;

Extracted from Colombo city map, Survey Department
of Sri Lanka - 1984

Map 6:   THE LOCATION OF MELVIN TOWN
WITHIN THE CITY OF COLOMBO

MELVIN TOWN
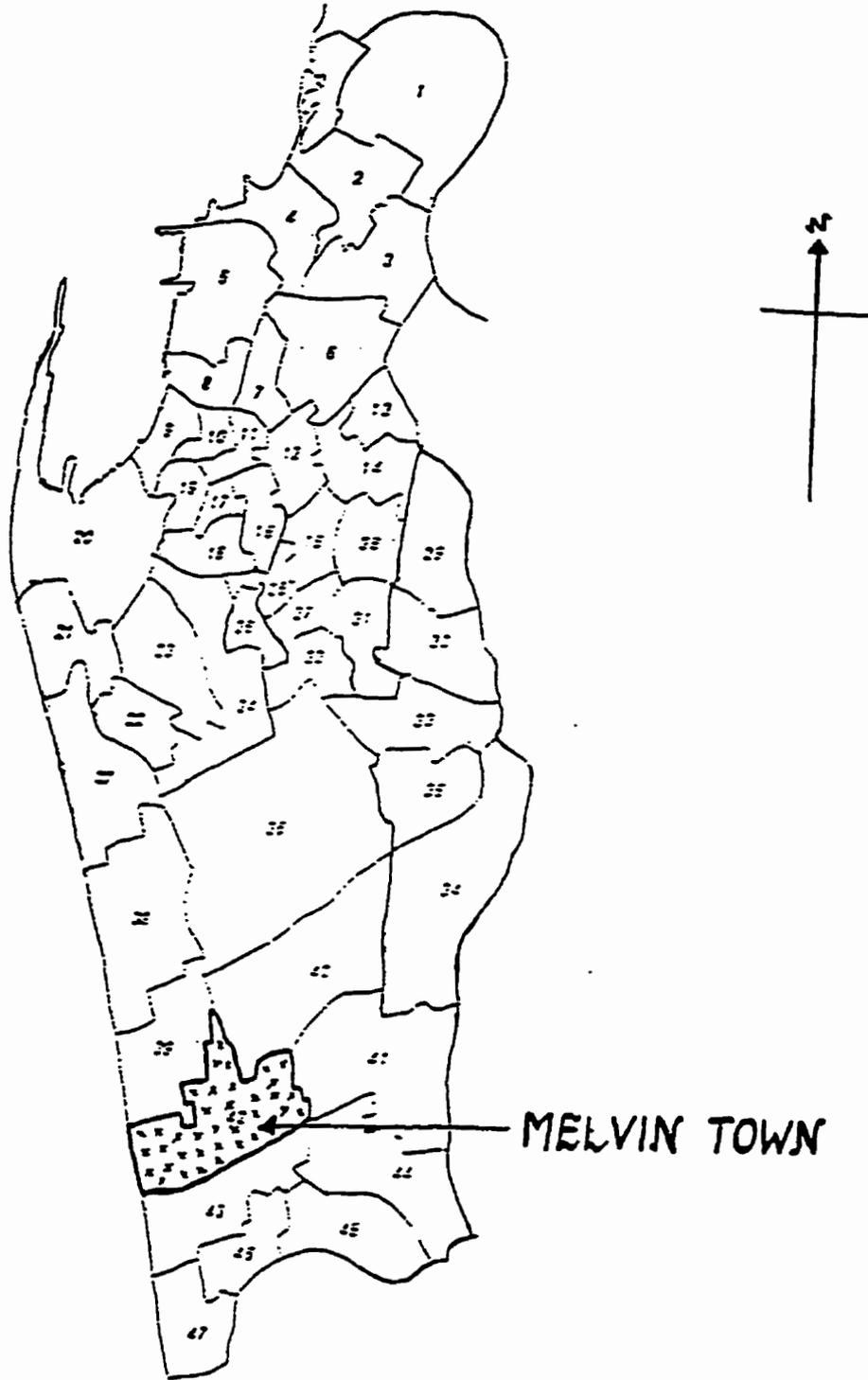
Source; Survey Department Sri Lanka - 1984

Map 7:   DENSITY OF POPULATION IN
           COLOMBO DISTRICT: 1981
           BY A.G.A. DIVISIONS AND URBAN AREAS

Kolonnawa U.C.

GAMPAHA DISTRICT

Kolonnawa
A.G.A. Div.

Colombo

Avissawella U.C.

Kaduwela A.G.A. Div.

Kotte U.C.

Nugegoda A.G.A. Div.

Dehiwala
Mt. Lavinia M.C.

Hanwella A.G.A. Div.

RATNAPURA
DISTRICT

Kesbewa A.G.A. Div.

Moratuwa U.C.

Homagama A.G.A. Div.

Moratuwa A.G.A. Div.

KALUTARA DISTRICT

less than 1000

1000 - 3000

District boundary

3000 - 6000

A.G.A. Div. boundary

6000 - 9000

urban areas

24612
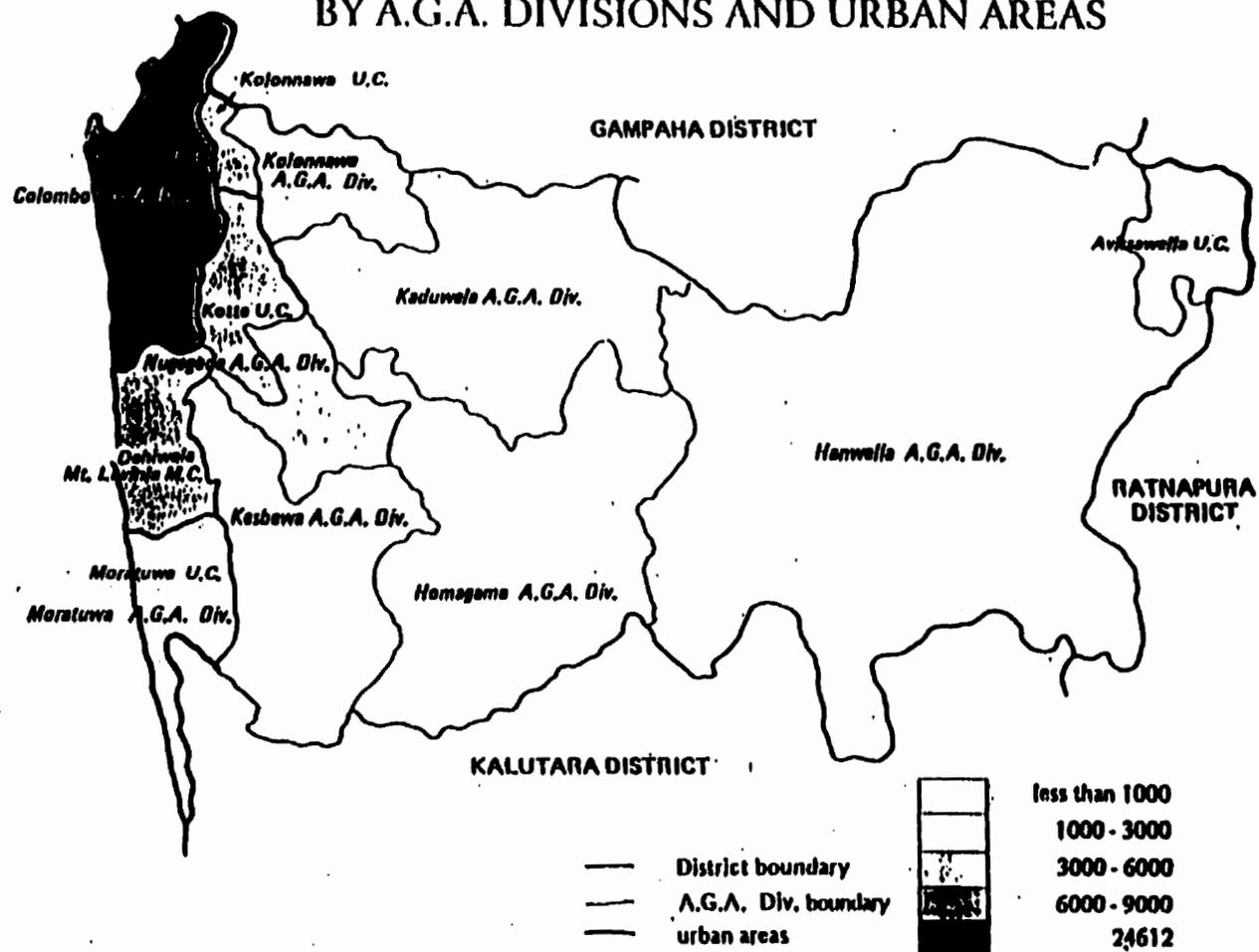
Sources
Sri Lanka census of population and Housing 1981
        Colombo District Report

needs of the colonialists. Colombo Fort, built by the Portuguese, the first European invaders of Sri Lanka, is now being used as the core of the country's administration. `Pettah', or the outskirts of the Fort, forms the main commercial area. The rest of the city has developed to reflect the occupational structure. Each area thus gathered together a population that belonged to a different social class.[62]

Caste is not a major issue in the city as it is in the village. People of various castes live together without even knowing their caste differences. Since the surname of a person denotes his/her caste, it is easy to identify a caste but many rural migrants may change their surname in order to conceal their caste position. However, city dwellers usually do not regard caste as a symbol of status or social class. Marriage is the only occasion in the city when caste plays an important role. Although it is not as strictly enforced among city dwellers, many city dwellers still think that it is better to marry within the same caste. It is believed that when two people and two families of different castes live together and become relatives it could create many disparities among them that could lead to marital problems for the couple.

While class may not be a major factor, social class distinctions are quite important within the city. When Colombo grew into a large metropolis containing forty-seven municipal wards, a specific pattern of class distribution became evident, made obvious by the types of settlement in each ward. Different class and status groups emerged reflecting the economic, occupational and political power in different historical periods and these have become the identifying

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[62] Although some years ago, the different sections of the city could be identified as the residential area of different social classes, at present the differences cannot be seen as clearly due to the rise in land values. The shortage of land within the city dramatically increased the value of the land and reduced the concern about social class in purchasing land. The price of property turned out to be the deciding factor in choice of residential location. However, the social class factor has not completely disappeared.

characteristics of the social stratification system of Colombo.

The outward migration of the elite into the sparsely populated outer boundary of the city and the inward migration of the working class into the city centre and to the commercial areas in search of job opportunities, led to overcrowding with slum and shanty settlements while the former areas, containing large houses and spacious gardens, became the ideal location for upper and upper middle class residents. But this outward mobility was confined mainly to the south, because over-flooding of the Kelany river left the north end of the city muddy and unsuitable. Thus vacated and water-logged areas in the other parts of the city, not demanded or used by the middle or upper classes, attracted low-income workers.

The administrative and commercial centres of the city, Fort and Pettah, are surrounded by slums and tenements. These tenements are mostly the derelict nineteenth century residences of the local elite. Working class and lower class people now live in these, and in shanties that have grown on unoccupied land. Residential centres have moved to the periphery or suburbs of the city. New housing complexes and flats built by the urban development authority also reflect social class differentiation (Jayaweera, 1986:4). Lower and middle class housing schemes and slum and shanty upgrading projects, under the National Housing Development Authority, represent a new phase in the development of housing in Colombo (Karunatilake, 1982: 42).

"Inequalities are more sharply etched in the urban environment, among the affluent, middle strata, and the city poor who are among the most disadvantaged segments of the island population" (Jayaweera, 1986: 13). Despite provision of facilities, services and other common amenities to the population of Colombo, there are great disparities between social classes, and these are clearly reflected in the living standards and in the housing conditions of urban families .

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According to the urban development authority 23,137 slum families live in 700 tenement gardens and 19,608 families live in shanties in 750 locations in the city. Slum tenements are nearly a century old, others are ghettos in old elite mansions and gardens. These have minimal accommodation and common water taps and latrine facilities. Shanties have grown in recent decades in clusters of improvised structures on encroached state or private land often in water-logged locations with no regular water, sanitation or electricity services. Unemployment and underemployment, low income and sub-standard housing are often correlated and are manifestations of the poor quality of life of poverty groups in the city (Jayaweera, 1986: 13-14).

As far as the pattern of settlements and class distribution is concerned, it is very clear that there is a juxtaposition between upper and upper middle class settlements and lower and lower middle class settlements. Spacious homes and home gardens and overcrowded slums and shanties form the two halves of the residential areas of Colombo.

The pattern of class distribution within the city divides the wards into four different classes: upper class areas, middle class areas, working class areas and slum areas. This class division reflects the occupational structure and housing patterns of the city. Occupations within the city can be divided into two groupings: formal sector jobs and informal sector jobs. Within the formal sector are found higher and lower level professionals and skilled and unskilled workers. Within the informal sector are found wage-earning and non-wage-earning workers. Non-wage-earning workers are the people who carry out their own informal occupational activities in varying degrees of size, while wage-earning workers are the ones who work for these non-wage earners.

These different occupational groups live in different areas of the city. Many higher level professionals live in upper and upper middle class areas while lower level professionals live in middle class areas. Skilled workers live in working class areas while non-skilled workers live mainly in the slums. Most of the wage-earning workers in the informal sector also live in these slum areas. Non-wage-earning operators in the informal sector have their residences in different

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areas as dictated by the size of their business and income. For example, an informal sector operator with a large-scale business may live in an upper or middle class area while a poor man who owns a small boutique may live in a slum. This division of classes within the city according to occupational structure does not indicate a clear-cut picture of wardwise occupational distribution but we can assume that this pattern is fairly representative.

The other measure is the residential pattern within the city. "The distribution of residential localities in Colombo city and the residential styles in these localities gives us a broad idea of the social stratification of the urban community living in the city" (Marga 7, 1978: 11). The housing pattern in each ward reflects the socioeconomic level and character of the population residing in the ward, (Marga 7, 1978: 11) although segments of other types as well could be included in these wards. Four types of housing areas have been identified: tenement-type housing areas, shanty-type housing areas, housing found in the commercial centre of the city and upper and middle class residential areas (Marga 7, 1978: 13). Tenement-type housing consists of two subtypes: tenement house type and tenement garden type. Tenement houses generally have their own toilet and water facilities, but have no garden. Houses are attached to one another with two or three rooms one behind the other with the first room facing the road. These houses are occupied by lower middle class people. Tenement gardens form a cluster of housing blocks attached to each other in a garden. Each block consists of a row of rooms, predominantly occupied by low income households. They are often adjoining or behind commercial buildings and can be approached through narrow paths and alleys juxtaposed between commercial buildings. These are mainly situated in the older quarter of the city, in those big houses and gardens formerly occupied by the city elite. Low income economic activities and informal sector activities and a high incidence

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of illicit activities predominate in these areas (Marga 7, 1978: 16).

Shanties are a post-World War II feature created by the fire gaps within the city, especially in the tenement housing areas. People displaced by demolition of their tenements had to move to the unoccupied water-logged areas and were forced to build temporary shelters with cadjan, tin and cheap wood. They did not receive any legal recognition for the ownership of land until the urban development authority began helping them to develop their houses, giving them title deeds. Residents of these low income households work in both the formal and informal sectors.

Wards like Kochchikade, Fort, Pettah, Slave Island and Suduwella either wholly or partly make up the commercial centre of the city (Marga 7, 1978: 15). Maradana, Dematagoda, Borella, Gintupitiya, Masangasweediya, Kehelwatta and many other wards are well known for their formal and informal trade activities. Kotahena, Kochchikade, Borella South, Lunupokuna, Grandpass, Cinnamon Gardens, Kollupitiya, Bambalapitiya, Milagiriya, Thimbirigasyaya, Wellawatta, Havelock Town and Pamankade are mainly middle and upper class housing areas.

This differentiation of socio-economic group by ward is not a clear demarcation between the social classes because there are mixed types in almost every ward. But this classification was compiled according to the predominant housing pattern found within the city.

Population

Since Colombo is the metropolis of a country which was developing an export-import economy, it has had a continuous centre-periphery relationship which attracted a vast number of people. The growth of the Colombo harbour demanded a large working class population since

growing city needed more and more labour. This created labour out migration from rural areas towards the capital city. The number of facilities, the availability of higher education and the central administrative structure also attracted a more educated and wealthy middle and upper class population. For these reasons Colombo's population experienced rapid growth. The first recorded enumeration in 1824 shows that Colombo city had a population of 31,188 which was made up of 734 persons in Fort, 4,979 in Pettah and 25,475 beyond Pettah (Hulugalle, 1965: 9). Beginning in 1871, a decennial census was undertaken and more accurate figures became available.

Table 3:1

Area, Population and Density of Population of the City of Colombo/1881-1963

Census Year	Area in Square miles	Population	Density
1881	9.45	110,502	11,693
1891	9.45	126,825	13,350
1901	10.50	154,691	15,469
1911	11.93	211,274	17,698
1921	12.93	244,163	18,872
1931	13.00	284,155	21,858
1946	13.27	362,074	27,852
1953	13.87	425,881	30,694
1963	14.32	511,639	35,729

H.A.J. Hulugalle, Colombo: A Centenary Volume 1865 - 1965, Sri Lanka: Colombo Municipal Council, 1965.

The population of Colombo increased by 363% during the eighty years under review while population density increased 205% corresponding to an increase in size of only 51% in the area. Compared with the population increase in the rest of the island, population increase was very high in Colombo until 1946. The population density of Colombo was greater than that of London and New York (Hulugalle, 1965:69). The 1971 and 1981 census reports establish that the city population has increased to 562,160 and 587,647 respectively and density to 14,745 and 15,759 per square mile. In 1984 the enumerated population by the municipal council of Colombo was 601,106 and density per acre was 66 (Unpublished report of the Mayor of Colombo, 1984). Since 1963, the size of the city has not increased. The high density of population is mainly due to the outward migration of the elite class to the city's peripheries, leaving behind the spacious home gardens which came to be occupied by the working and lower middle classes. These became very densely populated slum and shanty areas (Marga 7, 1978: 4).

After 1946 the density of population shows a slow increase compared to the growth of the island population. This is due to outward migration to the suburbs which occurred with the rapid growth of urban development (Marga 7, 1978: 4). This slow rate of increase is a special feature of the growth of the city's population. As the development of a city provides more and more opportunities, the rural-urban drift should also increase. Although there was rapid growth of population in the beginning, in the past forty years it has slowed. In most developing countries there is a population of migrants which cannot be absorbed by the city's economy and which results in a massive excess labour force. While this phenomenon can also be seen here, the growth rate is not as large as in other developing countries. Explanations include planned migration schemes to the new agricultural settlements in the dry zone, social welfare policies which

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improved the living standards of the rural population, the size of the country, the network of roads and cheap public transport system, and the location of major industrial projects in various parts of the country(Marga 7, 1978: 7). At present, the establishment of export industries which attracted a massive labour force can also be seen as an important part of this explanation.

Ethnicity and Religion

Colombo is a multi-racial city with many different religious denominations. Since its first foreign inhabitants, the Arabs, took residence there, there has been a mixed population comprised of Moors (the descendants of the Arabs), Chinese and Persian traders. With the arrival of the Portuguese followed by the Dutch and the British, the city came under European domination for nearly four centuries. Therefore it is natural that the city's population reflects the descendants of these groups as well as of the Sinhalese and Tamils, the earlier settlers. Table 3.2 shows the percentage increase of population by ethnicity.

Table 3.2
Population Distribution of Colombo, by Ethnicity: 1921 & 1963

Race	1921	1963
All Persons	100.0	100.0
Low Country Sinhalese	45.2	47.2
Kandyan Sinhalese	1.7	3.9
Ceylon Tamils	6.0	17.2
Indian Tamils	16.2	6.6
Ceylon Moors	10.4	17.4
Indian Moors	5.8	1.4
Burghers & Eurasians	6.1	2.6
Europeans	1.2	0.3
Malays	2.4	2.2
Others	5.0	1.2

H.A.J.Hulugalle, Colombo, A Centenary Volume 1865 - 1965, Sri Lanka: Colombo Municipal Council, 1965.

Table 3.2 indicates a very low percentage of Kandyan Sinhalese compared to low country Sinhalese. A fairly big percentage of Indian Tamils were there in 1921, but had decreased massively by 1963. This fact may be a result of the Sirima-Shastri accord drawn up in 1962 by the Indian and Sri Lankan prime ministers, in order to send back Indian Tamils originally brought over by the British as estate labourers. But the Ceylon Tamil population has increased almost threefold. On the other hand, the decrease in number in the Burgher and other populations may be due to the fact that with independence in 1948, European descendants left the country for greener pastures. The Ceylon Moor population has increased considerably. Nevertheless, in 1963 the Sinhalese population was still at 51.1%, with the Tamils at 23.8 %, followed by the Moors at

18.8%.

The 1981 census report presents a somewhat different picture, as indicated in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3
Population by Ethnicity - Colombo M.C. 1981

Ethnic Group	Population	Percentage
Total	585,776	100.00
Sinhalese	293,600	50.13
Sri Lankan Tamil	130,210	22.23
Indian Tamil	11,139	1.90
Sri Lankan Moor	123,131	21.02
Burgher	7,637	1.30
Malay	13,795	2.35
Other	6,264	1.07

Census Report 1981, Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics, 1981.

Religious groups differ from one another mainly according to ethnicity. In Sri Lanka almost all the Moors and Malays belong to the Muslim religion and most of the Tamils are Hindu while the majority of the Sinhalese are Buddhists. But a Tamil and a Sinhalese minority belong to the Roman Catholic and other Christian groups. There are other mixtures of religious and ethnic groups but they are not numerically significant.

Table 3.4
Population in Colombo M.C. by Religion:1963 & 1981

Religion	Total 1963	Percentage 1963	Total 1981	Percentage 1981
All Religions	511,644	100.0	585,776	100.0
Buddhist	221,047	43.2	252,183	43.05
Hindu	78,737	15.4	98,434	16.80
Muslim	109,771	21.5	142,298	24.29
Christian	100,999	19.7	90,403	15.43
Others	1,090	0.2	2,458	0.43

(Source : 1963 Population - H.A.J. Hulugalle, Colombo: A Centenary Volume 1865 - 1965, Sri Lanka: Colombo Municipal Council; 1981 Population - Census Report 1981, Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics, 1981).

The numbers in all of the religious groups have increased except for a slight decrease among Christians. This might reflect the decrease in the European, Burgher and Eurasian populations.

There is a ward-wise distribution of ethnic and religious groups within the city. Kotahena east and west, Wellawatta north and south, Kochchikade north, Ginthupitiya and Pamankade west are the areas where Tamils are mostly concentrated. The main Muslim concentrations are found in Masangasweediya, Grandpass north and south, New Bazaar, Aluthkade east and west, Kehelwatta, Kochchikade south and Maligawatta west. Slave Island is mainly populated by Malays. The main ethnic group in the rest of Colombo is Sinhalese (Marga 7, 1978: 19). Mattakkuliya, Modera, Aluthmawatha, Lunupokuna, Kotahena east and west, Bloemendal and Kochchikade North and South have a higher concentration of Catholics than Buddhist, Hindu or Muslims.

Age and Sex Distributions

The distribution of population according to sex indicates the male population is larger than the female population. In 1981, census reports indicated that there was a male population of 327,213 and a female population of 260,434 in the city of Colombo. The percentages are 55.34% and 44.66% respectively. Age distribution within Colombo reflects that the population under 18 years is fairly large with more than one-third of the total city population, compared to the population over 18 years of age. There is an under-18 year population of 210,955 or 36.01%, and 374,821 are over 18 years old or 63.99% (Census Report, 1981).

Economy

The development of Colombo city is closely related to two factors. First is the development of the import-export economy based on plantation agriculture which had far-reaching effects on the incidence of polarization in Colombo. This brought a "duality to the economy; a modern dynamic sector and a stagnant subsistence agricultural sector with the minimum of interaction between them" (Samarasinghe, 1981: 77). As the major commercial centre and the main administrative centre, the impact of this on the city of Colombo was considerable (Marga 7, 1978: 2). The other factor is the development of Colombo harbour.

> The rapid development of the coffee industry and the increase of the shipping traffic made the construction of a safe harbour in Colombo one of the most urgent needs of the colony. The completion of the Colombo Kandy railway was an added reason (Hulugalle, 1965: 101).

In 1885 the port was completed and this helped the development of the colonial trade in primary commodities and in the import trade. The whole economy was concentrated around this. The

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development of a network of roads helped to build up close links between the plantation sector and the metropolitan centres located outside the island. Therefore, under the colonial regime centre-periphery links were not only limited to the country, but also extended internationally although they did not develop to as high a level as found today.

Although Colombo developed an urban economy linked with commercial activities, it did not combine with industrial economic activities as in other developing countries. Industrial development absorbs the migratory population. But since industrial development was concentrated mainly in the suburbs and other parts of the country due to low land values and the proximity to raw materials, industrial development was limited within the city. Therefore, the city's economy centred around trade and commercial activities and the central administration.

On account of this, the Fort and Pettah wards are the most important in the city's economy. From the early period the Pettah ward was favoured by business and commercial activities. It is still regarded as the country's main commercial centre. The Fort is regarded as the main administrative centre although some of the ministries and government departments have shifted to Kotte and elsewhere. The new parliament building in Kotte made it the centre of government administration while other government institutions were decentralised to other wards. However, the major business houses, commercial firms, major banking institutions and principal government ministries are still functioning in the Fort and together with Pettah are considered to form the nerve centre of the metropolis.

Melvin Town

Melvin Town is one of the 48 electoral wards in the city of Colombo. It has always been

a middle and upper class residential area. However, it also includes slum and shanty dwellings as found elsewhere in Colombo. The pattern of settlement distribution that occurred during the expansion of the city has created different sections within the city that are inhabited by members of different social classes. The areas and streets where upper and middle class homes are found belonged to the early settlers or to the new wealthy settlers of the area. Many upgraded slums and shanties under urban development schemes or which belong to the new rich also come under the category of middle class homes.

The layout of Melvin Town is completely different from that of Pahalawela. Melvin Town is a complex of shopping and residential areas with different social levels. Different streets reflect the living areas of different social classes. Due to urban development programmes, shanties that were situated along the canal have been developed into proper houses. Another reason for the upward mobility of shanty dwellers is that many women in low income families have gone to the Middle East to work as housemaids. Most of them spent the money they earned in upgrading their houses. Therefore, beautiful new houses have been erected along the canal where most of the shanties had been previously situated. However, there are still some streets that have shanty-type houses but none of them are in the poorest of conditions. Within the last ten to fifteen years one of the major features in Melvin Town has been the change in the living environment of low income people.

The middle and upper class areas can be identified through the housing patterns. The new and old neighbourhoods are also recognizable from their external appearance since housing designs have changed remarkably over time. Some of the streets which are new residential areas have big and beautiful luxury houses. Most of the houses are owned by the people who live in

them. A few families live in rented houses. The owners of these houses either live abroad or own more than one house. Some of the streets are very busy with many shopping areas, while others are very quiet and peaceful residential areas. There are several popular schools in the area. The children in the area thus do not face any difficulty in receiving a good education.[63]

Unlike the village, transportation is much easier in Colombo. Many people own motor vehicles.[64] Several bus routes run through the area and buses are very frequent. During rush hours people say it is easier to travel by public transport than to use a private vehicle because of the heavy traffic in the main streets. Throughout most of the day, however, streets in the residential areas, although not far from the main roads, are quiet with very little traffic. Train services are not available in the area, but the train stations are situated within walking distance from one end of Melvin Town.

Melvin Town is situated within the metropolitan area, and thus has close access to all the facilities within the city. Major shopping centres, government offices, as well as many recreation facilities are located a half hour away from any end of Melvin Town. Movie theatres showing films from around the world, museums, drama theatres, playgrounds, stadiums, gymnasiums, parks, swimming pools, and many other recreation facilities that operate day and night are situated within close reach for the people living in Melvin Town. Exhibitions of various types, drama and

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[63] In Sri Lanka, going to school is not the same for every child. Schools vary in their status and popularity according to the prestige attached to that particular school, a remnant of colonial times. During the colonial era, English medium Catholic schools were considered to be prestigious and were given better facilities and developed to very high standards under the aegis of the colonial government. During the Buddhist renaissance, English medium Buddhist schools were established to counteract the Catholic influence and to provide Buddhist children with a better education. Later, the medium of instruction was changed to the vernacular languages, without the social recognition of the schools having changed.

[64] About 70% of the study sample owned a motor vehicle including cars, vans, jeeps and motor bicycles. Some families owned more than one vehicle belonging to different members of the family.

movie festivals, musical shows, carnivals, and various game events occur throughout the year. Since the ocean is about five to fifteen minutes away from all ends of Melvin Town, beautiful sand beaches and beach resorts are readily available free of charge. There are plenty of hotels and restaurants within the area. These places provide food from a wide variety of international cuisines. There are high quality hotels which facilitate the tourist industry of the country and which are also used by wealthy locals.

The occupational structure of the city is totally different from that of the village. Farming, which is the major occupation in the village, is completely unknown in the city. In this metropolitan area, there is no land left to cultivate. Not a single marsh has been left untouched. Marshy land was previously to be found on the sides of the canals and used as dump yards or as a part of the water drainage system of the city. All of the land is now used for buildings of various types: houses, apartment buildings, or shopping complexes. Since the home gardens are also very small, cultivation is unknown for the people in Colombo. The little home gardens are usually well landscaped with flowers and for decorative purposes but not used for any food crops.

There is a wide variety of occupations within the city. The employment structure of the city can be divided into two sectors: the formal sector and the informal sector. The other division is the government sector and the private sector. The formal sector includes the well defined wage sector within the city with large-scale enterprises. The informal sector or the petty commodity production sector comprises the entire unorganized labour force, both legal and illegal.[65]

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[65] Agricultural labour in the rural areas can also be analysed using the concept of informal sector as developed by Keith Hart (1973) on the basis of empirical data from Ghana. He argues that informal sector jobs are not personally recruited, or regular, or with a fixed salary. Informal sector workers live a hand to mouth existence and their income is supplemented by alternative income sources. Later, the concept was criticized and the concept of "petty commodity production" came into use as an alternative theoretical framework which explains the difference between the high and low income generating activities within the informal sector.

Although there are both employers and employees of large-scale businesses and enterprises within the area, a major part of the working class of Melvin Town belongs to the informal sector. Apart from the legal informal activities (such as small scale businesses, boutiques, operation of taxis and other hiring vehicles, pavement hawkers), illicit liquor and drugs as well as other illegal businesses such as imports and exports of products beyond the legally defined varieties and limits also contribute to the employment structure of the area. Although many informal sector workers are from the low income groups, the owners and shareholders of both legal and illegal informal enterprises enjoy upper middle class life styles as rich business people.[66]

The population of Melvin Town has a high representation of government employees. Government sector employees work for different government ministries, departments, boards, cooperatives, and industries. Private organizations of an industrial and non-industrial nature also provide employment for the population of Colombo.[67]

Chapter four has dealt with the social and infra-structural changes which occurred over the years in Colombo. It can be concluded that the city population comprises a multi-ethnic and religious population with a long history of social and cultural change. The multi-cultural impacts and exposure to a long history of foreign domination had unique impacts on urban women. Women are consistently facing social changes imposed upon them by the thorough integration into the world economy in the aftermath of economic liberalization. These impacts will be analysed in detail in upcoming chapters. The next chapter discusses how the economic policy changes

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[66] One of the illicit liquor dealers with whom I had a conversation said that some of the illegal business owners, although they are very rich, live in lower class housing maintaining a very low profile in order to escape the law.

[67] Although none of these institutions comprises only city dwellers, the employment structure of the city population can be divided into these four occupational groups.

affected the differential educational levels of women in the two study locations, since education

has been a major source of advancement for Sri Lankan women.

Chapter 4: Education and Social Mobility - Sinhalese Women in Pahalawela and Melvin Town

Education has always been perceived as a vehicle for social mobility in many literate societies of the world. The significance attributed to education within Sinhalese society is clearly evident in various folk songs and folk tales as well as in many historical documents as delineated in Chapter Two. This chapter examines the changing educational involvement of three generations of women in both research locations to see how far education has succeeded in increasing women's social mobility.

As explained in Chapter Two, education in Sri Lanka commonly refers to formal education and is an institution that has received high priority. The present education system originated under British colonial administration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "chiefly to provide personnel for the administration and to ensure the political socialization of, particularly, the local elite" (Jayaweera, 1993: 2). Three phases can be identified within the present education system. First is the effects of early colonial education which was manifest in the creation of social classes and sharpening gender disparities in Sri Lankan society. Second is post-colonial education marked by the free education system, change of the medium of instruction to the native languages and gender neutral educational policies. The third is the post-1977 period which, through structural adjustment policies, aggravated the difficulties of low income groups. Income disparities increased because of the reduced expenditure of the service sectors (Jayaweera, 1993: 3). As will be explained later, during these different phases, education has benefitted women of different social classes in different ways.

In Sri Lanka, schooling begins at age five, and many children, regardless of their sex,

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continue their education at least until the age of 17 or 18, until they complete high school. The literacy rate compared to other Asian countries has always been high in Sri Lanka. In 1990, Sri Lanka had a literacy rate of 89%, which is a very high percentage for the Asian region (ESS, 1993: 94). According to the 1981 census, the literacy rate in urban Sri Lanka was 96.2% for individuals between the ages of 15 and 29, and the highest literate age category in the country with a corresponding rate of 90.5% for the rural sector. For the same age category, the male literacy rate in the urban sector was 97.1% while it was 95.2% for females. In the rural sector, the female literacy rate was 88.5% and 92.5% for males (Census Report, 1981).

Many research studies have shown that women in Sri Lanka have equal access to education with men (Jayaweera, Perera & Rupasinghe, 1991; Rupasinghe, 1991; Jayaweera, 1993; Gunawardena, 1992). Although many studies carried out in western societies have provided evidence for gender difference in education,[68] researchers have found that the gender difference in educational performance and achievement is not significant in Sri Lanka (Jayaweera, Perera & Rupasinghe, 1991). The differences that are present in the "distribution of knowledge and skills" is attributed to the social construction of gender (Jayaweera, 1993: 2). Jayaweera (1993: 1) further claims:

> Gender disparities in the education of Sri Lanka have been reduced rapidly since the nineteen forties in the post-colonial decades, ...Girls and boys in the age group 5-14 years have equal participation rates (83.7% and 83.6%). There have been more girls than boys in senior secondary grades since the early seventies as men have easier access to employment. Gender specific constraints limit access only in two small communities - plantation labour families of South Indian origin and rural Muslim families in Eastern districts. Socio-economic factors rather than gender appear to affect educational opportunity. Among girls and boys, around 8% never enter schools, 50% reach grade 9 and 25% grade 12. `Drop-outs' are

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[68] For further reference see Jayaweera, Perera & Rupasinghe, 1991.

concentrated chiefly in urban slums and shanties, remote villages and plantations...

Therefore, the researchers relate differences in educational performance and achievement, which is greater within the sexes rather than between the sexes, to such factors as social class, school facilities, and the educational climate of the schools (Jayaweera, Perera & Rupasinghe, 1991: 17; Rupasinghe, 1991: 33-34).

The grade system in the country categorises schools into two levels: primary and secondary. Since 1985, schools with grades from 1 to 6 are considered to be primary schools. Until 1984, primary schools contained grades 1 to 8, or from Kindergarten to grade 5. Until 1982, secondary schools had grades either from 6 to 12, or from grade 1 to 8, 10 or 12 according to changes in national educational policy. Since 1985, schools having classes from year 1 to 9, 1 to 11, 1 to 13, or 7 to 13 are regarded as secondary schools (ESS, 1993: 95). There are two public examinations at the secondary school level. In grade 10, students have to sit for a public examination called G.C.E.(O.L.)[69] from which they will be selected for different fields of study, which they will continue up to university entrance, with the option of specializing in new subjects at the university level. After completing grade 12 or, at present, grade 13 students sit for another public examination called G.C.E.(A.L.) which is also the university entrance examination. Since the education system in Sri Lanka is free until the university level, and also because spaces and facilities are limited in the universities, only a very limited number, about 5% of those who pass the grade 12 examination, are admitted to the universities. This has made high school education

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[69] The abbreviation refers to General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level). At grade 12, students sit for the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level). I will be referring to these examinations as O.L.examination and A.L. examination.

in the country a heavy burden for both students and their parents. Because of tight competition for entrance into the university, and due to differences in educational levels throughout the country,[70] a huge number of good students who complete high school do not get an opportunity to pursue university education.

Following is an analysis of field data for both the rural and urban locations regarding women's education. The perception of education as well as performance and achievement takes different forms in rural compared to urban communities. Not only the educational facilities but also the difference between the opportunities that are provided for different social levels as well as their social aspirations play a role in determining the educational targets of urban and rural people. The gender differences in educational achievements are thus not a result of discrimination in access, but of a variety of other social factors that affect women's social achievement.

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[70] The difference between the schools according to standard was explained earlier in Chapter 4. The same difference exists between rural and urban areas. Even the high schools in rural areas are deprived of most of the facilities that urban schools have. Rupasinghe (1991) identifies six types of schools within the urban and rural division. In the urban sector, he identifies three types of schools: (a) prestigious and popular schools, (b) next `best' schools and (c) poor and deprived schools in slums and shanties. In the rural sector, three different categories of schools are identified: (a) best schools like central schools, (b) an intermediate type like rural maha vidyalayas (or high schools), and (c) poor village schools. The government of Sri Lanka introduced a quota system for university entrance to help students in rural districts in the country, allowing them to enter the universities with lower marks than students from urban districts.

Table 4.1

Rural-Urban Differences in Levels of Education of Women

	Rural	%	Urban	%	Total	%
No Educ	28	14.0	2	1.0	30	7.5
Grade 1-8	100	50.0	19	9.5	119	29.8
Grade 9-12	68	34.0	121	60.5	189	47.3
Degree	4	2.0	58	29.0	62	15.5
Total	200	50.0	200	50.0	400	100.0

As Table 4.1 indicates, the significant difference between the level of education in the village and the city, could be seen as mainly due to the differential access to educational facilities. The educational level seem to be much higher in the city.

Women's Education in Pahalawela

Education was a theme that was enthusiastically perceived by village women. The term `education' as used in the village refers only to formal education. It is very rarely that someone mentioned life experiences as a type of informal education. Women saw education as a means of upgrading their social status, a means of getting a good job, of contracting a better marriage, of earning social respect, and a means of becoming a good mother who would be able to properly guide her children. Basically, for village women, `education' was the best they could ask for in their life. Getting a proper education was the key to achieving many other goals. One village school master described education as a medicinal oil that would soothe all ailments. This is an extremely popular aphorism in the village.

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According to the villagers, education was always highly valued. However, men and women did not have the means to attend school.[71] According to an old village school master, the village school was started in 1900 in the village temple by a Catholic priest. Since then, both men and women have gone to school. In 1915, the school was moved to a new place and in 1957 the present school was constructed. However, the necessities of family and farm life meant that both men and women often had to leave school at an early age. It was primarily poverty that made the children leave school early because the parents could not afford to buy books and clothing for the children. Other than that, girls mainly left school to look after younger siblings when parents were away on the farm while boys left school to join the parents in farming.[72] Although education was highly valued, the socio-economic problems villagers faced prevented them from reaping its benefits.

One of the major barriers women faced was travel to a different village since the village school offered only the primary levels from grade 1 to 8. Since there was no bus service, they had to walk through the woods, farms and fields. Many parents did not want the girls to go out of the village since it was considered improper for girls to leave the village unescorted. This prevented many talented young girls from pursuing their studies. While villagers believed that it is good for both girls and boys to have a proper education, under the circumstances, girls could not be exposed to the risks involved. Since older women thought the village to be a very safe place for

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[71] According to the administrative reports of the department of Public Instruction, in 1871, the rate of female enrolment in government schools was 2.9% for Kandyan Sinhalese women in English schools, in Anglo-Vernacular schools 4.03% and there was no enrolment in Vernacular schools (Jayaweera, 1991:110). This illustrates the fact that education of up country women was limited to urban centres.

[72] Many village women informed me that if they did not have economic and other family problems, they would have continued their education.

women, there was no restriction inside the village. They said that it was never considered improper in itself for women to pursue their studies.

Mothers and grandmothers reported that in the early decades of this century girls were prevented from going to school because of early marriages as young as thirteen years of age. Many women were married before age seventeen. From the age of nine they were considered to be adults and after puberty, women were given away in marriage.

Table 4.2

Age and Education of Women in Pahalawela

Age	No Edu	%	!-8	%	9-12	%	Degree	%
15-44	09	32.1	55	55.0	50	73.5	2	100.0
45-64	16	57.1	39	39.0	17	25.0	1	100.0
65+	03	10.7	0.6	06.0	01	01.5	1	100.0

According to Table 4.2, educational level in Pahalawela has increased over time, if the age cohorts represent different time periods. Primary education has notably increased in the second generation (45-64), the third generation (15-44) have even higher schooling levels. This relates more to improved educational facilities in the village than to increased enthusiasm.

Women of the first generation did not face as many restrictions as their mothers did. By that time, schooling had become a common phenomenon, and the old values regarding education as the only way to better the quality of life made many parents encourage schooling regardless of their gender. Yet, poverty and distance prevented many women from studying beyond the primary level.

The second generation faced similar problems regarding education. The level of income

of the family always influenced the level of education of the children. Although education was free, the cost of books and clothing constituted a heavy burden for many poor families. While many families were self sufficient, the subsistence economy did not provide them with an extra income that could be used for family necessities other than daily consumption needs. However, many parents managed to send their children to school at least up to a certain level such as grade eight or grade ten which was considered to be a valuable educational qualification that could even prepare them for government employment.[73]

Table 4.3

Family Income and Education of Women in Pahalawela

Income	No Ed	%	1-8	%	9-12	%	Degr	%	Total	%
0-999	20	71.4	60	60.6	182	6.5	00	00	98	49.2
1000-4999	08	28.6	36	36.4	44	64.7	02	50.0	90	45.2
5000-8999	00	00	03	03.0	05	07.4	01	25.0	09	04.5
<9000	00	00	00	00	01	01.5	01	25.0	02	01.0
Total	28	100.0	99	100.0	68	100.0	04	100.0	199	100.0

Table 4.3 indicates that the level of education rises with the level of income. Lower percentages of women in higher income levels signifies the low representation of those income levels in the sample due to the low income level found in the village.

The third generation is quite educated. School attendance is very high at the primary level.

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[73] Jayaweera (1991b: 115) writes, "Urban and rural disparities are minimal in education and the universities functioned till the late sixties as the agent of social mobility. In 1950, 77% of university entrants had been from professional families. By 1967, their percentage had declined to 20% and 70% were from rural families."

The literacy rate of Pahalawela parallels the national literacy rate. Except for a few of the older women, all women, including those who received no schooling, can read and write.

Many girls in the younger generation pursue their studies outside the village. Some attend boarding schools in the big cities. It is very unlikely that a village girl does not go to school at least for her primary education even if the family is undergoing severe economic problems. According to the teachers of the village school, school dropout rates are very low in Pahalawela. Parents consider that girls are more oriented towards education than boys, who are seen as being less responsible about their future and who try to avoid formal schooling. Girls have better goals about the future because they know that there is no other way to improve their lives and thus they try hard to stay in school for as long as possible. Only a few girls who are not interested want to leave school early.

The normal trend in the village is to go to school as long as possible and then to leave school and stay home doing household work and helping with the family farm, or to get married as soon as they leave school. The girls who pursued a higher education or had enough qualifications to get employment, either left the village or commuted to work from home. Village girls who enter the university are highly respected in the village.[74] Village girls who leave school early face limited options. They do not have many opportunities open to them for further studies in different fields. Their choice is to either continue their formal education or to stay home. Many young village women declared their interest in continuing education in a variety of fields, but they did not have any hope of fulfilling these desires since they were deprived of the opportunities. Many

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[74] I do not have the actual numbers of women in the village who had a university education because the village school does not have classes up to the university entrance level. But I did meet about six women who were university graduates (I met some of them while they were visiting their families in the village) and they told me about the value of being an educated woman in the village.

of them expressed ideas similar to this; "We know we have the talents. What we do not have is money and the opportunity. We are lagging behind because we were born in the village and we are poor."

The economic changes that occurred after 1977 changed this picture for many village girls. As a result of increased foreign investment in the country, many factories were started which required cheap and unskilled female labour.[75] The manufacture of garments was one of the large-scale industries started. This attracted many young girls from low income families in the country.

In Pahalawela, at first, there were only a few girls who joined the garment industry. When the `Katunayaka Free Trade Zone' in Colombo was started in 1978, the girls in the village were afraid to travel there for several reasons. The parents objected to their leaving the village, especially to a big city out of concerns for their safety and good name. Because it was believed that the factory girls are paid poorly, treated improperly, and do not have decent living arrangements, parents did not have confidence in sending them off to work in Colombo. The girls who lived all their lives with their parents were also hesitant to go to the city by themselves. However, the information they received from girls who entered the garment industry changed the minds of both the parents and the children. A young woman who worked in the free trade zone remarked: "From what I had heard of Colombo, I had a very bad impression about city life, especially those who are in the garment industry. If it had not been for the girls who went there first because they had former acquaintances or relatives in the city, I would have never gone to work in the factories in the `Zone'". The girls came back to the villages, wearing good clothes and

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[75] There are many studies on the development of foreign investment and the expansion of industries in Sri Lanka as well as in other third world countries and their effects on women, especially the increase of cheap labour, and the growth of the industrial reserve army which facilitates the manipulation of the capitalist economy (Tinker & Bramsen, 1976; Dobbins, 1977; Voice of Women, 1982; Charlton, 1984; Hettiarachchi, 1994; Sharma, 1995).

jewellery, with their own bank accounts, and brought presents for family and friends. They had many interesting stories to tell about their `free life'. I met one of them who had come home for a holiday. She informed me: "I live with three other girls in the same room. Each of us has a bed. Every thing else is shared. Sunday is the only holiday for us. We never stay home on Sundays. Most of the time we go shopping. Sometimes we go to the beach or to a movie. I really enjoy being there. I get bored in the village now".[76]

The parents were relieved when they heard their daughters telling them there was nothing to fear. More and more girls became interested in the `garment industry' and more and more parents were willing to let their children leave the village to join them. They thought this would ease the financial burden of the family and also improve the lives of the children who would be able to have a better life with the money they earned. However, some parents were still afraid to send the children off to the city. Conflicts arose because girls were adamant about joining the garment industry while their parents strictly opposed the idea. The problem was solved when factories were started in nearby cities. Parents were not so reluctant to send the girls to these factories since they could either visit their children or the children could come home, at least for the week ends.[77]

The opening of a garment factory on the village border, to which many girls could either

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[76] Of the 60 women interviewed, 38 had at least one family member in the garment industry. Villagers told me that the numbers are much higher. Nearly all of them were unmarried. There was a bus running through the village at seven in the evening which brought the day workers back to the village from the garment factory. Villagers called it the `garment bus'. I noticed that this bus was always full even without the people working the night shift. Over fifty passengers travelled on this bus every day, almost all of whom were women.

[77] Nuwara Eliya, the main city in the district, is one of the places that attracted many garment industries in the early stage of the implementation of the free trade policy in Sri Lanka. This city is situated about forty miles from the village and the people who work there could easily return to the village for week ends if not daily. Compared to Colombo, which is over 150 miles away from the village, both the parents and the girls were much less worried about working in Nuwara Eliya. Therefore, the factories in Nuwara Eliya attracted many girls from the district.

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walk or commute daily by bus, changed the whole village situation. This was a very good opportunity for girls unable to convince their parents to let them leave the village to work in a factory. They could go to work in the morning and return home in the evening. Sometimes they had to work night shifts, but they could still take the last bus home. Someone would wait at the bus stop to accompany them home if their houses were located far from the bus stop. This eased the minds of both the parents and the children since the girls could have their own income and also be safe. Nevertheless, some parents were still reluctant due to the social stigma attached to these jobs or because they wanted their children to continue their education. A mother stated: "We are still capable of earning and we do not want our daughters to earn for us. What we want from them is to be educated, not to tarnish their reputation by working in the factories". Reports of incidents in the free trade zone such as rape, pregnancies among unmarried girls, and abortions (Hettiarachchi, 1992; 1994; Voice of Women, 1982; Logos, 1981), were not as common in the village. Nevertheless, poor working conditions stigmatized these young women as `cheap' and as `sexual objects'.[78]

This whole situation affected school attendance in the village. The girls who previously had had no other choice but to receive a proper education in order to obtain a good job, were provided with an alternative opportunity: either to go on in school, sacrifice the present and still be skeptical about the future, or go for the employment at hand and sacrifice an uncertain future.[79]   Many

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[78] The names that are used to identify female garment workers such as `jukio' (juki is the name of the most common sewing machine in the factories), `juki keli' (juki pieces), `badu keli' (pieces of goods), `machine keli' (machine pieces) describe the contempt in which these young women are held (Hettiarachchi, 1994).

[79] The high rate of unemployment among young educated people and the political and bureaucratic corruption that interfered with employment recruitment procedures, left many young educated people frustrated.

young girls chose the latter option, thus leaving school early.[80]

Parents, teachers and students in the village have very different opinions regarding this matter. Parents who were very ambivalent gave the whole responsibility to the children. They said that it is up to the children to decide what they want, because the parents cannot decide whether they should continue their education. Most of the parents in the sample expressed views like the following. "We cannot take a decision either way. If we ask them to continue studying and give up the jobs, they might not get another job in the future even if they do well in the school. If we ask them to go for a job, later they would blame us for not encouraging them for studies, because they lose the chance of securing a better job. Therefore, it is better to leave it up to them to decide what they want to do in the future." Earlier, when there was no other option, parents forced the children to continue in school since that was the only advice they could give to their children to improve their standard of living. Educated people were highly respected in the village and they led a better life than the others. Many poor children who went to the university became important people in the village.[81] Although political corruption interfered with employment procedures, there was nothing that people could do about it.[82]

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[80] Jayaweera (1993:10) remarks that due to poverty, school dropout rates are higher in low income neighbourhoods, in remote villages and in plantations and it is higher among the boys than among the girls due to their easier access to employment. However, in Pahalawela, school dropout rates are high in the secondary school level and among the girls due to the unique social structures created by the new economic trends.

[81] I talked to six female university graduates from the village, five of whom were from poor families. These and other male graduates hold a high status in the village in advisory capacities in various village events, even when they visit the village only occasionally.

[82] Sri Lankans have experienced political and bureaucratic corruption for several decades. This affected the masses chiefly in the areas of job recruitment, promotions and red tape. Apart from political and bureaucratic influences, bribery made it extremely difficult for many young men and women to get a job according to their qualifications. The frustration among the younger generations resulted in two youth riots in the country: one in 1971, the other during 1987-88. This does not mean that every educated young person in the country does not receive a proper job without political support. Most of the time, it depends on various boards and committees in charge of recruitment. Recently, new features such as proficiency in English, and the name of the school, have been added to the

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The newly found alternative provided girls with a chance to earn a small amount of money which otherwise they would probably never have had. Although the dowry is not publicly acknowledged, many parents still believe that girls should have some wealth according to their family status when they marry. Otherwise they believe that the girls will be treated contemptuously by their husbands and in-laws since they become totally dependent on their husbands. It was common for village mothers to remark: "It is our duty to give our girls at least a small wealth as a dowry. We do not want to humiliate both our girls and ourselves by sending the girls empty handed to their husbands."

The girls who were educated and had jobs did not face this problem according to the villagers, because they had a life time income and no one could treat them poorly since they were economically independent. But they believe it to be impossible to avoid many derogatory attitudes towards girls without incomes because of the perception that they will be economic burdens on their husbands throughout their lives. The parents, although they did not agree with the idea of the dowry, were ready to provide their children with some gold jewellery which is considered a life time asset, or some household necessities such as furniture, or some money as a saving for future necessities. But many poor villagers could not provide their daughters with any of these as they led a hand to mouth existence. Therefore, they regarded this opportunity to earn a little money before marriage, to be a great opportunity for their daughters.

Although higher education could have provided them with a better life, the social reality did not provide any guarantee that this would in fact occur.[83] The parents who still considered

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list of qualifications, making it very difficult for uninfluential village youth to get a good job.

[83] There are studies which confirm Boserup's (1970) argument in the Sri Lankan situation that free education which disregarded sex difference has improved the quality of life of women (Jayasinghe, 1982; Jayaweera, 1991b;

education as being more important for girls than marriage, dowry, or employment, forced their children to pursue their schooling. However, some parents really wanted to ease their burden of poverty by sending the girls to the garment factories.

All teachers in the village with whom I spoke think that school attendance has suffered because of the availability of factory work. The poorer the family, the more likely that girls will look for factory employment. Therefore, even the brightest students in the village school leave the school if they can find work. Earlier, as they did not have any other option they continued their education, taking advantages of the benefit of free education and the encouragement of their teachers.[84]

The teachers said they felt helpless because of their inability to force the good students to stay in school since they cannot predict the future. Earlier, teachers were not reluctant even to force the parents of a talented student to continue school even through economic difficulties because they could predict the future would be better for them. One old school teacher told me: "If a good student did not come to school for several days, I used to go to the house and inquire and advise both the child and the parents since I knew that child could have a better future. There are some children who still thank me for doing that. Now they are government officials who hold responsible positions. But now, the teachers cannot do that since it is very difficult to predict the future. Even if the child goes to the university who knows if the child is going to get a proper job?

Samarasinghe, 1989).

[84] Ironically, education became less of a burden for village children after 1977 when the government added new features like providing free text books (1980), free lunches (1990), and free school uniforms (1993). There were also many scholarships available so that even university education became possible for the poor. Village children benefitted greatly from these changes and school statistics show that school attendance increased at the primary level with no early dropouts which contradicts the situation of many poverty stricken communities.

The child might be economically better off by getting a job now, than continuing studies. Since money is the most important issue nowadays, neither the children nor the teachers can be blamed." The uncertainty of the job market and highly competitive exams have greatly limited the possibility of predicting a child's future with regard to education and employment. Therefore, teachers are not capable of doing anything about the change other than giving a little advice now and then.

The young girls themselves had different ideas about the situation. Some believed that this is a good opportunity to earn money and live happily. One of them said: "It is good to continue education and get a good job if we know that this in fact would happen. When we know for sure that most of the time it won't happen, why don't we use the chance at hand and earn some money? Maybe this is the only chance that we get within our life time to both earn and enjoy ourselves." Peer groups played an important role in changing their minds. More than 80% of the garment workers in the village told me that it was as a result of talking to their friends that they decided to take jobs in the garment factories. Most of them agreed that their main expectation was to save some money and buy some gold jewellery. Some of them showed me the jewellery they had bought. Most of the time this included a necklace, a pair of ear rings and sometimes two bangles. Girls who joined the garment industry showed their friends the jewellery they had bought. They wore nice clothes and had savings in their bank accounts. Higher education is a lengthy process and it is very doubtful that graduates would receive reasonable employment after leaving high school or even the university. The village contains many young people, both men and women, who are educated and unemployed. Therefore, many girls decide that what is close to hand is better than dreams about the future that may not materialize.

However, some girls did not abandon their dreams. They did not want to leave school early in order to join the garment industry. One reason was the social stigma attached to it. They did not want to be put down because of the type of work they did. The other reason was either the encouragement of the parents to continue or their own faith in further studies. They also think that garment work is better than having nothing or working as housemaids for rich people.[85] But they still preferred education.

As a whole, village women across the three generations, had great faith in education as the only way of upgrading their social status. As children, most of them wanted to have a good education. While many were encouraged by their parents, poverty, cultural attitudes, the geographical situation of the area, transportation problems, and other reasons unrelated to education per se, affected the fulfilment of their childhood aspirations. Most of the village women who gave up their studies have no present involvement in education. The lack of facilities has impeded any further pursuit of education for these women. Therefore, many of them have no further hope of returning to school. Many of the women from the first and second generations believe that further educational involvement could have made a big difference in their lives. Those who did achieve a certain level of education and received better employment, really believe that their achievements are a result of the education they received. But, the third generation does not have such faith in education. Due to political and bureaucratic corruption, education does not

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[85] It is not always rich people who hire housemaids. Other than those who always seek help for house keeping duties because they are financially well off, middle class working women and women who do not have any family help require the services of housemaids. Because of the social stigma attached to it and due to the fear caused by the incidents of violence and abuse of domestic servants, factory work is preferred to working as a housemaid, even though garment work is sometimes less profitable. (Because housemaids usually do not have any expenses since they are provided with food, lodging, clothing and even doctors' bills, medication, and recreational expenses, financially housemaids hold a better position than many working women).

seem as important a measure as before for obtaining good employment. Therefore, many young girls prefer a steady income rather than spending time in school.

However, many mothers still wanted their children to have a good education. Although, as before, they do not have the privilege of saying that education is the only way of promoting the standard of life due to the socio-economic changes that have occurred in the village, they still believe that their children would achieve a better social status than they now have, through their educational achievements. Villagers do not see any difference between men and women related to education. One hundred percent of the sample believed that education for women is as important as education for men, and some believed that it is more important for women because men have more choices in improving their social status.

Women's Education in Melvin Town

For city women, as for women in the village, education does not mean anything other than formal education. But, the type of formal education they can receive in the city is much broader in the variety of opportunities and subject areas. At the same time, although the issue of education was considered a matter of prime importance, it was not as enthusiastically discussed by city women. The major reason for this is that, for city women, education is not the sole basis for future prosperity. Many other factors could also ensure a better future for them.

Formal schooling and university education do not limit the educational horizons for city women. There is a wide variety of subject areas open for city women and various ways to pursue them. Nevertheless, high school students in Colombo encounter a special barrier at the university entrance level. Due to the quota system based on district level, students in Colombo are required

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to have very high grades to enter the university, since Colombo is graded as a district which has the best facilities. Ironically, the quota system rates all the schools in one district within the same category despite the fact that even in the same district not all schools have the same educational standard (Rupasinghe, 1991). As Jayaweera (1993) points out, there is a high dropout rate among children from urban slums and these children mainly attend disadvantaged schools within the city. According to my research findings, the children in Melvin Town are not deprived of good educational facilities due to their social class, mainly because within a two mile radius there are several high standard government schools which lower class children in the area can attend. However, social class does play a crucial role in higher education when these children have to seek opportunities in fields of study outside the free government education system.

Both men and women in Melvin Town have numerous educational opportunities. Gender is a less important issue compared to the village in choosing a field of study since accessibility is much higher in the city.[86] Therefore, being a girl does not mean that she has to give up her education due to various impediments that deter village girls such as difficulty of travelling alone, or schools being too far away from home. The close proximity of Melvin Town to all the facilities in the city has provided numerous advantages for girls. However, there are two important factors that impede them from having equal opportunities in education. One is the social class factor. As mentioned earlier, due to the high competition at the university entrance level, many good students do not enter the university. Yet, they are left with many other educational options that the village children do not even know exist. Regardless of gender, many young people in the city

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[86] None of the women in Melvin Town who claimed education to be an important achievement in a woman's life was selective of the field of study. They regarded women as capable of pursuing any area of education depending on their interests. Gunawardena (1992) confirms that educational socialization did not affect the field of study among Sri Lankan girls but it certainly affected their career choice.

do not finish their education after completing high school even though they cannot enter university, because of these alternative opportunities. For instance, if someone decides to become a musician or an artist or an accountant, without worrying about university admission, depending on how well they did at the university entrance exam, he or she can enter the school of accountancy or the school of aesthetic studies.[87] However, most of these higher educational institutes charge very high tuition fees. Therefore, not all good students are able to enter their preferred subject areas. Only the students who can afford the tuition are able to take advantage of these opportunities. Women who did not have high incomes often discussed the difficulty of pursuing alternative educational opportunities by themselves or by their daughters. One girl was in tears when she said: "I was always a very good student but unfortunately was not successful in the university entrance exam to enter the medical school. If I had money, I could go to the private medical school and become a doctor." Although this is not a phenomenon affecting only women, women are doubly oppressed due to the disadvantages caused by gender within the class hierarchy.

As Brydon and Chant (1989) posit, inequality created by social class which has assimilated into development thus becomes an impediment for city women. Girls in the lower social classes have fewer chances than girls in the upper social classes who can reap full benefit from the system. But we must ask whether girls at the upper social levels actually utilize these opportunities. This is where the social class factor creates a gender difference necessitating the analysis of both productive and economic structures as well as reproductive and social and cultural

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[87] Most of the higher educational institutions require a high performance level on the university entrance examination. Therefore, this examination has become the basis for entrance to higher education in the country even though some educational institutions are completely outside the government education system. For example, CIMA (Chartered Institute of Management Accountants) is a popular and a very competitive examination faced by Sri Lankan students although the examination is conducted by the same institute in London, England. But, the registration for this examination requires a certain score on the local university entrance examination.

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structures in order to understand the full oppression of women (Beneria and Sen, 1981; Jayasinghe, 1982; Brydon and Chant, 1989; Jayaweera, 1991a). Within an educational system in which gender difference is almost absent, social class recreates a gender difference thus obstructing women at certain social levels from achieving higher educational goals. I perceive this to be the second type of impediment in the education of women in the city. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Victorian ideals of womanhood became the model in the upper classes during the colonial period and hindered the development of women in those social classes. These women in turn became role models for women in the rest of the community (Leacock and Etienne, 1980; Jayawardana, 1986; Jayaweera, 1986; 1991a; Thiruchandran, 1988; Mies, 1988).

Differences among generations become important as well. Women of the first generation spent their youth under colonial rule although not all of them appear to have been heavily influenced by colonialism. Unlike Pahalawela, as a part of the country's capital, Melvin Town and its people could not resist the influences of a capitalist global economy, and therefore developed life styles to reap its full benefits. The second generation of women are those who grew up with or after the independence movement. The third generation of women are the children of the women of the first or the second generation and were born or grew up within the free market economy.

Women of the upper social classes espouse Victorian ideals of womanhood regardless of their generation.[88] The reason for this is that the economic power and social prestige they hold obscure the social reality they live in. Either they maintain a high social position due to their

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[88] Except for a handful of women who thoroughly believed that women should have a life independent of their family, all women in the upper class regardless of the generation or educational level stated the importance of making certain sacrifices by women for the sake of their family. Women's achievements, they said, "should not interfere with family responsibilities since those responsibilities cannot be replaced by any one".

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economic power or they do not realize their vulnerability since they are provided with all their necessities. Education is used as an added qualification for upper class girls to increase their prestige while a few of them (mostly those whose parents are also educated) actually acknowledge the value of education. Middle class women across all three generations are more inclined towards education, although they, especially the first generation, also hold Victorian ideals. Whether or not they convey these ideals to their descendants depends on their life experiences and their amenability for change. Women in the lower social classes either continue their studies or give them up depending on their resources and social values. Most of the time, the cycle of poverty prevents them from continuing their studies. However, at the time of this study, many low-income families had overcome the minimum poverty levels. With the help of free education, they could afford to continue their children's education. Most lower class women in the second and third generations held ideas similar to the following said by a housewife with grown up daughters. She stated: "I do not want to see my children suffer as I did. There are so many educational opportunities available for them which we never had. Even with difficulty, I expect them to take advantage of them." Yet, it was clear that often the economy interfered in meeting these aspirations.

Thus social class contributes towards increasing gender differences in women's educational achievements. In a community like Melvin Town where social class is the main form of social stratification, the influence it can have is much higher than in a less stratified society like that of Pahalawela.

For the women in Melvin Town, education is not the only way of ensuring a better future. Apart from higher studies, money, social status, parental influence, political influence, status of

the school, sport and social activities, and even bribery can aid city women in increasing their future prospects. Therefore, although they had a high regard for education, women who went for higher education and those who did not were not treated differently. The only thing that mattered was to have a "good" life. Several women in the city across social classes and generations claimed that if a woman is provided with all her necessities, that is all she needs. But men are different. They have to make money and build up their social status. One woman remarked: "Is there any thing in this country that money cannot buy? It is good if a woman could have her own job and social prestige, but if she has to sacrifice her family life, it is not worth it." Sometimes, other issues such as family status and economic prosperity were held in higher regard than higher education. For instance, a woman from a lower social position who received a much better education than a woman from a higher social position is not treated more respectfully than the latter (unless there is a very special reason) because of her education. A woman asked: "Do you think that even if my daughter gets highly educated, she would be as honoured even as a servant in ..... family?" Although this remark is a little exaggerated, many lower class women felt that although they could work hard for a better income, they would not receive any social prestige. Paradoxically, it is the socio-economic status that is respected.[89]

For the upper social classes nothing matters more than social prestige. This does not mean that they do not send their girls on to higher education. They are the group who has all the means

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[89] Although this is the normal trend, highly educated women are treated with respect even in the city regardless of the social class they come from, especially if they are now in high positions in the society. Achieved social status thus becomes more important than ascribed status in this instance. (See Giddens, 1993 for more details on social status.) However, this does not apply to social status earned in other ways; for example, through political power or economic power. Although women politicians were highly respected in the village, unless they had come from prestigious backgrounds, they were not respected in the city, especially by affluent people. Similarly, even women from very rich families were not considered as important by the affluent society unless they had a similar family background. They often remarked: "They are very well off. But she is the daughter of ... They earned all that wealth recently".

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to send their children to whatever studies they would like them to pursue. After 1977, when many alternative educational opportunities became open to the general public, it was the upper social classes who could reap most of the benefits due to high tuition cost. The government came to power in 1977 took steps to provide many alternative educational opportunities for students who could not enter the universities due to limited openings. These included a fee levied open university system and link programmes with foreign universities and other foreign educational institutes as well as many other educational institutes operated locally. These institutes provided the opportunity for the students to sit for admission tests and qualifying exams locally, so that after qualifying they could go abroad to study. Many upper class children, both males and females, thus received immense opportunities that other children in the country did not have. These new opportunities provided a new life style and prestige for these people. Hence, their upper class ideals were no longer an impediment to higher education. The middle class families who always counted on education for its socio-economic mobility also took an advantage with these new opportunities. The lower classes were not able to benefit in the same way and thus were restricted within the government education system.

Table 4.4

Age and Education of Women in Melvin Town

Age	No Ed	%	1-8	%	9-12	%	Degree	%
15-44	00	00	05	26.3	41	33.9	23	100.0
45-64	01	50.0	09	47.4	59	48.8	22	100.0
65+	01	50.0	05	26.3	21	17.4	13	100.0

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As demonstrated in Table 4.4, less than one fifth, or 17.4%, of first generation (65+) women have completed high school, while 26.3% have only primary level schooling; another 22.4% hold degrees and diplomas. It is the second generation (45-64) who possesses the highest levels of education among urban women. While the third generation in the city is more highly educated than their counterparts in the village, their level of education is comparatively lower than that of the second generation.

City women of the first generation did not have to face the same barriers as village women of the same generation. Schooling had become common even in the nineteenth century in the city. There were several prestigious girls' schools within very close proximity to Melvin Town. Thus women in the city did not have to face the same difficulties in going to school as women in the village except for some girls in low income families, among whom, unlike village children, education was not highly regarded. These poor children, mostly from working class families in the city, were expected to shoulder the hardships of their families just like poor village children. Hence, education was not highly valued among the urban poor for either boys or girls.

However, intrinsic characteristics of the urban culture impeded the educational advancement of city women, mainly the conventional role ascribed to the woman. Upper class women were primarily affected by these norms. Upper class girls were not expected to have formal schooling. They were either trained under governesses or teachers who came to the house or were sent to school only when they were very young. Some of them stayed in boarding schools which was also a sign of prestige.[90]   Also, the schools were not too far away to send the girls under the strict

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[90] Many older women from upper class families were educated in English and were well versed in British literature, western music, and home making, although they had the help of housemaids at home. They told me that they were expected to learn all these talents in order to become good wives and mothers. Without knowing what is to be done at home, they could not control the servants. Some of them were content with the life they had but some expressed

scrutiny of a chaperon. The curriculum also reflected the needs of Victorian family life.[91] This created a considerable difference between the education of men and women. Education was oriented towards producing ideal mothers and wives and not towards the development of the talents and abilities of individual women except in a few cases where girls received parental encouragement to achieve specific educational goals. Since the age at marriage was also as low as eighteen to twenty, many girls were not directed towards university education, but towards an early marriage. Older women of the upper class had many interesting stories to tell about their childhood and adolescence. One declared: "I went to .....Convent until grade five. After that, a teacher came home every day. By that time my two sisters were studying at home. Our teacher was a very kind white woman. We learned subjects like British history, arithmetic, western music, needle work, and knitting. My sisters enjoyed it very much. I hated music, so I had to be forced to practice the piano. Therefore, I abhorred having anything to do with that teacher although I liked her as a person."

Middle class girls benefitted most from education. Although they were also trained to conform to upper class ideals, they did not have the benefits of money, wealth or prestige. Therefore, for middle class women, learning home-making skills was not enough to climb the social ladder. For example, a woman who held a responsible post in a state ministry pronounced that many of her university mates in the 1950s were girls from middle class families. She remarked: "All the girls in my class in high school, either went to the university or to a job. None

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discontent. They complained of being unable to utilize their talents because of the conservative attitudes of their parents. These are the women who encouraged their daughters' education, even going against their husbands' wishes; for example, to marry their daughters early.

[91] The education system of this period is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

of us were very wealthy. We always had high hopes of having our own income. Some of us were scholarship holders from the suburbs who were very good students. Out of twenty in the class, five of us went to the university, which was remarkable at the time." Their education had to be in the areas related to work and income generating activities. Therefore, it was mainly middle class women who competed with men in the educational arena.

Table 4.5

Family Income and Education among Women in Melvin Town

Income	NoEd	%	1-8	%	9-12	%	Degr	%	Total	%
0-999	01	50	02	10.5	01	0.8	00	00	04	2.1
1000-4999	01	50.0	13	68.4	43	36.1	06	11.1	63	32.5
5000-8999	00	00	02	10.5	18	15.1	16	29.6	36	18.6
<9000	00	00	02	10.5	57	47.9	32	59.3	91	46.9

In the city, income level has a closer correlation with educational level than in the village. Table 4.5 shows that the educational level is low within the lower income categories, while the higher income categories contain greater proportions with higher education. Since a monthly income of 9000 rupees is not very high as a family income, it is not possible to specify the social class level of the women by income level or to establish a correlation between the level of education and social class by utilizing these income categories.

By the time of the second generation, not only formal schooling but also higher education had become an exceedingly common phenomenon in the city. Free education opened new horizons for many children who otherwise could not afford to enter university or otherwise

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continue their education.[92] Although some subject areas such as technical studies and engineering were basically male dominated, many other fields were open to women. Educational expenses did not become a heavy burden for either middle or upper class families.[93] However, even in this generation, lower class families faced the same economic impediments that village children had to face, retarding their education, regardless of gender.[94]

The situation of the younger generation in the city is quite different from that of the village. As mentioned earlier, after 1977, numerous educational opportunities were opened in the city. At the same time, job opportunities in the city also increased immensely due to the expansion of the private sector. The new educational opportunities and the new form of social prestige they created attracted the upper classes towards higher education. The middle classes, even with the serious economic problems they faced due to inflation, also managed to take advantage of the new opportunities.[95] With higher education, and other forms of support, both legitimate and corrupt, they were able to advance in the job market.

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[92] Chapter 2 delineates the free education system in Sri Lanka.

[93] Most middle class families at the time had a high standard of living since most of them were either government servants who were paid very well or middle class businessmen who had a fairly good income. With their enthusiastic attitudes towards studies, girls from these families achieved very high positions in society. (I had the chance to talk to women university professors, civil servants and other high level officials both in private and government sectors who came from these families and who received a very good education and who still appreciate the encouragement of their parents which helped them to become successful).

[94] Since the number of jobs that were open to these girls was scanty, it was the girls who pursued education. The boys in low income families had easier access to work in the informal sector as early as ten or twelve years of age although the laws prohibited child labour. This encouraged male children to leave school early. Jayaweera (1993:10) has made a similar statement. Yet, there were occasions when lower class children also pursued their studies, but only if the children or the parents were really keen.

[95] With the economic boom due to the open economic system, the country faced severe economic inflation which seriously affected the middle class, especially government employees. Since wages did not increase at the same rate as increases in expenditures, people on fixed incomes had to cut down their expenses, thus diminishing their living standards.

This encouraged more women to pursue higher education than men, since many young men joined the work force early. The new values created by the money economy made the value of money more important than education, so that the long process of higher education came to be less valued by many young men who could earn the same or even more by joining the work force early. The situation of women was different. Both upper and middle class women pursued higher education not only as a way of getting a good job but also as a symbol of prestige. The tendency was to create better opportunities for the future. Except for those who were really keen on education as a goal in itself, for others this became a means of getting a good job, or a chance to advance their social position, or a way of entering into a better marriage with dignity since an educated woman is still respected in the society even with the high value that is attributed to money and wealth. With wealth, an educated woman was in high demand on the marriage market. Therefore, even if they decided to resign from their jobs after marriage, women in both the upper and middle classes pursued higher education.[96]

Lower class women had two opportunities: either to join the labour market early or to continue education considering future prospects, just like village girls. Young women in low income families in the city had more opportunities both in education and in work than did village girls. It was very rare for the girls in Melvin Town to join the garment industry for cheap wages except in supervisory capacities or in even higher positions that paid more money. There were

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[96] There were three reasons given for resigning from a job after marriage. The first group were those who said, "I never wanted to go for higher education. My parents always said, "How are we going to even propose you to a man without any education". By "any education" they meant a university degree. I studied hard in order to reach "their" goal, and after marriage I gave up my job". The other group claimed, "I always wanted to do a good job and that is why I studied hard. I had to resign after the children were born. However, I am having a good life, I get everything I need, and also I feel lazy to go to a job again even if I get a chance". The last category included those women who were very keen on studies and work and had to quit after marriage but who regretted their decision.

only two girls in the sample who worked in the garment factories. One was a supervisor while the other was a secretary.

These employment opportunities that were available because of their proficiency in English, which has become an essential requirement in private sector employment, and also their educational opportunities, had encouraged the young women of Melvin Town to study. Therefore, unlike the third generation in the village, the same generation in the city had more choices and chances due to the economic changes that occurred after 1977. This fact was made clear by the remarks of several lower class women who maintained: "It will be difficult if our daughters do not go to the university. It is easier for men to find a job. We cannot send the girls to any job. If they are keen we have to help them to learn something they like to pursue, although it is difficult to afford."

The women of Melvin Town also held education in high regard. More than 95% of the sample wanted their daughters to be educated. The remaining five percent were not disinterested in education, but thought that it did not make much difference for their daughters if they continued their studies. These women were from both the upper and lower classes. Some upper class mothers thought that their daughters were able to contract a good marriage because of their family, wealth and social prestige, and thus higher education was not an imperative. They said that if the girls wanted to continue their education they had the chance but they were not going to force them. A few mothers claimed that they urged their daughters to marry early, and they did not want to delay their marriages because of education. Lower class mothers who did not insist on their daughters' education were of the opinion that today money is more important. If the girls were keen on working instead of continuing their education, they could not stop them. They also

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said that if the girls could not get into university, they could not afford to send them on for higher studies, unless they earned the money themselves and continued their studies later. There are many women in Melvin Town who work and study at the same time, whereas in Pahalawela women lack the opportunity to develop their educational skills after completing formal schooling, unless they enter the universities.

This chapter discussed the differential effects of the economic liberalization policies on the educational achievement of women in rural and urban Sri Lanka. The development of the present educational system and its impact on different generations of women were addressed in order to situate the post-1977 changes within this historical social context. This chapter established that new educational developments have benefitted only certain groups of women depending on their social class and the urban-rural dichotomy. Moreover, it demonstrated that the new economic policies, by widening class disparities and increasing poverty, have kept certain groups of women from benefitting from the new opportunities. Hence, education no longer seems to be an agent of social mobility for lower class women. However, it does seem to advance the position of women in the upper social classes.

Chapter 5 will discuss the changes that have occurred in women's work in both the rural and urban settings and how the post-1977 economic changes have transformed existing patterns and created new trends.

Chapter 5: Women's Work - From Dependency to Emancipation?

In Sri Lanka, the concept of housewife did not portray a womanhood that was limited to home. Within the traditional Sri Lankan social structure in which the public-private distinction was not apparent, women were involved in work both within and outside the home, without facing the burden of a double day. However, the socio-economic changes experienced in different historical periods have had a significant impact on women's work. This chapter deals with this issue, comparing the three generations of women's work in rural and urban settings to address the question of whether the new economic opportunities within the liberalized economy have led to the economic emancipation of women.

Sinhalese women were never barred from work even in responsible areas such as administration and the polity (Kiribamune, 1990; Herath & Kulasuriya, 1985). Although there was a division of labour related to agricultural and other types of labour where women were entrusted with lighter work compared to the heavy work that men did, in the areas where physical strength was not required such as intellectual activities, political activities, and recreational activities, women participated equally with men.[97] The public-private dichotomy which has become a dominant theoretical concept in the analysis of women's work under industrial capitalism, therefore, was almost totally absent in the history of women's work in Sri Lanka until British colonialism (Jayaweera,1986, 1989; see also Leacock, 1981; Tiano, 1984).

Victorian concepts, popularized under colonialism, created the public-private dichotomy in

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[97] O'Barr (1976) suggests that sex roles in every culture and society have their own particularities. However, they cannot be considered as innate and inborn tendencies of those sexes. Rather they are culturally determined based on the physiological differences between men and women. They become modified or new roles emerge as the conditions upon which these sex roles are based change, so that physical strength does not continue to be an essential requirement for survival (see Hammond, 1973 for example).

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women's work in Sri Lanka.[98] "The distinction between `public' and `private' domains and the

perceived dichotomy between productive and reproductive roles have little relevance to women

in Sri Lanka, the majority of whom have always participated in economic production outside the

household and have no option but to perform multiple roles" (Jayaweera, 1989:13). Victorian

concepts significantly affected the lives of women in the cities and the suburbs, especially in the

low country areas where colonial influence was stronger. Even villages in the low country did not

totally escape these influences when women displayed adaptation to those values through their

dress and demeanour.[99]

However, in the up country, the influence of the new cultural values was apparent only in

urban centres such as Kandy, where the elite tried to conform to the new cultural values in order

to increase its power and prestige. Moreover, this was an area under Hindu influence where

women were expected to conform to a strict code of conduct. Buddhist women never observed

these rules as severely as did Hindu women. Even under Hindu influence, Robert Knox (1911)

explains how much freedom up country Sri Lankan women enjoyed. Therefore, Victorian

concepts of womanhood had no significant influence on most women in the up country, while

westernized elite women almost totally adapted to these new values.

> In addition, the traditional economic role and contribution of women in the agrarian
> society has been overlooked by planners and administrators imbued with western and
> middle class concepts of male farmers and housewives. Home Development Centres

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[98] Leacock (1981) asserts that it was patriarchal capitalism that institutionalised the family as an economic
unit and placed women in a subordinate position within it, sharpening the discrepancies between production and
reproduction and creating the mutually exclusive private and public spheres. In traditional societies where public-private
spheres were reciprocal, feminine consciousness was based on the awareness of individual's responsibility to the totality,
while maintaining their dignity as women (Leacock & Etienne, 1980; Leacock, 1981; Mies, 1988).

[99] Piyadasa Sirisena was a popular novelist at the time who attacked this cultural adaptation of women. In
his books he explains the nature of the change of the value system of Sri Lankan women due to colonial influences.

established in the early eighties were intended to make Mahaweli women better wives and mothers (Ranatunga, 1985) but not more efficient farmers despite the fact that women farmers contribute around 50% to the household economy, work on average 14 hours a day in the fields, home gardens and households and are the main producers of subsidiary food crops...Women have lost land rights guaranteed by traditional laws, as in consonance with patriarchal social norms, land is allocated to male heads of households and succession laws in the land development ordinance of 1935 give preference to the males.(Jayaweera, 1989: 9)

These new concepts of womanhood intensely affected women's work, mainly through the concept of the male bread winner (Rogers, 1980). Women's work was restricted to domestic labour while women in public life were held in contempt. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the school curriculum for women helped meet the needs of the colonial household. While the upper and middle classes tried to conform to these new ideals for reasons of prestige, women from the urban lower classes and village women had no other choice but to continue their regular life styles. The economic situation did not allow them to develop such an `unproductive' life style.[100]

It is with the independence movement that women returned to public life. There were many movements that included the advancement of women as part of their objectives (Jayawardana, 1995). During the three decades following independence we notice a revival in women's progress. Women began to actively participate in education, in the work force, in politics and in many other public activities. As in education, this whole process of women and work affected village women and city women in different ways.

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[100] Even the women in the up country aristocracy led productive lives in managing the lands and the household work. But Victorian concepts regarded women as weak and humble. These women, instead of getting trained to become strong and courageous women, were sent to boarding schools or were trained under governesses to become obedient and submissive. They were trained in wifely duties appropriate to the colonial household. However, middle class women, at least at home, led productive lives although they had to conform to the new ideals. With sufficient incomes, most of them could also afford domestic help.

Table 5.1

Occupational Status of Women - The Sample

Occupation	Rural	%	Urban	%	Total	%
Housewife	50	25.0	117	58.5	167	41.8
Farmer	131	65.5	00	0.0	00	0.0
Teacher	08	4.0	38	19.0	46	11.5
Labourer	07	3.5	02	1.0	09	2.3
Professional	00	0.0	14	7.0	14	3.5
Business	02	1.0	23	11.5	25	6.4
Unknown	02	1.0	06	3.0	08	2.0
Total	200	100.0	200	100.0	400	100.0

Table 5.1 indicates that over half of the city women in the sample were housewives, compared to a quarter in the village. In the village, women who were involved in any productive activity related to agriculture considered themselves to be farmers, while in the city only income generating activities were considered by women to constitute `work'. However, village women had very limited employment opportunities other than in farming, while city women could enter a range of occupations.

Women's Work in Pahalawela

Village women never saw the public and private spheres in their lives as two distinct domains. Community life in the village required women to engage in numerous public activities. In many of these activities, the leading figures were women. Agricultural society did not provide a chance for any individual to escape the enormous work load that had to be completed in order

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to survive. Not only adult men and women but also children had to fulfil their `duties' to ensure the survival of the group. Since society and culture were inseparably intertwined with the economy, involvement in economic activities automatically brought villagers into contact with other public activities.[101]

In the past, agriculture in the village was a community activity that was always combined with rituals, ceremonies and religious activities. The main form of agriculture during the rainy season was paddy cultivation which demanded continuous labour investment. Although there were certain tasks assigned primarily to men or women, other tasks were done by both men and women. For instance, ploughing was a male task according to the villagers since it was considered to be heavy work. Planting and weeding were mainly female tasks. Harvesting and winnowing the paddy were done by both men and women.[102]

Planting and harvesting are both very special occasions. The work is done on the basis of "attama" - a system of agriculture that involves an exchange of labour.[103] Women get together to cook and work in the field. Usually, the landlady does not go to the field as she has to take care

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[101] Jayaweera (1991: 113) writes: "Labour force data in the early censuses from 1871, used categories - professional, government, domestic, commercial, agricultural, industrial and non-productive classes. Women enumerated in the agricultural class were chiefly plantation labour and women peasants in agriculture were subsumed in the `domestic' class with `housewives' and domestic service and were therefore `invisible' in the labour force. ... Despite under estimation, around 30% of paddy cultivators were found to be women in 1901."

[102] Women's subordination according to Beneria (1982) is based on the role of reproduction in determining women's work, the sexual division of labour, and on the dominance/subordination relationship between the sexes. These resulted from the process of modernization. However, examples from egalitarian and matrilineal societies makes the concept of universal female oppression a myth, and not a fact (Leacock, 1981). The sexual division of labour in these societies did not relegate women to a subordinate position (Leacock, 1981), but it was culturally created on the basis of the physical differences between the sexes (Hammond, 1973).

[103] The neighbours gather together to help each other on these occasions. It is the duty of the person who requests help to feed all the people gathered together. Work starts early in the morning, followed by breakfast, lunch and two or three tea breaks. They plan the work on different days for different people in order to get everybody's work done. Studies (Rajapakse, 1989; Perera, 1989) have discussed the effects on women of the transformation of `attama' into a wage labour system.

of all the other arrangements for feeding up to twenty or thirty people. Other women help her cook while they also help in the field. Sometimes, a few women leave the field early to prepare food. The busy life of village women during harvesting time was made evident by a landlady who said: "It took sometimes several days to complete harvesting. Every day during this time, I had to go back and forth between home and field since people were working in both places. My husband was a village headman and was too busy even on such days. I had to take care of both work, at home and in the field."

Usually, men stay in the field the whole day and do not help in cooking. However, they help·in the preparation of food on the previous night by doing tasks which are considered heavier work such as husking the coconuts, cutting the fire wood and fetching water if the source of water is far from home. Since working in the fields in the hot sun is always considered more difficult than housework, women have sympathy for the men folk of the village who throughout the year have to work the earth. One woman told me: " It is not a sin to treat men who toil the ground in order to feed us for all three hundred and sixty five days". Women usually held this kind of attitude due to the reciprocal relationship between men and women, and between field and home. Since they understand the mutual nature of their lives, many men in the older generation appreciated the women's chores both at home and in the field. Several men expressed their gratitude towards women. The following words of an older man provide a fine example of such attitudes. "Our women work shoulder to shoulder with us. Bring up the children. Cook and feed us. Bear the sorrows of the life. Even though our children do not treat us well, we tell them to treat their mothers properly." Many older men talked about their wives and about women in general with a deep sense of gratitude.

Paddy cultivation is a sacred form of agriculture in the village with many rituals attached to it. After harvesting, the first crop is dedicated to the gods. This is a ritualistic ceremony which turns the whole system of gender relations upside down. It is men who cook the food and women who enjoy the day watching them. Women get a chance to eat food totally prepared by men.[104] It symbolises the fact that although women do most of the cooking at home, men are not superior beings who have to be prevented from doing these tasks. Meanwhile, women get a chance to publicly enjoy the status of being treated and served by men. This kind of treatment towards women is not evident in any other Asian culture.

Chena cultivation has no such division of labour or rituals. Both women and men work hard as necessity demands (Risseeuw, 1980). As explained in Chapter Three, it is a form of temporary agriculture. Because the chenas were too far from the village or because they had to be protected from wild animals, men had to stay in the chenas in the temporary huts they built. Sometimes the whole family went, or during the day, the wife would take meals to the husband and his helpers. Whenever women were there, they did whatever work had to be done. Some women told me that they used to do all the heavy work in the chenas, and their husbands also helped in all the household activities including cooking and taking care of the children. They sometimes took turns staying in the hut doing housework when the sun was too hot. Life in the chenas was very difficult, so that families had to take care of each other. An old woman explained the difficulty of life in chena cultivation. She said: "Young women today can't even imagine what

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[104] Louis Dumont (1980) analyses similar situations and their effects on society in his Homo Hierarchicus. The explanation of the villagers for this ritual is that women are unclean and therefore men have to prepare food for the gods. But there are many other occasions when women prepare food for the deities. Even some men in the village agreed that it is not a matter of cleanliness, but it is good to have occasions such as this in order to enjoy something different from the normal routine.

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we went through in chena work. We worked shoulder to shoulder with men. We women were very strong in those times. Family members helped each other with no restriction. Both I and my husband shared all the work including cooking, cleaning and baby sitting."

The picture was somewhat different on the home front. Although the majority of household tasks were performed by women, they were never considered as unsuitable or prohibited for men. Sometimes women became very resentful about the fact that some men were not cooperative at home. One woman complained with anger and frustration about her husband's inability to cook. She said: "Almost every man in the village knows how to boil some rice and curry even if they cannot cook well. My mother-in-law came from the city and she thinks her children are superior and they ought not to touch pots and pans. This is very frustrating because even if I am sick, I have to get up and cook for the kids." Most village males knew how to prepare a meal, and to take care of children, at least when the women were not around.

Women were free to visit neighbours and chat with them, go with friends to fetch water or firewood, go to the stream to wash clothes or bathe, leaving the children with the men. Sometimes, men prepared the meals while the women were away. One woman told us that she never missed any pilgrimage although she had ten children, since she could leave them with her husband. Another woman said that each year she and her husband took turns in joining the pilgrimages since it was hard to take the small children. The social class factor intervenes here. Men in the upper classes normally did not do household tasks. The main reason for this was the exposure of these men to the outside world and the adoption of urban values. Another reason could be that upper class families had enough domestic help so that not only men, but also women (unless they were interested in household work) did not have to work at home.

This does not mean the work front in the village, whether domestic or outside work, symbolized peace and harmony. However women's work was never restricted to the home. Therefore, women automatically became part of the public life of the village. This is the reason why the concept of the "double day" (Leacock, 1981; Beneria, 1982; Gannage, 1986; Faulkner & Lawson, 1991) does not apply to village women. Although women shouldered a much larger work load than carried by today's women, it was shared not only within the family, but also within the community.

All three generations of women had the same workload, yet, according to women, many men of the present generation do not appreciate women's work as their fathers or grandfathers did. They consider it to be `women's work' and `non-profitable'. They regard themselves as the `earners' since many women of the present generation do not have enough time to work outside the home since they do not have as much extended family support and community help as their mothers and grandmothers did. The value of women's work is no longer appreciated as mutually important for the survival of the family due to the tendency to evaluate everything on a monetary basis.[105] Some young women said that they work very hard but their work is not appreciated since they have to spend most of the time doing housework. The division of labour is no longer according to the type of work but between the home and the outside.[106] Since men do less housework, women have less time for activities outside the home. Since the 1980's a public-private distinction has been emerging for village women due to the increased involvement of the

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[105] It is women's work in the household that never has been evaluated on a monetary basis. Waring(1988) claims that this has been a universal error that is also reflected in the UN System of National Accounts (UNSNA).

[106] This process has been viewed as caused by modernization and capitalist development (Leacock & Etienne, 1980; Charlton, 1984; Mies, 1988).

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village in the market economy, compelling villagers to become highly materialistic.[107]

Apart from agricultural work, second and third generation women in the village are involved in many other types of work.[108] It is noticeable that the social status of these women depends on their educational levels.[109] As explained before, many young women in the third generation work in the garment industry.[110] Only an educated few work in teaching and other white collar jobs. Teachers are highly respected in the village and many other educated women are respected above average men in the village.[111] Their advice is sought in many community and family matters. However, those women who hold occupations that do not require educational qualifications are treated differently. Although they are more economically independent than many young women who have become a part of their husbands' lives by becoming housewives, they do not possess the independence of many older farm women. One reason is that they also have to depend on their husbands unless they have the support of the extended family or

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[107]   Beneria (1982) views the problem of women's subordination as appearing in the early stages of development by generating more employment for men. Women become invisible and highly dependent on men as they confine themselves to the non-renumerated work in the household. In the Sri Lankan situation, as we see here, although women's employment opportunities increase, the socio-cultural factors render women's work invisible.

[108]   Gunatilake (1989) posits that rural women's engagement in income-generating activities together with child care and housework has resulted in many advantages and disadvantages for women.

[109]   This is a perfect example in support of Boserup's (1970) theory, that woman's education has advanced her status generally.

[110]   The adverse effects created by the inclusion of women in the process of development by the increase in cheap labour is analysed in different societies by many researchers (Dobbins, 1977; Charlton, 1984; Neuhouser, 1989; Faulkner & Lawson, 1991). Dobbins further remarks that by shifting capitalist investment into industries which could recruit the cheap labour of women, the capitalist system could trap women in the industrial reserve army. Hence, liberation of women should not be limited to the liberation of the class of petty bourgeois women whose services are directed towards the preservation and recreation of the male chauvinistic system which suppresses the majority of women within the IRA.

[111]   Jayaweera, (1991: 113) claims: "The number of women in the professional class increased, largely because the number of women teachers increased from 137 in 1871 to 4057 in 1991."

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neighbours in order to continue their jobs. This type of work does not create the mutual dependency among the members of the family and the members of the community that traditional farm work did because the man does not become completely dependent economically on his wife since he also continues to work and/or he becomes more independent by depending less on women for the household work when the woman is away.[112] The housewife does not face a similar situation since the household tasks are considered to be a woman's duty. Whether they do it fulltime or after work does not make any difference.[113]

The other reason is that if the type of work they do is socially not recognized as respectable work for women, they do not receive the respect at home or within the village. Therefore, their work is not much appreciated. To become economically independent, women thus become socially dependent and are treated with contempt.[114]

Thus, modem women, although the type of work they do is comparatively easier than the work done by the older generation, enjoy less independence and less self-satisfaction. Some older women expressed disappointment over the lives their daughters led. A woman said: "My daughter does not do half the workload I did at her age. But I think I had a better life. She does not have any time left to enjoy herself. She is still not satisfied. She wants to work more and earn more.

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[112] The wives of farmers who work outside the village also take care of the household, children and the field, and face a double (or more accurately a triple) day of work. But the women, after they return from work, never get the freedom that working men get after their work since women are supposed to take over the household tasks and release the man.

[113] As Faulkner and Lawson (1991) argue referring to the situation in Equador, women's labour power has become their modern form of dependence.

[114] The high respect that educated working women in the village receive exemplifies many theories on women's development that women's educational and occupational involvement would actually advance their social status only when they are taken out of their intransigent roles as mothers and wives. Increase of cheap labour does not coincide with women's development (Tinker & Bramsen, 1976; Dobbins, 1977; Charlton,1984).

They have too high aspirations. It is OK, but I do not like to see her killing herself to achieve that goal." The more they try to become independent, the more they become dependent on men because when they devote more time to this type of economic activity and household work, which are completely private spheres, they become further separated from public life. Thus, the lives of women become private, isolated and individualized.

Many women in the village said that when they were young, they hoped they could find a `proper occupation' which for them means non-agricultural work. Parents encouraged them since they also think that engaging in farm work does not provide their children with economic security or social status. However, either because they dropped out of school or failed in their examinations, or due to social injustices such as political corruption which obstruct them from getting a job, they were hindered from achieving their goals. The current generation of women is facing various difficulties regarding occupations unlike women in the past who were more or less satisfied with the work they did. One reason for this is that the third generation does not have the self satisfaction that older women had because they do not have access to various opportunities opened to women in the present society.[115] This makes them feel deprived.

The other reason is that social attitudes regarding work have obscured the understanding of women of their own status and made them ignorant of the problems they face. They are trained within modern society and culture to accept their dependent status and consider the work they do as a routine of daily life that does not contribute to the home. Even those who make economic

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[115] In the past, women had very few links with the cities and had no option other than formal schooling which helped them in upgrading their social status. In the current society, women come to know that there are many job opportunities to suit their educational levels which they won't be able to get without political or social connections. Lack of knowledge of English also prevents them from getting jobs in the city, especially in the private sector. There are also many more options for further education which these girls are unable to pursue without financial support.

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contributions to the family bear the burden of a double day of work while facing the social contempt for the work they do.[116] This makes them extremely frustrated and dissatisfied in their occupations. They do not have alternative opportunities, so that what they go through becomes a life long frustration. Working women were divided in their attitude towards this. Some said: "We have come to a point that we cannot be happy with or without the job. What else can we do? If we give up the job our situation will be worse. Therefore, even with all the difficulties we have to continue the job, although we know that our whole future will be miserable". Others said: "We do not have time for family life. Life is hard without two incomes. Yet we prefer to stay home and take care of the family." Even educated women who are well established in the village do not have much choice or many future goals related to occupations since in that isolated village they do not have many options to choose from other than continuing the life they have. As village life becomes more individualized, women's frustrations become stronger since they do not have the mutual satisfaction they used to have within the community.

However, women still have high hopes for their children. They think girls as well as boys should work in order to contribute to the family. Although it depends on the type of work they do, they think unless the girls have an income of their own, they will become dependent on their husbands and thus face a disastrous future. A common remark among the village women regarding this was: "Why should we let our girls be humiliated by men? That is why we force them to continue school and get a job." More than 75% of the women agreed that unless a girl has wealth she should work so that men cannot have complete control over her. Another 20% agreed that even if they were wealthy women should work to have more independence as

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[116] Many garment workers and other cheap wage labourers who face derogatory attitudes continuously go through this mental agony.

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otherwise the home would become a prison for them. About 70% of the women said that working women face many problems like hard work, less time for children, less time for themselves, and less time for household duties. However, most of them agreed that they should not give up work because, in the long run, many husbands do not appreciate what women sacrifice for the sake of the family and take women for granted. Many village women agreed that household duties should be the responsibility of both husband and wife, except a few young wives who were ready to take on the responsibility for the entire household. They did not want men to do that since they earn and provide them with what they want. Over 90% of the older women claimed that these kinds of attitudes would change later because the more life becomes difficult economically, the more men would make women suffer. Therefore, it is important to have an option in life, which they think is connected to having one's own income.

Women in the village varied in the way they perceived their economic contribution to the family. Almost all of the farm women accepted that they contribute largely to the family economy and felt economically independent. One woman stated: "Although I am poor, I have never been dependent on anyone, even on my parents except when I was a toddler. I started working on the farm when I was seven years old. I do not want to depend on my children either." Many farm women expressed similar views. Many of them had serious economic problems and they did not know of any solution. Some of them who had some educational qualifications would gladly take a `proper' job if given the chance. They thought that off-farm employment would give them more money and freedom. A woman claimed: "I know it is difficult with children, but I would be glad if I could get a job. This farm work is not easy, and we barely live after working so hard. I am tired of this life." Some women were tired of being in the house and on the farm all the time since

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the sense of community is no longer strong in the village. Many women felt isolated. About 2% of farm women thought that their husbands work harder and the double work they do at home and at the farm is not worth much. These women felt extremely dependent on their husbands. Older women respected their husbands but they said that their own contribution to the family is equally or more important. One woman who never went to school and never did any farm work, but took care of all the household duties, said that her work as a housewife is her job. According to her she contributes to the family economy by doing the household chores which are far more difficult than an eight hour job. She claimed that, therefore, women's economic contribution to the family cannot be counted from what she earns but has to include what she saves from the family budget. She brought up seven children, while doing all the other household duties, and she is very satisfied with her contribution.

It was mainly the fairly educated women without work who considered themselves not to be contributing to the family income. Out of 68 women who had an education up to high school, 25% promptly remarked that they felt that the only way of contributing economically is to earn a wage. All the other work they do they consider as the duties of a housewife and this does not count as an economic contribution. Women who had this kind of attitude were highly dependent psychologically on their husbands who were the economic providers for the family. These women tolerated any form of injustice by their husbands. The main reason for this attitude is the feeling, reinforced by their husbands, that they are not capable of living without the assistance of their husbands since they do not have any income.[117] They ignored the mutual interdependence and

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[117] Their husbands' remarks about how their earnings have to be enough to satisfy the needs of the whole family make women feel bad about themselves. For instance, they often remarked:"I have to earn to feed a whole family". Or "It is not to earn only for myself that I am suffering."

continuously developed contemptuous attitudes about themselves and other women in the same situation.

This kind of economic dependence completely restricts women's freedom. They have to depend on their husband for every single cent they spend. Therefore, many women restrict their needs to the minimum. They said that they restrict their material needs first. For instance, they do not buy new clothing for themselves. Then they cut down their expenses on social activities, recreational activities and sometimes even food consumption when they feel uneasy about running out of food items. Many women actually worry about their inability to support their own extended families.

Whatever attitudes they have about themselves, most of the women, about 94%, wanted their daughters to have a source of income. Although they were aware of the burden of the 'double day of work', these women were ready to help their daughters if they needed help to keep their jobs. All the women in the sample, including those who said that they did not feel dependent on their husbands with or without an income of their own, accepted that economic dependence is one of the main reasons for the total dependency of a woman. However, the 8% who were not keen on their daughters having jobs believed that although they feel dependent, the double day would contribute to family disorganization. Therefore, it is better for a woman to stay at home if the family can afford it.[118] They were ready to consider woman only as a mother and a wife, disregarding all her talents, capabilities, and even human dignity.

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[118] Nevertheless, some of them said that this can be done only if the husband is understanding and does not make the woman feel guilty for staying at home. The women who believed that they contribute to the family economy by earning or by staying home, did not have this kind of confusion. They were more contented with their lives.

Table 5.2

Occupational Status and Age of Women in Pahalawela

Age	wife	%	Farm	%	Tea	%	Labour	%	Busin	%	Total	%
15-44	33	28.6	68	59.2	05	4.3	07	6.1	02	1.8	115	100
45-64	17	23.6	53	73.6	02	2.8	00	00	00	00	72	100
65+	00	00	10	91.0	01	9.0	00	00	00	00	11	100
Total	50	25.2	131	66.3	08	4.0	07	3.5	02	1.0	198	100

As indicated in table 5.2, the first generation of women were almost all farmers and no one claimed that they were simply housewives. The small numbers were due to the lower representation of this generation in the sample. In the second generation, a majority were farmers and a small percentage claimed that they did not work, but just stayed home. In the third generation, more women worked in the areas other than farming, but among them, there were more women who were ready to declare that they do not work. The term `Housewife', conveyed their perception of work only to be remunerative work.

Women's Work in Melvin Town

Unlike the village where the importance of class and caste was trivial in deciding women's work, social class was very important in choice of women's work in the city.[119] As mentioned earlier, women in the city went through different cultural influences relating to women's work. Coming from a culture in which women's public involvement was never restricted, during colonial times urban women went through a phase where they were expected to be separated from public

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[119] The situation of women can only be fully conceived by using a class analysis within a gender analysis as explained by Mallon, 1987; Brydon & Chant, 1989.

activity in order to conform to the ideals of womanhood at the time.[120] With independence, women returned to public life. However, depending on their social class, their public involvement varied considerably. City women thus have had varying experiences related to work, not only corresponding to social class, but also according to generation.

The public life of city women is much greater than that of village women. But involvement in public life in the city is very different. In the city there are many different occupations, social and charity work, voluntary and political organizations, social and sports clubs, and many other societies and associations in which women can become involved. However, these involvements differed according to generation and social class.

The people in Melvin Town never considered themselves as a community except in some neighbourhoods that reflected some community feeling. These were either the lower class areas where there was community feeling resembling that of the village, and some old middle and upper middle class neighbourhoods where people had known each other for generations.[121] Nevertheless, although there were some community activities in shanty areas, the upper or middle class neighbourhoods very rarely organized themselves into any kind of community organization. Instead, they joined various clubs and organizations such as the Lion's Club, the Rotary Club or other social clubs. Apart from the neighbours visiting one another in their homes, these were the places where people could meet.

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[120] During this time, women in the upper classes usually did not engage in any income generating activity other than in work related to charity and social services. However, lower class women had no other option except to join the labour market.

[121] There were many instances where I had to inquire about household numbers or names of people. Most of the time people did not know the answers. In older neighbourhoods, and in lower class housing areas, people knew each other better.

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Table 5.3

Age and Occupation of Women in Melvin Town

Age	Wife	%	Teac	%	Lab	%	Prof	%	Bui	%	To	%
15-44	36	55.4	10	15.4	01	1.5	07	10.7	11	17.0	65	100
45-64	55	61.8	20	22.5	01	1.1	04	4.5	09	10.1	89	100
65+	26	65.0	08	20.0	01	2.5	03	7.5	02	5.0	40	100
Total	117	60.6	38	19.7	02	1.0	14	7.3	22	11.4	193	100

As Table 5.3 demonstrates, in Melvin Town, in every generation, there are more women who claimed that they were only housewives, although city women were involved in many more occupations than village women.

The first generation of women in Melvin Town were born, grew up, and were educated under a heavy colonial atmosphere. The middle and upper class women of this generation were taught, and trained, to become good housewives and mothers and were not expected to work for an income outside the house. This was a period of time when many women's organizations sprang up in order to educate and advance the position of women. However, these organizations did not go beyond the traditional Victorian expectations. Although women were educated, as described in the previous chapter, the education system was oriented towards fulfilling societal expectations for women. (Jayaweera, 1991)

Women in the upper class of this generation were completely detached from public life. They reported that before marriage, unless they were accompanied by their parents or a guardian, they did not go outside the house. Friends were invited to the home for different occasions such as birthdays, or they were allowed to visit friends with a servant who always accompanied them. These visits were rare. Most of the time, their involvements were with the friends of their parents

and their children. A widow of a reputed civil servant noted: " From the three girls in my family, I was the most protected because I was the eldest. Both I and my older sister went to school only up to grade 10. My youngest sister went to the university. She was seven years younger than me and a friend of my father persuaded him to send my sister to university. We had a lot of fun at home, parties, many visitors, but everything, including my marriage, was decided by my parents."

Upon marriage, they had to live under the care of their husbands. None of the women in the sample from the upper class had an occupation.[122] They said, even though they were educated, working for a salary was not considered suitable for a married woman. Most of them were married to higher level professionals, politicians, government servants, or upper class businessmen. All of them were economically well off, so they did not have to worry about money. But they said that they also had very limited needs. One of the main expenses was clothing needed for different occasions such as parties, which was not a big expense at the time. Other than that, they did not have any personal needs since they were provided with most of their needs by their parents. All the upper class women of the first generation married with a big dowry in the form of money or land or both as well as items such as clothing, jewellery, and household items given to them by their parents. Thus these women did not have to feel economically dependent on their husbands, because they felt that they also had contributed to the family economy by bringing in some wealth. Some of the women claimed that their husbands did not have much wealth accumulated or given by their parents except that they had a well paid respected job which was a life long income source. It is by marrying these wealthy women that they became

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[122] Referring to the census reports since 1871, Jayaweera (1991: 113) notes, "Detailed occupational data indicate that women were active in the official and unofficial labour force, despite the fact the large majority were neither literate nor educated."

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rich. Some of them were given houses as part of the dowry, so that at a very young age these men had accomplished a lot with the help of their wives. This made some men feel somewhat dependent on their wives, which meant women did not have to feel dependent on their husbands even though they did not have a job. The wife of the civil servant further remarked: " I agreed to the first proposal my parents brought for me. He was a good man, but very dominating. We were taught to obey parents and husband. He gave me all my needs. I did not have to ask much as my parents had given me jewellery and clothing enough for a generation. He was a very good father too."

Many upper class women of this generation did not have to do household work, unless they were really interested and did it for pleasure, because they could afford to have many servants. Some women still managed and controlled the household work. They said this made them feel important. A woman stated: "I never let servants do everything. I had three servants, two housemaids and a gardener. I checked almost every meal being prepared, for parties or for visitors I did all the food preparation with their help. I was a good cook." Others did not care as long as everything was provided for them and their families.

The foregoing does not mean that every upper class woman of the first generation was completely content with her lot in life. Women faced different problems. Four women in the sample told me that they wanted to do something related to their education but never got a chance to work. They maintained that if they were given a chance to work by their parents or by their husbands, things would have been better for them. They did not believe that money is everything. They said that all their needs were met, but they felt dissatisfied because they felt unimportant compared to educated working women. Three other women said that they would have preferred

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having a job, but they were satisfied with their lives. One woman revealed that despite the wealth they had and the dowry she brought, she always felt dependent on her husband. She said no matter how rich a woman is before marriage, after marriage she has to live under the control of the husband, so that she has to depend on him for every single cent she spends. Other women claimed that there were misunderstandings, confusion and arguments in the family, but they were not always related to money. Economically they did not feel dependent since they always knew that they did not come empty handed. They said, as a family they cannot differentiate between each other's wealth, but if the husband forgets he has to be reminded. They also felt good about the dowry system and planned to give a dowry to their daughters.[123]

Some of these women were involved in different voluntary organizations and some also held office. Most of them were fairly well educated and all of them were very well educated in English. Although not all of them were born in the city, they came from families wealthy enough to send them to boarding schools in the cities. These women occupied a high social status, especially if their husbands were in prominent social positions, or if they themselves became known publicly for their work. Although they all had domestic help at home, some of them were very busy between family and social work.[124]

Middle class women of the first generation also held similar attitudes towards work. However, some of these women were well educated and worked in different occupations. Either

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[123] Domestication of women through the process of colonization is discussed by many researchers (Leacock & Etienne, 1980; Mies, 1988; Jayaweera, 1986). The dowry system compensates for the feeling of economic dependency of these domesticated women.

[124] Some women remarked that they never felt bored being housewives because they never really were. Although they never engaged in income-generating activity, different social occasions kept them busy. This is a major reason why it is actually difficult to create class consciousness among Sri Lankan women as Ostrander (1973) posits. Women's experiences are highly moulded within their social class. Therefore they are not aware of the common oppression they face across classes.

their parents were well educated, were teachers or other officials, or they came from families who valued education. Many of them came from wealthy village families for whom education was very important. Some of them migrated to the city either because they secured work in the city or to educate their children.[125] Nevertheless, some middle class women thought it all right to study but there was a time for a woman to stop studying and get married. They did not want to work, nor did they want their daughters to work. They thought that a working woman does not have time for family responsibilities. Some women thought that occupations such as teaching would be good for a woman because it gave her time for her family. Just as in the upper class, there were some women who thought that women are not strong enough to work outside the home. Several women agreed: "It is good to work, but women cannot do everything. There are only a few jobs that suit women." They thought that it is the duty of the husband to work and provide an income while it is the duty of the wife to take care of the rest of the housework.[126] They did not consider this to be work. They regarded only paid work as work and therefore only what their husbands did was considered to be `work'. When asked what they did at home they answered "nikan innawa" which means "do nothing". The work they did at home they regarded as the duty of a housewife and not as real work. Although many of them had also married with dowries, they did not enjoy the power and prestige of upper class women and thus were more dependent on their husbands. Many middle class women also had servants, and for working middle class women, this was a great help. There were many occasions when they received extended family support when

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[125] Many educated couples migrated to the city because of the good education they could give their children. There were several families who moved to the city in the 1940s, 1950s and even in the 1960s because they could afford to buy land. Land values were very low at the time. They felt it would be better for their children to live in the city.

[126] By housework they meant all the work including cooking, cleaning, laundry, taking care of the children, and any other work at home.

they had to go to work leaving the children behind.

Middle class women of the first generation were also involved in many social activities, but to a much lesser degree than upper class women. Working women were rarely involved in these types of associations. They preferred to spend their leisure time with their families. There were some women who thought that they could study further or get a job without getting married in the near future. Although they were involved in both, the public and private spheres were completely separated for both middle and upper class women of this generation (Leacock, 1981). They did not receive the support that village women had from their husbands, except for a few men who did take care of themselves without expecting everything to be done for them by their wives. It was the Victorian norm for the wife to take care of the house, the children and also the husband, so that when there were no servants women did all the work by themselves without complaint. Although life could be difficult at times, they had to conform to the social norm.

The situation of lower class women was different. They were compelled to engage in wage work due to the economic hardships they had to face. While in a few cases, women did not work outside the home, most of them engaged in a home business or as pavement hawkers, or worked as labourers in factories or on work sites.[127] However, they never had to, or could not, comply to Victorian norms. They could not afford to have the life styles attributed to weak and feeble Victorian women. A woman who was a construction labourer noted: "I started work at eight in the morning and worked most of the time until four or five in the afternoon. Sometimes

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[127] Jayaweera (1991b: 113) claims, "The proportion of women in the industrial class was relatively higher - 40% in 1981. The 1901 census found that a small number of women were engaged in metal, iron, steel, glass and leather industries and in carpentry, bookbinding and watch repairs, indicating that women had ventured into new areas of employment. A significant number of women were engaged in petty trade in 1871, and their proportion in subsequent censuses declined, presumably, as men became involved in modern commercial enterprises."

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we had to do compulsory overtime work. It was heavy work and I was dead tired by the time I went home. Both my husband and I cook together, whoever comes home first feeds the children. I had a friend working with me, who had to go home and do all the household work by herself. Her husband came home drunk and beat her up if she had failed to do something." Their life styles were much more similar to that of village women, although lower class city women of that generation were more organized and revolutionary. It was the working women in the 1940s who played a leading role in trade union activities (Jayawardana, 1995). Although they were involved in many public activities such as politics, community activities, and other social activities, these were also separated from their private lives. Unlike village women for whom the family and community life were highly integrated, lower class women in Melvin Town had to shoulder family responsibilities and wage work separately. However, unlike the situation faced by middle and upper class women, they either had the support of their husbands even in housework, or the support of their extended families. Therefore, in general they did not have to shoulder the burden of the family alone.

The second generation of women in the city was born and grew up during or after independence. This is the group who enjoyed the benefit of free education. Therefore, with the numerous facilities available in the city, they could enter various occupations. Victorian concepts were fading, and women were getting more and more involved in public life. The entrance of more women into universities during this time created an educated female work force that had to be absorbed into existing occupations (Jayaweera, 1991). Although women had to compete with men, many women were capable of getting into higher occupational positions.[128] One woman told

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[128] "In 1971 for instance, 80.7% of non-schooled women and 68.9% of those with a primary education were in agriculture, 50.3% of secondary school drop-outs were in blue collar jobs, and 78.4% of GCE(OL)s, and 98.1% of

me that when they graduated from the university, they knew that they were going to get a good job and also that they were in high demand on the marriage market.[129] She said this pattern prevailed until the early 1960s.

Areas in teaching, nursing, secretarial and clerical services, and also factory work opened up for women (Jayaweera, 1991). Several teachers' training colleges, and nurses' training colleges, were opened and some of them were exclusively for women. Women became highly involved in areas such as law, medicine and biology, while men remained concentrated in technical studies and engineering. However, there was no area that excluded women.[130]

The class factor was not as much in evidence in this generation. Educated women from both the upper and middle classes were highly involved in the work force.[131] It is the women of the upper class who did not have a university education or any other higher educational qualification, who married early without entering the work force, when their educational qualifications were not enough to get them into the job categories suited to their social status. Middle class women had many options. Either they could enter the upper echelons of society through higher education or they could be satisfied with mediocre jobs. There were facilities for

GCE(AL)s and 97.4% of university graduates were in white collar jobs or in the professions." (Jayaweera, 1995: 126)

[129] Unless the girl became involved with a man, most marriages were arranged. It was very common for university graduates to have chosen their partners within the university. Education became highly valued at the time, so that an educated working girl was considered an asset to a family. Education and work took the place that dowry once had, so the girls who were not very wealthy had a chance to get married to partners from the elite.

[130] If there had been any discrimination against women in the area of work, laws were amended or newly created to eradicate such discrimination. For instance, "Sri Lanka's only sex discrimination legislation, the Sex Disqualification Removal Ordinance (1933) was enacted to remove perhaps the only one existing area of discrimination against women in public life at that time, the inability to join the legal profession." (Goonesekere, 1993: 3)

[131] Jayaweera (1991b: 121) claims: "The impact of education is seen in the rising educational levels in the labour force of men and women and the higher educational levels of women than men by 1971. It is also reflected in the increase in the relative share of women in professional and technical related jobs and in clerical related occupations."

them to upgrade their status, unlike educated women in the village. As mentioned in Chapter five, education was not as highly valued among the city poor.[132] This affected the level of occupation among lower class women in Melvin Town. These women continued to do the jobs their parents did or they took jobs like factory work or other menial labour.

It is the third generation of women who experienced the impact of the new economic system. As mentioned, many occupational and educational options were open to city women in this generation due to the new economic system. Both upper and middle class women took advantage of these opportunities. However, as the value of money came to dominate all other values prevalent in the society, these opportunities were not utilised to women's advantage, but rather to increase their economic worth. The intrinsic value of a woman as a human being or any progress she realized through education was not important if she could not advance economically.

The new emphasis on consumerism due to the increasing flow of goods to the local market highly affected the lives of women. Many women now dreamed of having a life filled with luxuries.[133] Therefore, they were ready to sacrifice their education, their jobs and even their independence to have that life. Among upper class women, education was used as a symbol of status, not necessarily a path to advance their quality of life or as a source of income. This does

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[132] One possible reason is that the urban poor have to compete with the middle and upper classes to climb the social ladder. The high dropout rates among the urban poor implied the effects of social class which deflates the benefit of free education (Jayaweera, 1991).

[133] I have analysed this situation in detail in my unpublished M.A. thesis, "Attempted suicide in Urban Sri Lanka", relating escalated consumerism and the continuous frustration people faced due to unfulfilled wishes, to the increase in attempted suicide rates in Colombo. The socio-economic environment created by the rapid change of the economic system is very similar to the situation in the US in the 1960s as described by Herbert Marcuse (1964) in his One Dimensional Man. Although Sri Lanka was not as developed an economy as the US, it is the fetishism of commodities created by the market economy, that increased the value of money above all the other values in the society.

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not mean that upper class women did not use their education to secure a job. For these women, it was much easier to find job opportunities with or without higher education, because of their social contacts. Nevertheless, since it is money as such which is now more important, these women do not consider occupation as a way of becoming socially and economically independent or as a way of improving their quality of life. Therefore, many of them work until marriage, or until they have children. Being married to wealthy partners or coming from wealthy families, they do not need to earn money in order to meet their economic needs.

This situation has created a life style for young upper class women which is similar to that of the first generation. Women accept the roles of mothers and wives, to the neglect of their education and occupational talents.[134] They do not lead productive lives at home because of the domestic help they receive. Many young upper class women are not involved in social activities as was the older generation of women. Many of them told me that they do not see anything they can do, or they feel too lazy to do these things. Some of them said that many of those associations are dominated by older women and they do not like younger women to undertake new things, so that they do not want to get involved. They prefer to stay at home or meet friends. Social circles are bigger for these young women. Most of them continue friendships with school mates or work mates. Compared to the older generation of the upper class, they have much broader life experiences, and more freedom and knowledge of the world. However, their lives sometimes become much more confined because of the busy way of life in the city which does not allow

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[134] However, there were five women in the sample who were very wealthy but continued to work. One said that she runs her own business, and her husband does not like it. But she wants to be independent and have her own income so that her husband will never be able to say that only he earns. She insisted that women will never be independent until they have their own income. Many of them have also brought wealth in the form of dowry. Coming from the families that held power and prestige, they are also less under the control of their partners.

enough time to maintain friendship or kinship networks. Therefore, their lives become almost completely private, very much separated from public activities.[135]

Middle class women face a similar situation regarding occupation. They need the jobs more than upper class women, but the lack of extended family support and domestic help force them to give up their jobs.[136] Women who continue to work face the problem of a double day of labour. Although the attitudes of some young men have changed and they help in domestic work, the societal expectation is that women shoulder all the household burdens. Therefore, life has became much more difficult for the young working women of the urban middle class than for the women of the other two generations.

Due to changes in social values, many young educated men also expect to marry educated non-working women.[137] This also has compelled young working women to give up their jobs. Many of the young working women complained of the problem of the double day of work. While ten of them were ready to give up their jobs if they could afford to, three said that they would continue to work even with difficulty because they want to use their education and they want to be independent.[138]

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[135] All the women who stay home after marriage except two told me that they are not involved in any public activities. Most of them said that they are contented with their lives. One woman said that she is very unhappy in the way she is living without using her education at all, but her husband does not want her to work. Three other women said that although they have good lives they prefer to work. Yet, they believed that life will become hectic and do not want to work until their children are grown up.

[136] Tinker (1990) asserts that complying with traditional gender roles has compensated women by releasing them from the double day of work.

[137] Changing attitudes towards marriage will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

[138] Statistics provide evidence for the same situation country wide. According to census reports, in 1971 the percentages of female employers were 0.8, paid employers 76.9, and unpaid family workers were 11.2 while in 1981 the same categories respectively were 1.2, 79.4, 12.9 and 6.5 indicating a rise of women's employment. However, 1985/86 Labour Force and Socio-economic Survey report delineates that these figures were respectively 0.9, 58.4, and

Lower class women did not have an option. They had more job opportunities than before, and continued to work even with the problem of a double day.[139] However, because of housing problems for the urban poor, many lower class families still had extended families. Although many young couples wished for a house of their own, many young women saw the extended family as a blessing. They hoped to buy or build houses close to their parents.

Thus, the new economic system has created a social structure that takes women back to conventional roles. Although women are given more opportunities, at the same time women are barred from utilising those opportunities. Hayden (1981) writes that with economic development, commercial enterprises such as fast food outlets, Laundromats, and day care centres become the modern counterpart of the family. Sri Lankan women are either still deprived of those facilities that take women's workload out of the home or they still have not adapted to or do not trust the existing ones, except for fast food places which are becoming very popular in the cities. Depending on their social class, third generation of women are either giving up their opportunities for personal development or are engaged in an arduous struggle to maintain their independence and dignity, coping with the burden of a double day of work.

This chapter analysed my research findings in the area of women's work in Pahalawela and Melvin Town. There are two reasons for the differential impact of liberal economic policies on women's work in the city compared to the village. First, the historical processes created varying

23.0 which indicates a high increase in the domestication of women.

[139]   Garment work was not popular among young women in Melvin Town. There was not a single garment worker (except two in the clerical and supervisory grades) in the sample of lower class families. I asked whether they know anybody in the neighbourhood who worked in the garment industry, and the reply was in the negative. The better education they receive, combined with better social opportunities, have made better work more accessible to them than for village women.

attitudes and opportunities regarding work; and second, there were disparities in access to those opportunities. It was argued that with economic liberalization, a whole new arena related to work opened for women in Pahalawela due to their availability for low-skilled wage labour. Melvin Town was affected differently due to the fact that even women in the lowest socio-economic classes had better access to employment compared to rural women. However, other social structural changes revoked the benefits of economic development, leaving women with no option other than to completely give up employment or to submit to the exploitation of both the work place and the 'double day'. Depending on social class and regional variation, increased employment opportunities for women, thus, did not always certify but would even deny them economic independence, within the newly created social structure.

Chapter six discusses the changes that occurred in marriage and family structures for the three generations of women in the city and in the village.

Chapter 6: Marriage, Family and the Continuance of Patriarchy

Historical evidence from the Kandyan period, just before its subjugation to British colonialism, proves the liberal position of women within the Sinhalese family organization. Centuries of foreign domination had a differential impact on the institutions of marriage and family depending on the regional and class distribution of women. This chapter demonstrates the historical transformation of marriage and family as it affected the position of women across three generations, providing a basis to analyse the effect of liberalized economic policies on family structure

There were two types of marriages in Sri Lanka: Kandyan marriages and low country marriages. People in the village married under the Kandyan Marriage and Divorce Act in which divorce was made easy. It permitted separation after two years on the basis of desertion. A woman could leave her husband and was given freedom to remarry if she was not satisfied with the marriage. Divorced women were not treated contemptuously and they had no difficulty in remarrying. At present, this system has been abolished and the up country is considered to come under the marriage laws of the Roman-Dutch legal system and the British common law in which divorce is not an easy task. Polyandry was made illegal, illegitimate children became the responsibility of the mother if legitimacy is was not proven within one year after child birth, and custody of children was given to the father as the natural guardian, all of which "support the male dominance within the family" (Jayaweera, 1986: 20).

In Sri Lanka, marriage and family still determine the future of a woman. Once a young woman marries, the social expectation for her is to stay in the marriage, even under extremely difficult conditions that might arise due to the incompatibility of the marriage partners. Divorce

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is granted on only three grounds under Sri Lankan law: adultery, malicious desertion and incurable impotency. It does not provide any further basis for divorce (Dias, 1982: 8). A woman is supposed to tolerate all the difficulties within a marriage for the sake of the children. Social attitudes still hold that children need both their parents, even if they have to live in an excessively disorganised and conflict-ridden situation.[140] Therefore, marriage and family can become oppressive social institutions for Sri Lankan woman regardless of the equal position provided for women in other social institutions and the freedom that women used to enjoy in traditional marriage, as discussed in Chapter two.

Despite the social norm of strong marriage bonds, divorce is not uncommon in Sri Lanka. Mean age at marriage for Sri Lankan women in 1981 was 24.4 while for men it was 27.9. However, it is interesting to note that within an 85 year period from 1901, age at marriage has not varied greatly. For women, it has increased from 18.3 in 1901 to 21.4 in 1921, decreased in the 1940s and 1950s, and slowly increased again in later decades.

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[140] Although there is a vast literature on the psychological effects of parental conflicts on children, many educated people still advise married couples to stay together because they think children need both parents without considering the debilitating effects on the child. Dias writes, "Whether such unhappy, two parent homes are themselves deviant, is the question that remains unanswered" (Dias, 1982: 10). Since society favours the needs of the man, by expecting the woman to fulfil her duties as a wife and a mother under any circumstance, it is the woman who normally has to shoulder the burdens of married life while the man enjoys the comforts of the marriage.

Table 6.1

Age at Marriage - the Sample

Age	Rural	%	Urban	%
13-18	58	34.1	15	7.6
19-24	99	49.7	79	38.7
25-30	15	13.0	81	44.3
<31	06	3.0	15	7.7
Total	199	50.5	195	49.5

(Missing observations: 6)

According to the sample as shown in Table 6.1, early marriages are more prevalent in the village. The age at marriage when controlled for generation, provides a better picture of the changes that have occurred across the different generations.

Table 6.2

Age at Marriage across Three Generations - Rural and Urban

	Rur	%	Urb	%	Rur	%	Urb	%	Rur	%	Urb
13-18	33	28.5	01	1.5	30	41.7	05	5.7	05	45.5	09
25-30	15	12.9	33	49.8	12	15.4	39	44.3	00	00.0	13
<31	03	2.7	06	8.9	02	2.7	06	6.8	01	9.0	03
Total	116	100.0	68	100.0	72	100.0	88	100.0	11	100.0	39

Table 6.2 shows that in the first generation, both in the city and in the village, early

marriages have occurred while the village has a higher incidence of early marriages. In the second generation, very early marriages, occurring before the age of eighteen has decreased in both the city and the village, although the rate of decrease is much higher in the city. However, marriages between the ages of 19 and 24 have increased considerably in both the city and the village in this generation. In the third generation, most women marry between the ages of 19 and 30, in both locations. There are two reasons for this. One is that the social perceptions about the responsibilities of family life have negatively affected early marriages while medical reasons regarding child bearing have reinforced these attitudes. An additional reason is that, the long years of schooling prevent early marriages.

There are two marriage patterns in Sri Lanka. One is the arranged marriage where parents find a marriage partner for their children through their social contacts, or through other methods such as marriage brokers, or newspaper advertisements. It is normally the parents who initiate the search. After getting to know the details of the two families, and the two families are agreeable on the conditions as well as the compatibilities of the two partners, arrangements are made for the two partners to meet. Normally these meetings are a family matter. Later, if the couple decides they like each other, the engagement will be announced.

Commonly, at present, girls are not forced into arranged marriages. However, there are many occasions when girls unwillingly decide to give consent. One reason is that as it is normally the man who first decides, it is very common for girls to be rejected, which can be a very painful blow to a woman's self esteem. Since it occurs frequently, it is not generally considered to be degrading to women. But when they have been rejected a number of times, girls tend to accept any offer to avoid any more refusals. The other reason is that an unmarried girl often becomes

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a burden to her parents since unmarried women are held in low social esteem. Therefore, although parents do not force a girl into a marriage, willingly or unwillingly, they make it difficult for a girl to stay home any longer by telling her what a burden she is. Ultimately, girls agree even to a partner whom they would not otherwise wilfully accept. It does not mean that these marriages necessarily fail. Apart from really successful marriages, mainly due to the tolerance and adjustability of Sri Lankan women who are socialised to think that they have to respect and tolerate whomever they marry, many marriages survive by women suppressing their actual needs. Many women both in the city and in the village who had unpleasant marital experiences remarked: "There is nothing to be done now other than to beat the drum which is already tied." This is a common Sinhalese expression to say that one has to endure difficulties.

The other type of marriage is where men and women find their own partners. However, they also have to obtain parental consent. If a parent objects, the couple cancels the engagement, elopes, or marries without parental consent.

The major family types in the country are nuclear families and extended families. Although joint families are very rare, they still exist. Joint families include several siblings, perhaps with the parents, who live together sharing the same kitchen, but maintain separate family units.

Table 6.3

Family Type - The Sample

FamType	Rural	%	Urban	%
Nuclear	134	67.0	139	69.5
Extended	55	27.5	40	20.0
Joint	06	3.0	10	5.0
Other	05	2.5	11	5.5
Total	200.0	100.0	200.0	100.0

Table 6.3 indicates that the nuclear family is the most popular family unit both in the city

and in the village. Extended family units are more common in the village than in the city.

Marriage and Family in Pahalawela

In the village, the economy, education, religion, and even politics are closely related to

marriage and family. Family forms the basis of the agricultural economy. Education is based on

the economic condition of the family and family values. Religious sentiments are taught and

valued according to family values.[141] Politics is a family affair in the sense that family relations

form the basis for political preference. No matter what one's political concerns are, villagers

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[141] All villagers are Buddhists. People believe and follow the religion according to what they have been taught by their elders. As discussed in chapter 3, in Pahalawela, unlike most Sri Lankan villages, people do not have a very close relationship to the temple, so that it is not the religious organization, but the family, which inculcates religious values. The families who traditionally had close contacts with the temple, or individuals who are inherently religious, transfer these values to their young and involve them in religious activities. Others are not highly involved in religious matters except for going to the temple on religious days, usually once a month.

politically support family members and relatives who run for various political offices.[142] Family life forms the basis for the whole social structure of the village.

However, compared to the status that village women hold in other areas of life, the status she has within marriage and the family is somewhat controversial. Her status within the family depends on several factors: type of marriage, type of family, marital status, and status within the family.[143]

In the village, 84.5% of women accepted the husband as the head of the household. A few women whose husbands were dead, considered either the son or the son-in-law to be the practical authority within the household although they declared themselves to be the head of the household. These women readily accepted male authority in the family although they criticized many of its other aspects. Nevertheless, there were a few women who considered themselves to be the heads of their households. They were either widowed or separated. Only two women in the sample said that there is no head in the family, that both husband and wife bear the same responsibility and authority.

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[142] Since the village as a whole belongs to a few different kinship groups, most of the villagers are related to one another. Therefore, during political campaigns, the village is divided into two groups because in the village only the two major political parties exist. They are the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). They support their relatives, ignoring their own political preferences.

[143] According to Grossholtz (1984) Sinhalese history provides evidence for a matriarchal past. Neither the gender nor the division of labour became the source of power within the traditional Sri Lankan family which contained more egalitarian relations between the sexes as explained in Chapter 2. However, the existing male domination, although not much evident practically, could be seen as a result of the transformation of the roles within the household by capitalism as Mallon(1987) asserts. It is with the peasant proletarianization process that the survival strategy of peasants against colonial and post-colonial exploitation turned to domination of women's labour power forcing these women to become the victims of a dual exploitation.

Table 6.4

Head of the Household

Head	Accepted No	%
Husband	169	84.5
Wife	28	14.0
Not Sure/Both	02	1.0
Grandmother	01	0.5
Total	200	100

Table 6.4 demonstrates a normal trend in village life. Although women have all the economic and decision making power, women are expected, at least nominally, to submit to the male authority in the family.[144] It is not uncommon in the village for women to be the decision makers in all aspects of family life. However, it is unwomanly and uncustomary to proclaim this fact. It was clearly demonstrated by a woman who declared: "I take all the decisions in this family. My husband never takes any decision without consulting me, even if it is related to his very personal life. I usually don't ask for my husband's permission to take decisions although I would tell him anything I did. Even if I forget he won't question me or get angry. He believes always that I make the right decision. Still, I regard my husband as the head of the family, because as long as he lives, that's the way it should be." This elevates male authority and

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[144] In chapter 2, I discussed the relationship of Buddhism to the institution of marriage. Marriage is a mundane issue which is out of the sphere of Buddhism, although the nature of the relationship between husband and wife is prescribed on certain occasions to be perfectly reciprocal. However, as Hindu marriage and family values which highly elevate male authority in the family became mingled with Buddhist values for hundreds of years, we never can expect the values and customs in the pure form as prescribed in the Buddhist code even though all of the villagers are Buddhists.

minimizes female power within the household.[145]

Women's status within the family is highly dependent on the type of marriage. Even when arranged marriages were customary, it was very common among village youth to fall in love. The preferred form of marriage was cross-cousin marriage where a girl was supposed to marry her bilateral cross-cousin. If there were several eligible cousins, either the parents decided or the couple was free to choose. It was common among cross-cousins to fall in love with each other so that when the question of marriage arose, they just had to let the parents know of their decision. Courtship among cross-cousins was more acceptable in the village. Although young men and women in the village were free to make acquaintances with each other, they were not supposed to carry on a courtship in public until the decision about the marriage was taken by the parents. Therefore, many young people had secret love affairs and incidents of broken affairs because of disagreements between the parents and the children were not uncommon. Even engagements between cross-cousins, although rare, could be broken due to parental disputes.

Whether it is their own choice or not, the final decision about the marriage was made by the parents. If the marriage met the parents' full approval, the couple received the fullest support from family and relatives. Otherwise, even though the marriage was agreed upon by the entire family, it was up to the couple to take care of their own lives. Many girls who married according to their own choice were reluctant to ask for family support even if they had serious family problems, unless the family came forward.

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[145] Historically, Sri Lankan women did not change their maiden names upon marriage. It was customary to have a respectful, friendly and mutual relationship between the spouses, although western and Indian attitudes disregarded the reciprocity of the relationship in favour of a hierarchical relationship between the spouses. Although the reciprocal nature of the relationship has not completely disappeared from the village, submission to the nominal authority of the husband is regarded as a symbol of a virtuous wife.

Elopements were also not uncommon in the village. This happened when the parents completely disagreed with the engagement. Couples who eloped were usually isolated from the family and relatives so that many of them left the village or lived with the family of one partner who did provide support.

A girl who is properly married has a higher status in the family and in the village. Family and parents take the responsibility for a daughter's married life, if it is an arranged marriage or one agreed upon by the parents. Therefore, the woman receives continuous support from her family. This gives the woman self-confidence and the husband or his family become more cautious about their treatment of the woman since she has the option of returning to her parents if the marriage does not work.[146]

A girl receives a dowry from her parents depending on their wealth, when she marries according to the approval of her parents.[147] The dowry is considered to elevate the position of a girl in the village. Many women said that since a woman gets married and lives with a man's family or in his house, unless she has an income as well as some kind of wealth that she can call her own, she becomes too dependent on her husband. Therefore, a dowry can be considered as an insurance for the girl's future. About 65% of women of all ages in the village claimed that although small, a dowry provides women with self-confidence, reducing the feeling of dependency, while another 30% condemned the concept of dowry as a way of exploiting women.

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[146] Although this does not happen very often, the feeling of support that women receive is very important.

[147] The concept of dowry in the village has a special meaning. The dowry can be land, money, jewellery, household items or even animals such as cows for her farm. It can also be a combination of different things. Whatever the form of the dowry, it is given according to the wealth of the parents and is always given to the girl, but not to the man she marries which is the Hindu custom. This is expected to help her in her married life and could be used by her in case of an emergency. But there are also occasions when the husband uses the dowry for family matters or, in some cases, for his own personal use.

Another 5% were not certain about their view or noticed both pros and cons in the dowry system. Nevertheless, all of them agreed that if the woman has a job, the dowry is not necessary because her job gives her a life-time financial guarantee. Also, many working women are self sufficient in their needs such as clothing, jewellery, and household necessities. Even if they work on the farm, because it is commonly the husband's land, they are presumed not to have the economic independence of working women.[148]

Type of family is another factor that affects the status of women within the family. Conventionally, a woman was taken to the husband's parent's house on the day of the marriage and lived there permanently, or until they built their own house.[149] She becomes a member of the husband's family and she has to live according to their wishes. If several brothers are there, either they have joint families where the families live in different rooms in the same house and cook separately in the same or different kitchens, or the oldest brother of the family inherits the house and the younger brothers move to their own houses.[150] Joint family households are no longer common in the village although extended families are still common. In the sample, there were only six joint families, 55 extended families and 134 nuclear families. Four other families lived with a relative or a friend.

Women had contrasting views about the family type and their status within the family.

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[148] Although in general women talked favourably about the dowry given them by their parents, more than 90% of the women thoroughly condemned any demand of dowry made by men.

[149] This custom still prevails unless the couple spends their honeymoon somewhere else. After the honeymoon, even if they have their own place to live, they stay with the husband's parents at least for a day or two. This first visit to the parents after the marriage, which is called home coming, is part of the wedding ceremony, both in the village and in the city.

[150] It is the custom in the up country to transfer the inheritance of the parental house to the oldest son.

About half the women thought the nuclear family provides them with more freedom and higher status since they become housewives and decision makers. Other women thought the extended family gives women more freedom since they do not have to do all the household chores by themselves, since they have the support of the in-laws. However, many women feared the antagonisms that can occur among in-laws and preferred to live separately. One woman stated: "It is a thousand times better to live separately without having too many connections with in-laws. My sister is going through hell living with her in-laws. " Many working women liked to stay close to one of the two extended families, but separately, since the help of the extended family is very important to them, especially in taking care of the children. However, it seemed that although the type of family is important in deciding women's social status in the family, it depends on the personal relations with the other people in the household. Some women lived very happily with the in-laws, while other women suffered within the nuclear family under the cruel domination of the husband with no extended family support. About seven women openly expressed unhappiness about living with in-laws while many others hinted at this. Nevertheless, five women told me that they have a splendid relationship with their in-laws. Four women who live in nuclear families told me that they are very unhappy about their lives due to the dominating characters of their husbands. Two of them claimed that their husbands physically abuse them. One of them said: "I told his mother that he beats me and she was very angry with him. She even asked me to come and stay with her. He plays very innocent in front of her. If we lived with them he would not have treated me like this." The other woman said that she does not expect sympathy from her in-laws, but will go back to her parents if he continues to abuse her. Some women believed that the husbands become controlled within the extended family because there are other people who will raise their

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voices against any harm done to women. In the nuclear family, the man has sole authority.[151]

Marital status also determines women's status within the family and in the society at large. To be single at marriageable age is not considered proper.[152] Many women preferred to stay single since they thought married life is laden with pressures and burdens. However, socially, single women are treated with contempt. Married women acquire a higher status in society even when they have the worst kind of relationship. The reason for this is that the life of a woman or a man is considered incomplete until they marry. Secondly, a woman has to be a mother. A married woman without children was considered a bad omen on auspicious occasions such as weddings. They were not supposed to be seen by the couple when they left after the ceremony. An old childless woman revealed: "My mother-in-law was furious when she saw me standing with the others on the way when my sister-in-law was leaving the house after her wedding. She made several humiliating remarks with the others knowing that I could hear. I was badly hurt, and did not go to my mother-in-law's house for more than a year. But my sister-in-law has three children and is very happy." Widowhood was thought to be bad luck for the woman although separation or divorce was not condemned in the same way.

The second generation of women faced more restrictions about divorce and separation because the values of the society changed and divorce was condemned. Western values regarding marriage which became the values of the low country under European domination were regarded

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[151] Beneria and Stimpson (1987) investigate the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy which transforms the economy as well as family and gender roles within it and their consequences for women.

[152] More than 60% of village women considered the age of 25 to 30 as marriageable age while about 25% said that it should not exceed 26 years. About 6% said that women should stay alone as long as they can, and they said that even 40 years does not matter if it is her wish to be married at that age. The rest of them said that no one can decide since a girl alone cannot decide the age she wants to marry or whether she will ever marry, since this depends on many factors.

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as the values of the cultured society and contemptuous attitudes were developed towards the Kandyan marriage laws.[153] They considered marriage to be a permanent bond. No matter how difficult and unsatisfactory the marriage the couple should stay together because of the children. It is a common belief among this generation of women that a child needs both parents (Dias, 1982) so that mothers have no other choice than to remain even in an unhappy marriage, although it is the woman who has to make all the sacrifices.

Table 6.5

Marital Status of Women in Pahalawela

Status	No	%
Single	02	1.0
Married	184	92.0
Common Law	07	3.5
Separated	00	0.0
Divorced	01	0.5
Widowed	05	2.5
Other	01	0.5
Total	200	100.0

As Table 6.5 demonstrates, 92% of village women are married while only one woman in the sample is divorced. When compared to the very low marital satisfaction expressed by some women, these statistics demonstrate the social resistance to divorce.

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[153] Goonesekere (1993) discusses the freedom provided for women under Kandyan marriage laws.

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The younger generation of women has different attitudes regarding marriage. They say that it is not necessary to suffer throughout life if married life is excessively difficult and it is better to get a divorce if there is no other solution. But that has to be the last resort since the children will also suffer. It seemed that, for the third generation of women, lack of economic security was more of a factor affecting attitudes towards marriage and divorce than the social stigma or the effect on children. Yet, any of these women, widowed, married, divorced, or separated (especially if they have children) enjoy a better status than single women.[154]

The status of women within the family is another factor affecting their social status. Grandmothers were highly respected and were given a high priority in decision making and in advisory capacities. To take care of the young, grandmothers were considered the best. Any elderly person in the family (such as aunts) were also well respected. The other highest status in the family was the wife and the mother who comprised 80.5% of the respondents. Single mothers were also given a higher status depending on their behaviour towards their children. Single mothers who devoted their lives to their children were highly respected. Moreover, any married woman received a higher status than single women and any older woman received a higher status than younger women.[155] Six percent of the respondents were married without children, 9% were single mothers, 1% were grandmothers, 1% were daughters, and 1.5% were others such as aunts, or other relative. Two women who were married with children were willing to accept their status as daughter as well, since they still felt that they were under the guardianship of their parents

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[154] A reason for this can be the high respect accorded to motherhood in the country in general.

[155] This depended somewhat on the educational and occupational status of women. Young and unmarried women with higher educational qualifications or respectable employment were treated very respectfully in the village. One young woman who was a university graduate and a professional but unmarried and in her thirties was highly respected in the village. Even young school teachers who were still unmarried were highly respected.

despite their marital status.

Although economic trends after 1977 have not created a remarkable change in marriage and family life in the village, it has considerably influenced certain aspects of it. It has obviously affected the age at marriage. The older generation in the village had a very low age at marriage. They did not have the means to continue their education and there was no reason to keep them at home. They were supposed to marry early and have children. The children were a major part of their lives because on the one hand, marriage for them meant having children and many children was a symbol of success. On the other hand, they needed more farm hands. Therefore, it was important to marry young and have more children. This attitude has changed in the second generation. These women were more keen about other types of goals such as education and employment. The third generation has a tendency to leave school early and join the labour market. However, the type of employment available creates many difficulties for young girls such as living away from home, health problems, monotony of work that gives no job satisfaction, and injustices in the work place that drives them towards leaving these jobs early. As soon as they earn some money, they quit their jobs and get married.

However, many older women thought that they should have married later than they did. They said that married life is difficult no matter what lies ahead. Therefore, women have to be mature. Many women of the second generation were married in their twenties or thirties and they were happy about that. Several women who married in their thirties said that they had time to enjoy their lives since, after marriage, a woman does not get the chance. A few women said that it depends on the husband. Many women had similar ideas to the following expressed by a young woman regarding marriage. "If a girl gets an understanding husband, married life would not be

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difficult. Otherwise the life of a woman could become a living hell, since a woman has very little chance of escaping from her responsibilities (or burdens)." However, women agreed that marriage is the biggest decision in a girl's life because it can change her future completely for better or worse. About 88% of women believed that their single lives were much happier than their married lives, except for four women who stated the opposite. Three out of these four women had had unpleasant childhood experiences due to poverty or other family problems. Only five women claimed without any hesitation that they have good lives because of their partners.

Women's relationship with their in-laws also contributed to their marital satisfaction. About 50% of women had pleasant relationships with the in-laws while the other 50% experienced problems and disharmony. Over 90% of women had close relationships with their own extended families, but many women were not satisfied with relationships because most of them wanted to support their extended families but failed to do so because of poverty. In a few cases, husbands or in-laws had put restrictions in continuing these relations. This commonly happened when the women were dependent on the husbands. Yet, many village women lived close to their extended families and had no barriers in continuing these relations unless poverty restricted them.

Village women had a great deal of autonomy in decision making. They had complete autonomy in bringing up children, their socialization, education, social life, marriage and even life after marriage. Husbands usually agreed with their wives' decisions in these areas. Many women controlled the family budget. They had freedom in their social life. Women did not need permission from husbands to visit neighbours, to fetch firewood or water, or to go to the stream with friends to bathe or to wash clothes. All these occasions were enjoyable for women in the company of their friends. Women left the small kids with the neighbours or relatives if the

husbands were not at home. Husbands normally asked for money from their wives for their necessities, since women controlled the income of both spouses. Many women looked after their old parents if they were sick or needed help. Housework was taken care of by husbands if women had to stay away from home for a few days. Since villagers place a high value on taking care of elderly people, these incidents rarely sparked conflicts between spouses.[156]

Although not very common, an alcoholic husband brought many unbearable problems for women such as physical abuse. Since there is no other support for women in these incidents other than their own extended families or neighbours, many women tolerated these as regular occurrences that could not be prevented. They were encouraged to separate from the husbands by the community only if these incidents became excessively intolerable for women.

Third generation women do not have this freedom or the power of decision making. One reason for this is they are dependent on the husband. The other is although they are economically independent, it prevents them from enjoying any other activities due to time constraints. They feel guilty about not playing their customary roles of wife and mother properly, and thus they automatically submit to the authority of their partners.[157]

Marriage in Pahalawela has little to do with romantic feelings. It has changed from those

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[156] This is the reason Brydon and Chant (1989) suggest that since economic liberation does not parallel women's emancipation, true liberation would have to be achieved in both the productive and reproductive spheres, in the regions of the economy as well as in society and culture. The family situation of city women as shown later in the chapter demonstrates that economic liberation has not provided them with the freedom that less economically liberated village women enjoy.

[157] By creating hierarchical structures and a public-private distinction within the family, colonialism succeed in polarizing gender which was expanded by capitalism. This destroyed more egalitarian gender structures, originating a class-based system of women's oppression. Therefore, Mallon (1987) asserts that it is extremely important to combine class analysis with gender, which grasps the historical development of patriarchy as well as its present realities. This is the only way to comprehend the situation of peasant women as suppliers of cheap labour in the industrial zones who also become easy targets of gender exploitation both within and outside the family.

romantic relations which often began in the field, at the stream, in the woods, or at the temple, to a more or less social contract. Whether it is a love marriage or an arranged one, marriage has become an enormous responsibility. Both spouses toil hard to take care of the family. Although life was more difficult in the past, since the needs of the society and the importance of money has substantially increased due to the present economic trends, married couples in the village face severe economic hardship. Many couples stay in the marriage because of necessity and not because of choice. However, in the village, couples respect each other and take care of each other,[158] although this has little to do with love and romance. Still, clandestine affairs are not uncommon and even women who are notorious for being promiscuous are not condemned. While they gossip about these incidents, they do not castigate these women and consider them to be part of regular life in the village.

Although village women have all the power in decision making in the family, they have no control over their sexuality.[159] Sexual life is an area where village women have very little power. Over 50% of the women said that they thought it is their duty to submit to their men whenever the men needed to have a sexual relationship even when they themselves were not the least bit interested. That is an issue they never discuss with their partners and they said that men have no idea of women's sexual needs. The sexual relationship becomes one sided since many women believe that the sexual needs of men are much stronger than those of women. In order to

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[158] Apparently, conflict between spouses was much greater in the younger generation among whom the feeling of interdependency was far less than the two older generations. Instead, women were more economically dependent on their husbands.

[159] The control of women's sexuality under colonialism is discussed by many researchers. Sri Lankan history provides evidence for the sexual freedom of women as explained in Chapter two. Yet it does not suggest that women were sexually liberated within the family.

prevent men from becoming frustrated or seeking other women, women have to make themselves available to men at their request. Many women stated that they derive no sexual pleasure and that they abhor sexual relations with their partners.

Over 80% of the women agreed that they did not have any power in deciding how many children they wanted or when they wanted to have them. Many older women stated that it was very difficult to bear so many children at such a young age but with the help of the extended family they managed to take care of them. Since women were bearing children year after year, their partners had to take care of the older children.

Although they had many children, older women thoroughly recommended family planning for younger women.[160] Many older women stated that when the facilities are so easily available, it is a pity that these young women do not make use of them. They stated that planned families are much easier for a woman to handle than facing unexpected pregnancies which sometimes also affect the child. Many women agreed that every child born should be wanted by the parents, and planned child births give the opportunity for the parents to expect and plan for the birth of every child.

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[160]   In 1983, a public health office opened in the village. The public health officer works as an advisor on family planning to the villagers. The family planning clinic is situated in the hospital which is not more than four miles away from the village.

Table 6.6

Number of Children: Pahalawela

Children	No. Women	%
0-3	97	48.5
4-7	84	27.0
8-12	19	6.5
Total	200	100.0

Table 6.6 indicates that about half the women had three or fewer children. All women who had more than eight children belonged to the first generation.

Many women were confronted with a major problem regarding the number of children. Many husbands did not want to use any contraceptive methods, so that women had to depend on birth control pills which they sometimes refused to take due to the fear of side effects. The public health officer in the area said that young women are really keen on family planning, but women are left with no other choice than oral contraceptives, because they do not want to force their husbands to prevent family disputes. However, modern economic trends have affected attitudes regarding this. Among very young married couples, use of contraceptives is becoming more popular since they fear unwanted births. In contrast to the past, it has become essential to limit the size of the family since each individual is struggling hard to acquire wealth which cannot be accomplished with too many children. In this way, young women have obtained a certain control over their sexuality.

Village women had varying attitudes about divorce and separation. A few women said that once a girl is married, she has to stay in the marriage even if life is extremely difficult. Many

young women believed that a couple should stay together because of the children. But they agreed that divorce is sometimes unpreventable although it should be the last resort. Women of the second generation had more liberal attitudes towards divorce, but attitudes were affected by the educational levels and the economic independence of women. They said that if a woman has the means to take care of children, there is no need to suffer. They strongly believed in parents' help in that kind of situation. Among the younger generation of women, there were two contrasting attitudes. One was based on economic motives. They said that it is extremely difficult under the present economic trends to live on one person's earnings. Many young women who quit work after marriage have no other choice than to stay with their husbands no matter what difficulty may arise. Another group of young women was completely against suffering in order to conserve their marriage. They said that the marriage survives because both people want it. Therefore, if one person suffered there is no reason to stay in a marriage. They did not worry about social attitudes towards divorce and said that a woman's life is more important than social attitudes.

Although women held varying attitudes towards divorce regarding themselves, over 70% of women of all ages claimed that they would not let their daughters suffer in a bad marriage. They also said that if there is no other solution they would encourage them to divorce.

Extra-marital or pre-marital sexual relationships as well as unmarried motherhood were not accepted in the village. Most women did not directly condemn them, and many of them had neutral attitudes regarding such incidents. About 60% of the women claimed that it is uncustomary to engage in such relationships, but there are reasons for women to do so. About 20% of the women believed that this kind of relationship should not exist, no matter what the

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reason.[161] Twenty percent refused to say anything about the matter.

Although women in the first and second generations were more independent, third generation women did not hold the same prejudices. Divorce, barrenness, and widowhood are no longer condemned in the village and women are no longer blamed. Women of all three generations agreed that there is a need to support women. They are trying to understand the difficulties faced by women, without blaming women for disorganization in the family.

Over 70% of women said that they are happy with their marriages. Yet, probing into different areas of their lives indicated that the actual scene differs in many cases. It is not that all of them lied about this, but they tried to mask reality by obscuring it with cultural concepts of morality. About a quarter of the women honestly believed that they were not satisfied with their married lives. Another five percent were not sure about their feelings of marital satisfaction.

Thus, the new economic policies had affected marriage and family in the village in specific ways. It had drawn women out of the household and the family farm and placed them within the industrial wage labour sector. By devaluing women's contribution in the subsistence economy within the family farm through the escalating consumerism, it also had pulled women back to private and reproductive roles within the household. Women seemed to be incarcerated within this conflicting situation.

Women. Marriage and Family in Melvin Town

The concept of marriage and family in the city is quite different from that of the village.

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[161] I later found out that one of the women in this category was having an affair with a friend of her husband.

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As described in Chapter Two, unlike the village, social institutions in the city went through a number of transformations with colonialism. Therefore, values and customs concerning marriage and family in Melvin Town are considerably different from those of Pahalawela, while they also significantly vary from generation to generation.[162]

In Colombo, the centre of foreign invasions, foreign influences were highly visible and strong. Although Sinhalese Buddhist marriage rituals remained almost the same as in the village with exceptions in dress and ceremonial practices, Sinhalese Christian marriages almost entirely changed to adopt to western Christian marriage ceremonies. However, it was the values related to marriage that were most seriously affected by foreign influences in the city for more than three centuries.

Marriage and family in the city is not as strongly linked to other social institutions as it is in Pahalawela. Although social values related to education, the economy, religion and also politics are transferred to the next generation through socialization, weaker social integration and the wide variety of opportunities in the city provide more autonomy to the individual. For instance, even though the value of education is highly promoted by parents, given the chance, children can take another path. A young upper middle class married woman said: "My parents wanted me to go to the university but since childhood I was interested in business. Both my father and my husband are businessmen. My parents never wanted me to do a job related to business. After marriage, I

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[162] The colonial impact on stratification which converted it into a class system, also transformed the power structures within the family. The sexual control of women was utilized to control their liberty as well as their productive and reproductive powers mainly in the upper and middle classes who were more responsive to Victorian family ideals. Therefore, as Mallon(1987) argues, the household cannot be considered to be a mere economic unit, an error caused by
utilizing only a class analysis, because the allocation of power within the capitalist patriarchal family is based on gender, and in Melvin Town, more precisely, on gender within the class hierarchy. This is the major reason why the mere control of income does not become the essence of power in the Sri Lankan family structure as Blumberg (1988) claims.

started this small business by myself. My husband does not like it very much. He thinks I should stay home with the child. But I want to have my own income and I am not going to lose this chance." Similarly, although the political and religious values of the parents are usually followed, unlike in the village, that does not become entirely a family affair since the individual's judgment can differ from that of the family. Even the political and religious practices of the spouses can be totally different. Since family relations are not reciprocal in the city in the same way as on the family farm, the individual within the family becomes more independent.[163]

Although not as intense as in Pahalawela, a woman's status within the family in Melvin Town also depends on factors such as family type, marital status, and her social status within the family. Moreover, these factors affect the stability of the marriage for two contradictory reasons: one is lower social integration and individual freedom which ease woman's responsibility towards the society, and the other is the economic independence of women in the city which does not coincide with her liberty within marriage. However, these factors affect the status of women across different generations in different ways.

Age at marriage in the first generation is comparatively lower than age at marriage in the second generation while in the third it rises again. Age at marriage in Melvin Town is higher than it is in Pahalawela across all three generations. In Melvin Town, there is a significant increase in age at marriage in the second generation. The low marital age in the first generation is found

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[163] This is where a paradoxical relationship exists among the members of the family, especially between the spouses. The lower the mutual dependency of the spouses, the more they become independent. In the city, due to less mutuality, and the availability of more educational and working options for women, they ought to become more self-reliant. Yet, as described in the previous chapter, the other social obstacles make city women more vulnerable than rural farm women. However, men in the city, due to less reciprocity, become more autonomous while those social barriers that impede the success of women do not deter them from achieving their goals. Therefore, in spite of the accessibility of city women to a freer life, they become further dependent, providing the chance for men to be more independent.

across all social classes in the city, but attitudes towards marriage differ according to social class. Upper and middle class women in the first generation claim that marriage is essential for women and a woman should be married by her early twenties. They stated that women are fragile, powerless and vulnerable and thus they have to be protected and should be taken care of. These women were obviously expressing Victorian attitudes towards women, attitudes which were entirely different from those of women of the same generation in Pahalawela. Although women in the first generation of Pahalawela also married young, it was for an entirely different reason. They never considered women to be weak and feeble. Women had to be as strong as men in order to survive. Lower class urban women of the same generation, although married young, were involved in work outside the home, and lived a more independent life. Within the household however they did not have the same freedom enjoyed by village women of the same generation. Western concepts of womanhood, deeply rooted for centuries, mingled with the image of subservient womanhood in Hindu culture to present an image of the servile `married woman' which however, varied with social class. A woman who was a factory worker revealed: " I was actively involved in the trade union movement in the 1930s. Whenever I had to attend meetings, I made sure that food was ready and that all the household work was done." Women thought that this was part of their duty as wives and mothers. These women believed that it is a sin to be born a woman because a woman is destined to suffer all her life.[164]

Nevertheless, another woman claimed that both she and her husband worked, participated in politics and trade union activities, and that they also shared household duties. About 20% of lower class women expressed views similar to this woman while the rest voiced opinions similar

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[164] Many women held this kind of belief regarding women both in the village and in the city, mostly among women of the first and second generations, although Buddhist literature entirely rejected such attitudes.

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to that of the first woman. Some upper class women who wished that they could have jobs claimed that household work also should be shared. However, even some of those women who wanted to work agreed that household work is a wife's responsibility. If women want to work, they said, women should be prepared to shoulder the burden of a double day of labour.

Second generation women in the city, regardless of social class, were educated, economically much more liberated and married later than the women of the first generation. Although societal views on the subordination of women were not completely eradicated, these women, by means of their educational, economic and social gains, obtained a certain amount of power in the home front. As explained in Chapters Six and Seven, these women, with domestic help and extended family support, as Gannage (1986) maintains, could achieve their goals without having to shoulder the heavy burden of the double day.

Third generation women had to face a serious societal contradiction. While education and increased work opportunities delayed their marriages, the value placed on money soared above all other values and encouraged them to find economically successful partners at an early age. This resulted in an increase in early marriages. Many women continued their education after marriage.[165] However, the most common feature was to marry as soon as she finished her education. This also varied according to social class. Young women of the upper class either got engaged or married at an early age, yet many of them continued their higher education. They worked if they preferred, either until they were married or until they had their first child, and/or continued to work according to their wishes since their wealth and power provided them with

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[165] Usually, in Sri Lanka, marriage terminated formal studies for a Sri Lankan girl. Since a married woman carried an enormous responsibility towards her family, it was not a common phenomenon for a woman to study after marriage except on rare occasions; for example, professional training needed for promotions, as, for instance, teacher's training, diplomas, etc.

more autonomy in the family. Many middle class working women had to shoulder the double day of work which forced them to either resign from their jobs after marriage or continue to work, bearing a heavy burden. However, since the pattern of marriage reversed again compelling many economically successful young men to marry educated non-working women in order to have prospective wives who could devote themselves entirely to the family, it increased the rate of women who quit their jobs after marriage (Jayasinghe, 1982).

This reflected a revival of nineteenth century western attitudes on the home front, which although not as intense as during colonial times, brought back women to their conventional roles as `mothers' and `wives', confining them once again to the private sphere. Although many young men were ready to share household work, women could not escape from the social pressure to bear the burden of household responsibilities.[166]   Gavron (1966) discusses a similar situation happening in the England in the 1950s. However, her observations revealed family life as being seriously endangered as a result of increased female employment, especially among married women (Gavron, 1966: 26). In Melvin Town however, family did not face such threats due to the passive attitudes of women who were ready to sacrifice their future for the sake of the family.

As Table 6.7 indicates, most city women, just like village women, accepted the husband as the head of the house. However, most of them expressed that this was merely nominal since both of them cannot be the head. Actually, there is no head in their house. One woman said it is unfair to ask who is the head of the house because a family is a shared unit with no leaders and

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[166] One university professor told me that she had so many setbacks in her career because she wanted to be a successful mother and a wife. Yet, she said, her husband achieved his goals without facing any constraint about family life. She claimed until societal norms change and make family a shared responsibility, a woman will not be capable of achieving her goals. Problems concerning Sri Lankan women's occupational mobility are discussed by Jayaweera (1995).

followers.[167]

Table 6.7

Head of the Household - Melvin Town

Head	Number	%
Husband	152	76.0
Wife	44	22.0
NotSure/Both	01	0.5
Grandmother	00	0.0
Son/Nephew	02	1.0
Son-in-LAw	01	0.5
Total	200	100.0

Type of marriage also affected the status of women in the city but not in the same way as village women. There is not much difference in the city between love marriages and arranged marriages. However, in arranged marriages, women have more voice since the marriage is agreed upon by both sides. In a love marriage, since it is her own choice, women try to conform to the new life even if there are difficulties. The idea of reputation related to marriage is controversial in the city. Since urban people are not bound together tightly as a community, personal reputation does not matter in the same way as it does in the village. Nevertheless, more restricted attitudes towards marriage that were compatible to Victorian norms resulted in the city under foreign domination, and these hampered women's freedom within marriage. Although the individualism

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[167] Although village women had a more independent life, they had a more respectful relationship towards their husbands. City women, although they were more dependent in certain ways, considered husband and wife to be companions, more equal in status within the family.

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of city life, economic independence, and the social emancipation of women direct women towards more independent life styles, at the same time, the conservative attitudes in the city (which are not traditional) prevent them from breaking away from difficult marriages. Less family support in the city worsens the situation for women.

Parental consent is nevertheless still important in the city. Cross cousin marriage is very rare. Courtship is very common in the city although couples rarely live together before marrying. Even in arranged marriages, couples go out and get to know each other before marriage. Elopements are uncommon since social life is more open in the city.[168]

Dowry, although not as apparent as before, still exists in the city, sometimes in a severe form compared to the village. It also has a critical effect in deciding the future of a girl according to her social class. In the first generation, dowry was important among all the social classes as a guarantee for a girl's marriage. Dowry provided high self-esteem for women, while the lack of it affected them in the reverse. However, the middle and lower classes of this generation did not suffer because marriages were arranged, usually after the parents had made all of the decisions. If the man had asked for an unaffordable dowry, the arrangement would not work out.[169] In the city too, the dowry could be money, land, jewellery, and/or any other wealth.[170]

For women in the second generation, the importance of education and work led to a

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[168] Even if the parents disagree on the choice their daughter makes, elopement is rare. Some marry against the wishes of the parents, but that does not create an indelible stigma as in the village. The type of marriage usually has no effect on the reputation of the girl, although it affects the relationship between the spouses.

[169] No one informed me of incidents related to dowry which ended in marriage break up. Several women told me that people respect women more than money so that if the marriage was agreed upon, usually that meant either the dowry was decided or they had agreed to marry without a dowry.

[170] A woman told me that she received an elephant for her dowry and until the death of the animal, it lived with them. Elephants were considered to be assets as well as an income source that could be afforded only by wealthy people.

decline in the importance of dowry. Nevertheless, women of the third generation are facing the deleterious effects of dowry. Although education and work are still considered important, monetary considerations are crucial in a woman's value in the marriage market, as a result of the commercialization of marriage and society. This humiliates women, especially middle class women who have to maintain their social status with less economic resources, because the lack of dowry reduces their worth on the marriage market. Although men usually do not ask for a dowry as it is considered indecent to do that, many other avenues are being used to discover the wealth of girls.[171]

Women had varying attitudes towards the dowry. Women of the older generation did not criticize the dowry, but some of them thought that it was unfair for girls. Almost all the women of the second generation said that dowry is not necessary, except for a few upper class women who said that a dowry would help a girl's future. Third generation women were very confused on this issue. All the middle and lower class women criticized it and some of them said that it should be abolished. Nevertheless, they also said that women should have some kind of wealth before marriage so that they would not be dependent on their husbands. They also approved the dowry given by the parents or any wealth accumulated by them through employment before marriage to be used as insurance for the future. Several upper class women agreed that it was the dowry that helped them in contracting good marriages, more so than education. However, there was a general agreement among the women that the dowry should be decided by the parents and that it was inappropriate for a respectable man to ask for a dowry.

Younger women in Melvin Town favoured nuclear families even with the difficulties they

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[171] Men find out this kind of information through friends or relatives (or through the girl while dating), or guess according to the life styles and jobs of the girl and her parents.

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had to face due to less or no support from the extended family. One cause for this was the high cost of living in the city. The other was the freedom that the couples expected after marriage. About 67% of those who have nuclear families said that it is good if they can have the support of the parents or in-laws, but it is better to be away from both sides to avoid disputes. The remainder said that they would like to have extended families with them. Those women who already have extended families also saw pros and cons with this arrangement. Many women of the older generation had lived with their in-laws after their marriages. They had both good and bad experiences and the ratio of the inclination towards an extended family was 50:50. About 70% of the second generation also favoured the extended family.

In the city, a woman has more freedom to decide her own life than in the village due to less community pressure. However, the social pressure for a woman regarding marriage is not less in the city, although many young women remain single. A woman has to be highly self-confident and independent to choose to be single even in the city. It is not only for reasons of independence that women do not get married. The difficulty of finding a suitable partner is also a common cause for women to remain single. The situation differs from the village where the community is knowledgeable about all of its inhabitants. Therefore, parents have to exercise caution in finding a suitable partner for their daughters. Women said that the higher the level of education and the social status of the girl, the more difficulty there is in finding a partner because social expectations are such that the husband should be higher in social status than the wife.[172]

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[172] This is an important feature of marriages in Sri Lanka, because women have many unpleasant experiences in cases where the husband occupies a lower social, occupational or educational status than the wife. Women told me that since he is supposed to be respected as the head of the household, he is also expected to be in a superior position. If the woman happens to be in a higher position, he tries to put her down in many other ways due to feelings of insecurity. This would end up, they said, in extreme control of the woman leading to abuse and domestic violence.

Nevertheless, an unmarried woman who is socially successful is not as socially ostracized as a woman who is not.

Table 6.8

Marital Status of Women in Melvin Town

Status	No.of Women	%
Single	06	3.0
Married	155	77.5
Common Law	00	0.0
Separated	02	1.0
Divorced	02	1.0
Widowed	35	17.5
Total	200	100.0

Table 6.8 shows that divorces are also not common in Melvin Town.[173] The absence of common law marriages indicates the total acceptance of English law for over a century in the city. Even if there were incidents of couples living together, this was not openly declared.

A married woman compared to a single woman has a higher status in the city even if she is very unhappy in her marriage. This is somewhat different from the situation in the village where successful unmarried women were more respectfully treated than those married women who are not socially successful. Attitudes regarding marriage are still shaded by Victorian norms in Melvin Town. Although divorce is more common in the city, social pressures are exerted to force

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[173] This could be related to random sampling procedure.

women to stay in marriages even under extreme duress.[174] However, divorce is more tolerated among the younger generation. Although widowhood was also considered to be a bad omen in the city among the older generation, it is no longer an important issue. Widowhood does not prevent women from rising to the highest social positions.[175] Although they consider marriage to be an important avenue for economic and social prosperity, the younger generation of women have more flexible attitudes towards the marital status of a woman.

Woman's status within the family affects the social status of women in the city almost in the same way as in the village, although sometimes elderly people in the extended family do not have the same decision-making authority as in the village. In the city too, grandmothers or any other elderly relatives in the family are highly respected. Although the status of the single woman in the society depends on her socio-economic achievements, frequently an unmarried woman does not have a voice in the family. She is still considered a child no matter how old she is. This is mainly a feature among middle and upper class families in the city. However, among the lower classes, women's economic and educational achievements are valued above their marital status.[176] The status of the single mother is not different from any other married woman with children. In

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[174] Women said that if a man is facing difficulties in marriage due to the behaviour of the woman, people continuously advise him to divorce her and a man who tolerates such a woman is ridiculed. But a woman who suffers throughout her life because of the man's conduct is forced to stay at least because of the children. In any event, they said that social attitudes regarding marriage are unfavourable towards women.

[175] Due to ethnic and political conflicts in the country, many women became widows. Many women leaders are the wives of assassinated politicians. Compared to Pahalawela, Melvin Town had a high rate of widowhood which I was not able to relate to the political conflicts in the country without further investigation.

[176] In the upper and middle classes, the parents are either educated and\or wealthy and powerful, so the children's achievements do not change their social status much. Therefore, until they get married and start a life of their own, they have to live under the authority of their parents, and they do not gain much power within the family due to their achievements. Among the lower classes, normally, social mobility occurs through the achievements of the children, just like in the village. Thus regardless of marital status, successful women can attain significant power within the family.

Melvin Town, 8% of the respondents were married without children, 73% were married with children, 3.5% were single mothers, 10% were grandmothers, 1% were unmarried, and 3% claimed to be relatives other than wife, mother, daughter or grandmother. Only three women still accepted their position as a daughter in the house although they also bore the status of wife and mother. This usually happened in extended families, where the respondent lived with her own parents.

Marital satisfaction among city women depended on the same factors as in the village. There were also other factors due to the different social life in the city. It was clear that the more women become ambitious about their personal progress, the more the women of any generation and any class were prone to be dissatisfied. Since life styles in the city were more complex than in the village and women were provided with more opportunities, women were more likely to be unhappy with their lot. However, women in the upper and middle classes of Melvin Town were sometimes very reluctant to reveal much about their personal life, especially if they were experiencing marital conflict. Nevertheless, many women did talk freely about their married life.

The most important factor affecting marital satisfaction was the decision-making power of women within the family. The fact that women had more economic freedom did not make much difference here except that they were not financially dependent on their husbands. In the lower classes, having an income provided women with power.[177] But in the middle and upper classes, social expectations of a wife incorporated conventional values, and did not provide women with that kind of power although they did not depend on men economically. The decision-making power in the family was a different issue from economic independence except on the

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[177] It is only in this particular situation that the Sri Lankan picture regarding income and authority resembles that discussed by Blumberg (1988).

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occasion of divorce or separation where economically independent woman had more freedom and security.[178]

Compared to the first generation of women in Melvin Town, the second generation was more independent socially and economically. These women related that they studied, worked and also had a family life because they were not heavily burdened at home due to the external help they received. Since women were admired for their capabilities and achievements instead of regarding them as financial resources, sexual objects or on their ability to conform to conventional roles, women were urged to achieve self-development. The situation of women in the third generation is complicated. Ostensibly, they are more educated, economically more powerful, and have broken away from the conventional norms governing women. Therefore they have more autonomy. However, field evidence reveals that the reality is different. Lack of traditional support systems for women limit their horizons for their own achievements and other social activities, thus making women's lives more constrained and vulnerable to male domination within the domestic sphere. This same vulnerability deters their efforts to break away from the cycle of oppression.

Age at marriage did not affect the marital satisfaction of first generation women. They did not complain about their early marriages and many of them were happy about having many grandchildren while they still had the strength to look after them. They did not even oppose early

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[178] Although usually it was the mother who made decisions regarding children and other family matters, the father had sole authority in most of the first and second generation families. In the third generation the situation was somewhat different. Many young couples made the family decisions together no matter whether they had an income or not. Family life is becoming more mutual than hierarchical, although wealth or income which did not disturb routine family life provided women with more power. One woman said: "We can easily say that we fulfilled our family responsibilities and we also do not depend on you (husband) for every single cent we need. So they cannot control us too much." This is the idea behind women marrying with a dowry and quitting work. Thus they accept the roles of mother and wife as the appropriate social roles for women.

marriages for the present generation. It was the second generation who complained about early marriages. About 70% of them agreed that working women should not marry before 25 years of age since after marriage they would not have an opportunity to enjoy their lives. The younger generation had varying attitudes regarding age at marriage. The ratio was about 50:50 among women who agreed and disagreed about early marriages. However, about 80% of them said that it is essential to be educated and even after marriage a woman can continue her education since it equips women with future security as it opens up more job opportunities. Nonetheless, their ultimate hope is to have a prosperous life, similar to young village women. Unlike the previous generation of women whose education and employment was directed more towards personal development, the third generation of women focused their aspirations towards material success. However, these women were not ignorant of what they were giving up in their lives. With the increased understanding of young men of the shared responsibilities of family life, these women hoped that sacrificing their personal development for the family's future would bear result. Yet, on the occasions when the marriages did not work out, they were not reluctant to renounce all the luxuries and take on the heavy burden of a single parent with no social support system protecting them.

Alcoholism or similar behaviour of husbands as well as conflicts with in-laws also affect marriages. Although these incidents were very common in previous generations, the third generation has developed much tolerance regarding them. Social drinking is more acceptable in the city and drinking becomes an issue only when it becomes intolerable and leads to abuse. The formation of nuclear families in the city has lessened the frequency of conflicts with in-laws.

Sexuality is important in deciding marital satisfaction among city women more than for

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the village women who usually were very submissive in sexual relationships. Paradoxically, village women have much more control over many other areas of life compared to city women while city women exert power in sexual relationships within the marriage compared to the subservient relation they hold in many other areas of their lives.

Western attitudes regarding marriage have had a positive impact on women regarding sexuality. Many women acknowledged the mutual nature of such relationships, and were not very submissive. Marriages that result from romantic relationships are very common. Although not as frequent as now, love marriages were not unusual in the past. As stated before, on the one hand love marriages provide women with much more independence in married life since the couple knows each other well before marriage, and on the other hand it restricts the freedom of women. Since it is their own choice, they tend to bear whatever consequences that may arise without seeking extended family support.[179] Although mainly it depends on the different personalities, within a love marriage, women said sexuality is more mutually discussed from the beginning of the marriage because of the close relationship of the couple. Therefore, problems that occur due to sexuality would not be borne as the problems of the woman alone.[180] This does not mean that

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[179] It is important to note that although this is the common trend, there are occasions that reverse this situation where women married according to their own choice to go back to their parents for any mishap that occurs within the marriage while women married according to their parents' wishes tolerate all the problems by themselves. This happens mainly depending on the relationship between parents and daughters or the personal nature of the woman. Since many girls who get married according to their parents' wishes are usually dutiful and yielding, the same tolerance is extended towards their husbands or they do not want to trouble the parents which may lead to further abuse and subordination of the woman.

[180] However, about 72% of the women told me that their husbands do not have the sole authority in deciding a sexual relationship, and if they say no that has to be accepted. Some women who married according to their parents' choice (and a very few women who married by their own choice) told me that they were reluctant to talk about their sexual needs at the beginning of the marriage, but they do not have those fears and difficulties any longer. Some women claim that whenever they are not ready for such relationships, they do not even have to give excuses, as it is acceptable and understandable to have one's own preference. They said the same goes for men. About 16% of women claimed that they do not feel comfortable in talking about sexual matters with their husbands. Many of them either had very authoritarian or abusive husbands. The rest of the women did not discuss their sexual life with me. Many of them

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they are not confronted with difficulties of a sexual nature, but these problems, unlike in the village, are either mutually discussed, or solved with external advice (mainly from friends), or ended through the dissolution of the marriage. It is less likely that women in the third generation tolerate these problems by themselves although in the past, even among the second generation who were more liberated in many other ways, this kind of tolerance was more common.

Nevertheless, wife abuse is not unknown among city women although many incidents were not identified as abuse by the respondents.

> Sri Lanka's law on sexual abuse is outmoded and does not give adequate protection to either women or girls (Goonesekere, 1989). The basic offenses are contained in the penal code which reflects nineteenth century English law on sexual offenses and trafficking. Marital rape is not recognized as an offense, even though the English law has recently recognized such an offense through judicial interpretation (CENWOR, 1993).

The nature of abuse depends on social class. Among the lower classes physical abuse is more common while among the upper classes verbal and psychological abuse is more prevalent. However, only physical violence is socially recognized as abuse. Women are expected to tolerate other types of abusive behaviour since they are regarded as trivial matters between husband and wife or just temporary problems. Problems related to alcoholism, using obscene language, and extra-marital affairs of the husband are considered to be serious problems, yet they are expected to be solved between the spouses or with the help of close family friends and relatives. Sexual abuse within the marriage and even rape is not a matter for common discussion even in the city since these are considered to be extremely private situations between the spouses, unless excessive violence is used. Although women are not encouraged to leave even in this kind of situation in

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were from the first generation with whom I also felt uncomfortable in discussing the matter due to the culture. Others either were extremely shy or wanted to hide their unhappy life.

a society where there is no social security for women who leave, this type of extreme tolerance among women is ridiculed more than appreciated. The degradation of women is not always tolerated, and the dignity of women rises above other matters in extreme circumstances. Women have varying attitudes regarding these matters.[181]

More than 90% of city women regarded any kind of abuse (abuse as they defined it) as incidents that should not be tolerated. About half stated that whatever happens a woman has to leave the marriage if these circumstances arise. About 20% claimed that only physical violence cannot be tolerated while other incidents can be rectified. The rest said that it depends on the socio-economic situation of the woman. Yet, women find it is extremely difficult to talk about some of these problems even with close acquaintances, so that they tend to conceal these, sometimes serious, difficulties. While divorce as a final solution is accepted in the city, economic problems interfere as financial requirements are more crucial for survival in the city than in the village where a family is able to survive more or less with extended family support.

Pre-marital and extra-marital relationships are not commonly approved of even in the city. This depends more on the cultural background of the family than its social class. Women of the first generation completely rejected this kind of relationship while a few women of the second generation were more tolerant, while third generation women had mixed attitudes. Third generation women said there were both advantages and disadvantages in pre-marital relationships. Although all of them denied that they had had such relationships, about 40% of them claimed that it is better to live together before marriage because the couple gets to know each other well only

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[181] A women's charter approved by the Sri Lankan government in 1993 recognizes that gender based violence to be a violation of human rights and provides for its enforcement in the Courts of Law (Women's Charter, 1993). However, Goonesekere (1991: 20-21) asserts that weak law enforcement diminishes the effective implementation of these policies.

after they start to share a life together. However, they said pre-marital relations provide a chance for men to use women as sexual objects and dump them when they want to be free. Therefore, although it provides sexual freedom, it will be more humiliating for women. Thirty-two percent of young women totally rejected pre-marital sexual relations. They said it has more disadvantages for women than advantages. About 12% said it is good to have that freedom as it is not only the man who decides it. Others did not provide a clear answer. But, city women did not have the tolerant attitudes that village women had about extra-marital relationships although they were more permissive about pre-marital relations. Although some of the women said it is up to the individual, there was a class component involved here. Women said that among the very rich and the affluent, these incidents occur behind closed doors. Sometimes these incidents become known to the public but these women or men have the power to furnish them with enough confidence to ignore the social response. Among the lower classes, sometimes these incidents are ignored for economic or other reasons or become the cause of family disputes. One woman told me about a neighbour who uses her affair to make money. Her lover gives her many things that she otherwise would not have. Among the middle class, these incidents are less condoned. They do not have the power to ignore social pressure and also it would be a severe blow to their social status. Therefore, even if these incidents occur, they are kept well concealed.[182]

Although it was not common among the first two generations, family planning is a part of the life of the third generation. They said there are incidents when both men and women would not like them but since it is the woman who mainly has to shoulder the burden, they have to be more cautious. Over 88% of women told us that it is agreed by both spouses. Some women

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[182] It is important to note that these incidents among men are more permitted even in the middle class, although they can cause family disputes and even end marriages.

related that their husbands are more cautious since they are more concerned about the economic aspects of the family, and having a small family would enable them to have a better life.[183] Some couples chose not to have children until they thought it would be the right time. They said that it is better if people leave them alone without inquiring all the time about not having children. However, even the first generation of women agreed that the smaller the family, the better the chances of having a good life.

Table 7.9 illustrates the effect of birth control on the number of children in the city. A very high percentage of women have three or fewer children and only two women in the sample have more than eight children. These two women also belong to the first generation.

Table 6.9

Number of Children - Melvin Town

No.of Children	No.of Women	%
0-3	155	77.5
4-7	43	21.5
8-12	02	1.0
Total	200	100.0

Unlike Pahalawela, the economic changes that occurred after 1977 have significantly affected marriage and family life in Melvin Town. On the one hand, there is more social tolerance towards women without blaming them for every family misfortune. On the other

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[183]   One woman told me that after seeing the difficulty she went through in her child birth, her husband decided not to have any more children and she is happy with the decision.

hand, women are forced to relinquish their personal advancement for the future of the family by placing the economic element above all the other aspects of life. This takes women back to their conventional intransigent roles incarcerating them within the socially created boundaries. Although social class and individual personality as well as the relationship between the spouses have an influence on this, the social ramifications of the fast advancing money economy is drawing women back into the household.

This chapter has analysed the historical change in the position of women across three generations within the institutions of marriage and family in Pahalawela and Melvin Town, comparing the impacts of the liberalized economy on historical structures. It demonstrated that women's liberty within the institution of marriage was not compatible with their achievements in other areas of life. Women in both locations seemed to have confronted different types of difficulties related to different aspects of the institution of marriage and family. The new impediments created for women within marriage and family, by the liberalized economy, were perceived to be the major causes, which thwarted women's efforts to benefit from its developments.

Chapter 7 includes an account of women's involvement in politics and leisure activities in both research locations, investigating whether the increased socio-cultural links to the market economy have aided in advancing women's political awareness.

Chapter 7: Politics and Leisure Activities

Economic liberalization not only integrated the country into the world economy, but also created an intense cultural blend, resulting in many positive and negative impacts for women. Women's awareness, influenced by the advances of feminist movements throughout the world, increased and even influenced the policy planning processes. Facilities as well as the social acceptance of women's leisure activities expanded, providing women with opportunities to enjoy their lives outside the domestic and work environments. However, these chances were not equally available to all women, nor did women receive equal social acceptance. Women's involvement in politics and leisure activities varied depending on regional variations and class differences. This chapter attempts to identify these variations, placing them in a historical context in order to comprehend the bases for the variations.

Political activities are not a strange phenomenon to Sri Lankan women. As explained in Chapter Two, women have a long history of being involved in government and politics. In the beginning of this century women started coming back into the political arena after years of foreign domination. It was during this period women in many countries began a strenuous battle to either secure women's rights or to struggle for national freedom from colonialism. In neighbouring India women were at the forefront of the freedom movement. British women were involved in a battle to obtain universal franchise. Sri Lankan women were undergoing the cruel domination of colonialism. Under the martial law implemented to resolve the communal riots of 1918, many freedom fighters were assassinated in the presence of their wives and children. Both men and women were tortured and killed within their own houses and on the streets. Nancy Wijekoon, a woman poet who wrote patriotic poems, was accused by a chief of police

in his report, for provoking the masses against foreign domination (Bandhuthilaka, 1991:6).

It was under these oppressive circumstances that Sri Lankan women returned to public life. Although they did not immediately enter active politics, from the beginning of the century, women were involved in an awakening within the religious and educational spheres (Bandhuthilaka, 1991: 1-7).

For the first time in Sri Lankan history, in 1931, a woman became a member of the state congress. In that same year Sri Lankan women obtained the franchise. Since then women have been actively involved in public life, especially in politics under different political ideologies, in conservative parties as well as within extremely revolutionary political doctrines. In 1960, the country produced the world's first woman prime minister, Sirima Bandaranayaka. Women's movements became very popular in the country from the very early part of the century, inspired by the national struggle in India and radical women's activities in Britain, such as the labour movement in which working class women actively participated (Jayawardana, 1986; Shastri, 1993). Young Lanka league and Ceylon National Congress formed in 1915 and 1919 respectively, two nationalist organizations in which newly-emerged professional and middle class women became politically active. "They also formed their own organization, the Mallika Kulagana Samitiya, allied to the congress" (Shastri, 1993:250). The `Lanka Mahila Samithi' movement was also a very dynamic women's organization which originated in 1930 with the objective of improving the living standards of rural Sri Lankan women and their families (Mahila Samiti annual Report, 1993-94). It spread throughout the country, unlike the labour movement which had its stronghold in the major cities. Every political party had its women's organization at the village level and village women actively participated in politics.

The change of government in 1977, and the new constitutional changes that followed exhibited many authoritarian trends (Jayawardana, 1985). Trade union activities were repressed providing both men and women with no power to protest resulting in escalating riots against the government. As explained in previous chapters, economic opportunities increased demand for female labour. Capitalist development, however, marked an expansion of chauvinistic forces which resulted in the rise of a women's movement. Jayawardana (1985: 172) states: "In this period of crisis, upheaval and continuing conflict, the women's issue has come to the forefront; today, it is undeniable that the women's movement is a part of national political activity.."

The year 1975 was declared by the United Nations as the international year of women, and it had a high impact on women in Sri Lanka. However, Goonesekere (1991) posits that although the country agreed to the UN convention on women, these commitments did not receive priority in policy planning. Many of the rights of women indicated in the convention were already incorporated in the Sri Lankan legal system. However, expected alterations following the convention did not reach many areas where judicial and legislative interventions should have been initiated. Nevertheless, a women's movement is spreading throughout the country via a large number of feminist organizations. Even in the absence of one single feminist organization, these difference organizations, although marginal, have influenced policy planning (de Silva, 1995). The question is whether these organizations have been capable of educating women about the political reality behind their oppression.

Politics and Leisure Activities of Village Women

Women in Pahalawela are actively involved in politics. They have their own branch organization of the ruling Sri Lanka Freedom Party, which came to power in 1994, and at the time of field work was very active. The field work was carried out at a time when the general elections of the country were being held after seventeen years of rule by one political party, the United National Party.. Presidential election campaigns were in progress and the villagers were faithful supporters of the candidate of the ruling party at the time. Both presidential candidates were women a fact which aroused the enthusiasm of village women. One woman told me: "We women are very proud to have a woman as the leader of the country. It is good to have two women contesting for the presidency. I feel good when I think that all these men are working so hard to elect a woman as the president." Women were very proud to talk about the preferred candidate. Both men and women were very active in campaigning.[184] The country elected a woman (Chandrika Kumaratunga) as prime minister.

For village women, political involvement was not only an occasion to express their political concerns, but was a leisure activity as well.[185] This provided them with the opportunity to come forward, get away from house work, meet other women, and go around the village canvassing for their candidate. Thus, women became active participants in the public life of the

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[184] Due to the troubled political nature of the country, I was advised by villagers to stay away for the time being, since any information gathered aroused the suspicion of the villagers. Therefore, I returned to the village after the elections.

[185] This observation confirms Jayasinghe's (1982) argument. She states that the political awareness of village women has not reached a high level, especially in terms of active participation.

village, holding office in women's political organizations.[186]

Village women were never cut off from participating in public life. As mentioned earlier, all village activities bridged the gap between private and public life. But later socio-economic developments decreased the organic nature of social solidarity[187], individualised them in such a way that they were no longer as dependent on others as before, nor could they live independently without the help of others. The village community did not become urbanized, nor could it conserve traditional social values. This separated women from the public life of the village since it was the community life that connected them with the public sphere.[188] Individualization was necessitated by the new economic trends, thus removing women, although not totally, from public life.

The political movement provided an opportunity for women to engage in public life. As explained later, in traditional Sinhalese society where leisure activities were not separated from their daily work, perception of women's leisure was very different from that of western society. The village community, therefore, did not face the problem of losing manpower so important for their existence by the engagement in these activities as in the industrial society where leisure was a completely separated domain outside women's work (Pruette, 1924: 192)

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[186] This aspect of political awareness questions the possibility of women identifying the political bases of their own oppression as Charlton (1984) suggests.

[187] Here, I use the term organic solidarity in contrast to Durkheim who describes the social solidarity of the rural society as mechanical solidarity. Durkheim in his Division of Labour, (19) posits that in self-sufficient rural communities social solidarity was based on shared values rather than on division of labour as in industrial societies. Although based on agriculture, this was a village community in which the members were mutually dependent upon one another. Each person was self-sufficient, yet this self-sufficiency was impossible without the help of the others although each individual was not trained to perform a specialised task as in industrial society. It is not only the shared values, but also the shared labour, that created the solidarity of this community.

[188] Rajapakse (1989) illustrates how the transformation of `attama' dissociated women from their economic environment.

However, since the present economic structure in the village does not provide women with the pleasure of enjoying their daily work, in the absence of any other leisure activities, village women also had to utilize these types of opportunities for their enjoyment. This idea was expressed by several women: "It is only during an election that we get a chance to get away from our routine work and meet other women and enjoy. Otherwise life becomes so boring sometimes, even the work in the paddy fields is less enjoyable than before, because now, everyone works for money. They want to finish work as soon as possible and go home." But these activities were confined mainly to election times. Once the elections are over, the general enthusiasm fades.[189]

About 75% of the women were involved in political activities. The nature of involvement differed. There were office bearers (mainly president, secretary and treasurer of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party women's society who were political leaders among village women. Among the rest of the membership of the organization, some were very actively involved while others just held membership without any actual participation other than attending meetings. A woman who was a member but who had attended only one meeting told me: " I joined the women's organization because all the others did. I have neither the time nor the interest to attend meetings. Sometimes, I would like to go there just to enjoy myself. But my husband never wanted me to go and says that a woman has better things to do at home and he doesn't want to see his wife loitering all over the village with other women."

Women in the older generation were not much interested in politics other than voting.

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[189] This has hindered rural women from benefitting from their political awareness or productively developing a political consciousness. Therefore, as Peattie & Rein (1983) suggest, this kind of political involvement deters women from working as a `claiming category' in ameliorating their position.

The enthusiasm of the younger generation was also not very obvious. It is the second generation who were actively interested in politics. This is the generation who had the opportunity to pursue higher studies in the vernacular schools due to the social transformation that followed independence culminating in 1956 with Sinhala becoming the official language of the country. Until 1977, the area was continuously under the leadership of the political party which made this change. Although there was another party that held leadership from 1977- 1994, the hardships the villagers faced during that time, and the faith villagers kept in a past leader who initiated the development of the area, made them actively support the opposition leadership in the 1994 elections. These women had the benefit of free education under the changed curriculum in Sinhala after years of British based English education, which prevented village children from obtaining higher education. One graduate school teacher said: "I would have never been able to enter the university if Sinhala had not become the medium of instruction. Neither our parents had money to send us to English medium schools, nor did we have the knowledge to follow the studies without even having the basic knowledge in English."

Many of these women mentioned that the unpleasant experiences they faced in the past due to youth unrest and political conflicts made them actively engage in political activities to help in overthrowing the government.[190] The younger women were born or grew up during that period when they experienced continuous political injustice. One of the main reasons was

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[190] In 1971, an organized youth group attempted to overthrow the existing government by an armed riot which was suppressed within a very short period by government forces. Leaders as well as many suspects were captured and sent to jail. The leaders were imprisoned for life. The government which came to power in 1977, released them all allowing them to enter formal politics as an organised political party. When their first attempt in the elections failed, they once again launched a riot against the government which escalated in 1987-88. Many politicians and government workers were killed and state property was destroyed. While the government forces were used in full strength to control them, there were rival armed groups who also used extreme measures such as kidnapping and killing suspects. However, by the end of 1989, the situation returned to normal and many youth were either imprisoned, killed, or disappeared.

the difficulty of getting employment without political support although they had the necessary qualifications. The other was the disappearance of the youth in the village during the time of youth unrest for which they blamed the government.[191] However, continuous political injustice decreased the political interest of these young women who were more keen on joining the garment industry and earning money for which they did not need any political support. Many young women agreed with one of them who said: "We have had enough of politics. Both we and our families worked for different political leaders, and none of them have helped us in return. Neither the village nor the people benefitted from politics. It is better to work in a factory rather than wasting our time supporting political leaders to enhance their own power and to support their kith and kin." Both the economic situation and the political situation alienated these young women.[192]

Although they were very keen on politics, village women did not have much opportunities in the field of politics. They hardly met the leaders of the area. They did not have any political contacts outside the village. One woman said: "I have never met any other politician other than our MP. That meeting was also limited only to a normal greeting." However,, another woman claimed: "I am very interested in politics. Wherever there is a general meeting close to the village I usually attend if I don't have any other important work. Sometimes my husband also joins me. Sometimes I go with other people from the village. I

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[191] About four young men from the village had disappeared during this time and never returned. Some people believe that they were murdered and the families still wait for their return. According to de Silva (1995:244), the "climate of terror" which prevailed in the country, with many political assassinations including women leaders, has made "women's political participation even more formidable than before."

[192] This repudiates the idea of Kearny (1981) that improved life circumstances of women caused by modernization will strengthen women's autonomy and competence thus increasing their entrance into politics. Political injustice in the Sri Lankan situation has counteracted the benefits of modernization creating an aversion among women towards politics.

attended both the meetings our presidential candidate addressed within our electorate regardless of the distance I had to travel." However, they were very aware of the political scene in the country. Although they did not think that they could be of any help in promoting the status of women, some women believed that they could do plenty at the village level.[193]

Most of the village women, despite perceptions of incapability in politics, believe that women are highly qualified to occupy top level political positions. They also think that more women should enter politics, because only women can understand women's problems.[194] Therefore, top female leaders would benefit women. More than 75% of the women thought that their daughters can join politics if they want and some women even said they would encourage them. The few who talked against women in politics were mainly from middle class families in the village. They claimed that politics is an extremely corrupt area where women are not able to retain their dignity. They also said that politics consumes time and money, and can never be in harmony with family life. Therefore, while it may be good for single women, it is not an occupation for mothers. One school teacher stated: "If mothers become involved in politics, who is going to raise the children? It is not nice to see women roaming around the village. A mother's main duty is to bring up her children properly, and that way she can contribute to her country." This attitude clearly reflected the influence this woman had from Victorian norms which denounced the liberalism of village women. Higher education had not made her perceive

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[193] However, about 20% of the women thought that political involvement was only a fun activity for them and they would not promote the status of women or of the villagers by engaging in political activity. About 60% of the women were positive about organized involvement and engaged in various activities. About 10% of them became leaders when the opportunity arose.

[194] This expectation is counteracted by Jayasinghe (1982) who asserts that despite the fact that the first woman prime minister happened to be a Sri Lankan, several decades of universal education and women's franchise, direct political involvement of women in high levels of decision making are still very low.

women's roles beyond these terms.

Village women do not engage in any recreational activities per se. The village is deprived of any recreational activities that women can enjoy. However, the older women claimed that although it was very difficult to survive, they actually enjoyed their lives.

There were non-family occasions that the old villagers did not celebrate as a community. They did not have much money, but that did not interfere with community life. They were mostly self-sufficient and needed money only to buy clothing and other household necessities. They went to the town fair with their farm products and bought what they wanted in exchange or sold them for money. From birth to death, every occasion required the community to gather together. The birth of a child was an occasion when the whole village paid a visit. At least a few neighbours gathered to celebrate special occasions in a child's life such as the first day of feeding rice, reading the first letters, the first day of school, all of which were done at auspicious times. Then a girl's puberty ceremony, a marriage, and the death of a person were occasions for the whole village to gather to celebrate or to mourn. In times of sickness or death, the village took on the whole responsibility for the family, fulfilling all their needs including their daily food.

Music was a part of village life used in day to day activities. One woman humorously remarked: "We could not survive without singing. We did not have a life without music". In agricultural work, in religious gatherings, pilgrimages, and even in funeral homes, special songs created for these different occasions were sung. To pass the night in the `chena' without falling sleep, villagers sang songs out loud in order to be heard by neighbouring farmers who returned their answers with song. The harvesting of both chena and paddy were exceedingly enjoyable

occasions, especially for women. Although men also joined, the singing was led by the women. There were women well respected in the village as experts in singing on these occasions.[195]

Pilgrimages were the most enjoyable activity in the village. Either the husband or the wife or the whole family (if the children were old enough to take the long trip on foot) joined these pilgrimages. The foot path to this sacred place ran through the village. People from all the areas walked along this foot path day and night and groups from the village joined them. It was preferable to go in large groups because of the risks (such as attacks from wild animals or sickness) taken on the journey. Some women noted that it was so enjoyable and important to join these pilgrimages, that they left the children with their husbands to join the trip. One woman claimed that she had ten children but she still went every year either with the family or by herself.

Daily activities were also exceedingly pleasurable moments for village women. Women used to get up early in the morning, prepared morning tea or breakfast, took care of house work, and by nine o'clock in the morning, they are ready to go out. During the planting or harvesting season, they went to the field in the morning. Otherwise they would go to the woods to collect firewood, go to the fountain to bring water, or go to the stream to take a bath or wash clothes. They did these activities as a group or at least a couple of women together. They never did these activities alone. A woman stated: "Although the village was a very safe place, we never went out alone. We were taught by our mothers to take care of ourselves. There were many beliefs about spirits, ghosts and devils roaming in the woods and streams and

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[195] Villagers arranged for me to meet with one of the older women who was a popular village singer. She sang a few lyrics which others seemed to enjoy a lot. She was still respected even by the younger generation, and she appeared to be very proud of her talent.

women were most vulnerable if they were alone." [196] These occasions gave women a chance to go out and enjoy the company of other women. In the evenings, they got together in each others' houses to chat or play games. The new year was filled with enjoyment. All women, men and children played games, sang, and celebrated together.

At present women do not have many of these recreational activities enjoyed by older women. Some told me that they do not have any leisure time to do anything. Others claimed that even if they have time, they do not have anything to do. A common remark was: "Even if we have time what is there for us to do? Are we going to walk along the roads for nothing?" Unlike in the cities, going for a walk for pleasure was unknown in the village. Neither men nor women went out unless there was a specific purpose.

Leisure activities in the village have changed. They do not go on pilgrimages any more. Bus trips have become very expensive. Pilgrimages on foot seem to have become obsolete. Money is much more valued than before. They have to save money for many different reasons; to build houses, to send children to school, for clothing, etc. Necessities have increased in number. The village has become closely linked to the cities through new bus routes. The new fashions of the cities easily reach the village. The villagers are also caught up in a culture of consumerism.[197]

Many village women work in the factories in or outside the village. They have to work long hours and actually do not have time for leisure activities. Peer groups are no longer

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[196] By listening to these one can conclude that these were intended to protect women's dignity.

[197] A village house had a refrigerator which was used only to keep ice. Since villagers cook every day and do not like to keep any perishable food without cooking it, and thus they did not have anything to put in the refrigerator. Nevertheless, it has become a symbol of wealth and social class.

there for women to have fun with since most of the young women are working outside the village. Farm women have to compete with wage earners to get their needs fulfilled.[198] Day to day activities no longer bring enjoyment for women which make them more frustrated about their lives. The harvesting and other agricultural work is mostly done with paid labour (Perera, 1989). However, weddings, funerals, child birth, and sickness are still occasions for the village community to gather together.

Although they have limited time, villagers still help and take care of each other. Neighbouring women still get together for a chat in the evenings, and they meet each other at the stream or at the fountain. But the older women believe that even with all the new facilities and much larger incomes, life has become a burden for their daughters in a way it never was for them.[199]

Politics and Leisure Activities of Women in Melvin Town

The political involvement of city women is much different from that of village women. The social class factor is very important in addition to other factors such as economic power, political heredity, and personal interests. The generations play a less important role here.

For the women in Melvin Town, politics is not a fun activity, but a serious affair.

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[198] This has created jealousy and competitiveness among village women. Since most factory workers dress well, the rest of the women in the village have to work hard in order to get their newly created necessities satisfied.

[199] Herbert Marcuse in his One Dimensional Man (1964) discusses the effects of excessive consumerism in an advanced capitalist society. Although Sri Lanka is no even close to the point of development that Marcuse analyses, the effect of consumerism has taken a similar trend. When his theory is extended to analyse the effect on women, women are the most vulnerable to become alienated in a consumerist society. The political involvement of ordinary women has not helped in overcoming these socio-economic impediments. While it has helped to promote and maintain patriarchy by helping to sustain the status quo, it has also aided the liberation of women in the bourgeoisie by promoting various women's rights.

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Many of them said that politics requires a lot of courage, tolerance and time, so that you have to be ready to sacrifice your life totally for this purpose. In the first generation, upper and middle class women viewed politics as not suitable for women as women become public figures with no private life.[200] The fact that most of the early politicians had come from upper class families did not make much difference.[201] Sixty-three percent of women stated that it is admirable that women are so courageous and out going, but 56% of them did not want their daughters to be involved in politics. The other 7% claimed that it is up to their daughters to decide what they want to do. The other 37% of women totally rejected the idea of women in politics. They said it was totally unsuitable for women. Women cannot have both families and a political life which demands so much time. Women of the lower class of this generation viewed politics differently. They held women in politics in high esteem. They themselves had many memories related to political and trade union activities. They said that women also have to fight for the rights of the people, and to eliminate social injustice. About 60% of them had no objection to their daughters or any other women entering politics.[202]

The second generation of women across all social classes, although they were not much different from the first, had more pliant attitudes towards politics. They said that if men can do it, so can women. But women encounter very difficult problems that men do not have

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[200] Victorian norms were clearly apparent among this group regarding women's political involvement.

[201] The few upper and middle class women who became political leaders in the country either had the support of their husbands or family and close relatives. A few rebellious women had overcome cultural barriers that prevented them from entering politics. Their wealth and prestige protected them from the social blemish that a peasant woman or a woman from a lower class would have encountered. Bandhuthilaka (1991) refers to incidents where some women received higher education and engaged in politics hiding it from their Victorian households.

[202] However, Jayasinghe (1982) states that the high level of political awareness among Sri Lankan women has taken them neither beyond basic political involvements such as voting and campaigning for their political leader, nor has it promoted women into decision-making positions.

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to face. They said it is very common in politics to tarnish the reputation and the character of politicians in order to defeat them, and women are more vulnerable to this kind of attack. Therefore, they claimed, if they join politics, women have to be very strong in order to survive. However, most upper and middle class women of this generation did not want their daughters to enter politics. The lower class had more positive attitudes, and they considered politics as an area where women can climb the social ladder equally with men. The third generation, regardless of social class, was much less interested in politics. But they had no objection to women entering politics, and they also believed that women in politics are doing equally well with men and sometimes even better. But the years of political conflict in the country have planted very unpleasant memories. Only a very few middle class and lower class women were themselves interested in politics. However, about 75% of the women said that they have no objection to their daughters entering politics since they have to let them decide what they want to do with their lives. Jayawardana (1985: 180) claims:

> In so far as women are being encouraged to shift from household to wage work, and to achieve a measure of economic independence, this is a move in the direction of women's emancipation. More and more women are thus being given the basic pre-requisites for an independent existence. However, the limits of this approach have to be realized; the necessity of moving further ahead in the direction of true liberation is the task of feminists today and in this task, the area of consciousness raising of which much was spoken at the beginning of the decade, must be given priority.

The research data from Melvin Town shows that neither economic independence nor political awareness have increased the consciousness of the majority of women about their oppression. According to Charlton (1984) until the political reality behind the powerlessness

of women is understood, efforts to upgrade the position of women, or at least the effort of creating equity between the sexes, is not possible. The integration of women in development procedures has not provided them with the power to overcome gender or class discrepancies, despite their integration into international economic and political competition. Therefore, the process of modern development neither eliminates gender differences nor does it move society towards equality. As shown in Chapters Five and Six, women's education and increased work opportunities do not seem to be building a foundation for women's emancipation, but rather creating a new form of subordination. Women's political awareness in Melvin Town thus does not appear to be conducive to any political movement towards the emancipation of women as a whole.

This is where post-modernist feminist perspectives can be applied to the Sri Lankan context. Development, as we noted in previous chapters, has not treated women of all different social groups in the same way. Any effort taken towards development, therefore, should be based on a theory which understands these variations among women. Parpart (1993) argues this could be achieved by focusing on `difference', legitimizing the quest for difference among women themselves, which was ignored by the concept of `female otherness'. Huston (1979) points out that the distinctions between men and women with respect to the privileges and prospects they enjoy depends on their political, economic and social structures, which simultaneously constitute the disparities between women in different countries and also within countries. Therefore, any women's movement has to be based on a theory which breaks away from considering Sri Lankan women as a `vulnerable other', thus disclosing the realities governing their `power and resistance' within unique types of `male-female' relationships, their

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own conception of `femininity', and listening to their voices. Such a project would not be equivalent to modernization.

Nevertheless, there were women from all three generations and all social classes who had been politically involved. Some of them had been involved in various party organizations while others had husbands or parents or close friends who had been politically involved. Yet, women in the city were much less interested in politics compared to village women. More than 80% of city women clearly stated that politics at present has become a dirty game and not good for either men or women, but especially for women since it does not tally with the social expectations of a woman. Women have to sacrifice their personal life, they said, to advance politically. However, this aversion for politics mainly came from upper class women in all three generations except for those who were themselves involved in politics. Middle class women were not against politics although they themselves were disinterested. The lower classes had more positive attitudes. They saw it as a way to upgrade their lives and to change the existing social system.

Women in Melvin Town are more involved in other social organizations. There are numerous clubs and societies that have been established for years for different purposes. Involvement depends on social class. Upper and middle class women for generations have been involved in social work through various clubs such as the Rotary Club, Lion's Club and organizations such as "Lanka Mahila Samiti" (Association for Women's Institutes in Sri Lanka). There are many other clubs and organizations which are involved in various professions, sports, arts, and many other activities. The involvement of women in these activities depends on the amount of leisure time they have. Working women are less involved unless they receive

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domestic help. Therefore, these clubs and associations benefit upper class women more than middle class women. Lower class women neither have the resources nor the social connections necessary to enrol in these organizations even if they have the leisure time. Therefore, their social activities are usually limited to political activities just like village women.

Social class is a major factor that politically makes it impossible to create a women's movement that is directed towards the single goal of women's emancipation. There are no women's organization that include membership across social classes. The few women's movements are led by or consist of professional women, many of whom apprehend the problem of women's subordination, yet are loathe to yield to western feminist ideals knowing their deleterious consequences. They are likely to be inspired by a feminism which incorporates the cultural identity of Sri Lankan women.[203] Any political activity based on the class would over-emphasize the class factor thus ignoring gender discrepancies within the class.[204]

However, unlike village women, women in Melvin Town have access to diverse recreational activities which again depend on social class. It is common among city girls, regardless of social class, to get together and go to a movie or shopping or visit friends. Depending on the flexibility that their parents provide, they go on tours or spend the day together or have sleep overs. Yet other recreational activities which require money and certain cultural flexibility usually restrict the involvement of women across different social classes. As

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[203] This is where a feminism informed by `traditional liberalism' has to be the momentum of a Sri Lankan women's movement. Aguilar (1993) analyses how the Philippines women's movement has acquired its own characteristics informed by its own political history, and attempts to identify the particular roots of its women's oppression.

[204] This class division make it impossible to create a class consciousness among women to unite them as Ostrander (1973) suggests. The over emphasis of both class and gender as Dobbins (1977) explains has adverse effects on women as well as on the lower classes since it will make it difficult to politically organize these disadvantaged groups.

Pruette (1924: 193) argues, "Leisure itself is often the mark of a rising standard of living, but the reverse may be true as well and the rising standard of living may be purchased by lessened leisure and greater enforced activity". For example, ballroom dancing has been an activity pursued by only upper and some middle class women for generations. Others either consider it to be a western concept which is inappropriate or they simply cannot afford it. Instead they get involved in native aesthetic studies.

Marriage usually changes women's involvement in recreational activities. This happens either due to lack of time and money or the concern of the appropriateness of certain activities for married women. This depends on the cultural background of the person rather than the social class, although the upper classes again have more flexibility due to the availability of more resources. They also are less vulnerable to social criticism or they ignore it since they retain the power to do so.

Community involvement is rare among upper and middle class women except among friends even if they live far away from each other. In old neighbourhoods, people associate more as a community. In new neighbourhoods people do not even know their neighbours. Therefore, city women did not receive the help and comfort village women had from their neighbours. Yet, in lower class communities, women have close links with neighbours. However, according to them, even these relations were not as strong as those in the village.

The present generation of women in the city has more opportunities for recreation than the older generations. Yet they agreed that they are less free than their mothers and grandmothers thus missing the chance to enjoy these opportunities. It is not because of a lack of freedom as women that they suffer in their lives, as did former generations of women. It is

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the money economy that requires more of their time for income-generating activities and household work that limits their chances.[205] The open economy is enhancing opportunities for women to upgrade their living standards while reducing the possibilities of enjoying them. This situation is similar to what Pruette (1924: 193) explains. She writes, "Leisure appears to be increasing for all classes but not the capacity for being leisurely."

Women's involvement in political and leisure activities differed enormously according to regional differences and social classes. High involvement of village women in political activity, except for a few cases, did not necessarily reflect an increased political awareness or a feminist consciousness. It was merely a leisure activity for some village women. City women, on the other hand, although not as politically conscious as village women, were quite conscious about their own oppression mainly due to their exposure to the outside world, but faced numerous constraints which prevented them from taking any action towards their emancipation.

This chapter has demonstrated how the money economy together with the political instability of the country has created an extremely complicated situation which separates city women from political involvement while village women are separated from their traditional leisure activities.

Chapter Eight summarises the findings of each of the previous chapters, connecting them to the theoretical literature in order to arrive at final conclusions.

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[205] Many third generation women declared that either their husbands or both of them have to work hard to meet the financial necessities of the family. In any case, women are heavily burdened with household work. According to the first generation, although they had much less freedom compared to young women and they had much fewer opportunities, their lives were less burdened and more relaxed.

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Chapter 8: Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to analyse the changing role of women in Sri Lanka after 1977. The year 1977 became the focal point of this thesis for several reasons. The change of government in 1977 saw the onset of many socio-economic reforms. The growth-oriented economic policies in the post-1977 regime inaugurated a "system of guidance of the economy through market forces and the price mechanism" (Lakshman, 1992:90). This `growth' affected many areas of the economy. By 1979, the rate of economic growth was 7.6% compared to 3.4% in 1974-77. Although severely deterred by the civil riots of the 1980s, nevertheless, by 1992, GNP had increased to 5.1%. While the growth rate was 3.4% in 1974-77, it was 7.6% in 1977-78. The unemployment rate dropped to 14.8% in 1978/79 from 24.0% in 1973 and continued to vary between 15 and 16% (Gunarathna & Herath, 1993).

Accompanied by economic growth, educational facilities throughout the country expanded, and there was a clear growth of infrastructure. Both rural and urban areas were integrated into a global economy. The social consequences of these changes were evident in many different areas of the society and culture. However, the severe repercussions accompanying these changes did not benefit everyone. They had detrimental effects on different groups of people depending on many factors, such as social class, education, political power, and geographical distribution. The anti-egalitarian tendencies of market-oriented economic policies unavoidably led to a "worsening of the conditions of inequality in terms of income distribution and regional development" (Lakshman, 1992:93).

One of the most vulnerable groups was women. The effects of the market economy on women varied depending on social class and regional distribution. However, taken as a

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whole, the effects were detrimental to the development of women. Statistically, there was a clear growth in the occupational job market for women which could have resulted in an obvious strengthening in the status of women. However, while increased job opportunities helped women with fewer qualifications and training, they also caused women to give up their future prospects through higher education for the fulfilment of immediate needs. At the same time, educated and qualified women were either barred from obtaining the increased employment opportunities due to social attitudes of women's place within marriage and family in the absence of a social welfare system that would support the advancement of women, or they were faced with a `double burden' of work if they were to keep both the job and the household duties in place. The economic impact on women was reciprocally linked to other areas such as education, political and recreational involvements, marriage and the family, and differed according to socio-economic and regional distribution.

The discussion in the previous chapters leads to several conclusions. Findings will be summarised here to allow a rural/ urban comparison which is one of the main foci of this thesis.

Educational opportunities for women increased significantly after 1977. However, these opportunities were heavily influenced by social class. Since most of the alternative educational opportunities that were newly created required a higher financial cost than the traditional educational system, women in the upper social classes had a better chance of taking advantage of these improved opportunities. Therefore, women who were economically well off in both rural and urban locations received a better education. Two other factors also interfered with educational opportunities for women. In rural areas, due to lack of facilities, women were

unable to secure the opportunities available to their urban counterparts, even if they did not face financial difficulties. On the other hand, since most of the rural women came from poor families, they had to rely on the traditional educational system which was less costly. The situation was similar among lower class urban women. The other factor is that due to the increased necessity for financial success as the most important indicator of a successful life, the value of education declined as the only measure of individual achievement. In the urban sector, women from economically successful families, either gave up their opportunities for higher education or gave up their chances of utilizing that education in employment by marrying economically successful partners. Thus, they totally obstructed their personal development by retreating into the conservative roles of wife and mother. Except for a few women who received the fullest support from their spouses, most of those who tried to maintain both roles as an employee as well as a housewife either failed in one of the roles or became excessively burdened and exhausted. In the rural sector, excessive emphasis on money brought these women into competition with their urban counterparts, prompting them to give up their education to secure an economically more profitable life. The only opportunity that these less qualified women acquired was work in the many garment factories located close to the village. Many rural girls sacrificed their educational prospects in order to secure immediate economic gains.

The money economy has created a public - private dichotomy in the area of women's work, which was unknown to Sri Lankan women until colonialism created this difference for urban upper class women. The efforts made by women of all social classes to overcome the barriers that hindered them from re-entering the public sphere was shattered by the money economy. Urban and rural women faced specific impediments that thwarted their entrance into

the public sphere. Urban society is undergoing vast structural changes due to economic transformations. The difficulty of maintaining an extended family has created a tendency to establish more nuclear families. Working women, therefore, do not receive the traditional social support they had from the extended family. The increase of demand for unskilled labour attracts many women who otherwise would have served as domestic helpers thus further hampering the chances of middle and upper class working women. Although this appears to be an improvement for lower class women, in fact domestic helpers are economically much better off than factory workers. The severe exploitation that women garment workers have to face economically as well as physically, psychologically and sometimes sexually, does not compensate for the social stigma they avoid by escaping domestic work. However, since social honour matters for women in the lower social classes more than for the economically well off for whom money can compensate for any social blemish, the chance they get to earn `something' without getting into domestic work has a significant value for lower class women. The result is that women were exploited in both areas of their work lives, as factory workers and as housewives. In any case, they were prevented from utilizing their actual talents and strengths. Moreover, the high cost of hiring domestic help again favours wealthier women, in contrast to middle and lower class women. Working women in the former group escape the `double day' of work while women in the latter groups are unable to escape from it.

Rural women still receive support from neighbours and the extended family. However, they do not have the same opportunities as city women. They have to take employment as garment workers or enter into other menial work if they do not have the qualifications and/or political and bureaucratic connections. The basic hope of many young

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women is to work and earn as much as possible until they get married. Since the economic factor is extremely important, both educated and uneducated women in the village become more involved in renumerated or non-renumerated household activities as well. Village activities do not provide public life for these women any more. All the work is now oriented towards individual families. The work therefore is no longer a public activity or a tool for advancement of women in the village, but a completely private affair that exploits them, except for the few educated women who still strive for personal success.

Thus increased work opportunities have not favoured the majority of women. Either they favour rich women, widening social class differences among women, or they attract poor women into low-paid low-status work, also hampering their future advancement. The overall social chaos caused by the money economy, however, inhibits the overall progress of women regardless of social class or the rural-urban difference, although it favours certain groups of women. Increased opportunities do not mean that these opportunities are always utilized by the right people or that these opportunities are targeted towards the advancement of disadvantaged groups.

The liberalised economy has had a profound influence on the institution of marriage and family. The economy and education are operating as push and pull factors in determining the age at marriage. The growth of educational facilities has encouraged many women to pursue their education. Simultaneously, the increasing significance that is placed upon money is attracting women into alternative methods of financial success. This is the panorama that affects marriage and family life for different social classes and communities in different ways. Women in the upper social classes have the means to pursue very costly educational opportunities. At

the same time they have the wealth and social status to be married to highly qualified and/or wealthy partners. Dowry once again comes to play an important role within the institution of marriage. Women in the upper classes, have the option of continuing their education and securing prospective marriage partners through high dowry payments. Moreover they also have the means to hire domestic help. This provides them with the opportunity to continue paid work. However, the tendency that is springing back among upper class women is to embrace conventional ideals of `womanhood' such as `wives' and `mothers' despite their qualifications as it is becoming a symbol of prestige. These ideals lead many upper class women to quit work after marriage. The value of money is overpowering and women have become the victims who conceal their personal success within the dark cloud of financial prosperity for the family. Thus, women once again become a part of the institution of family, and her significance as an individual in her own right fades.

Urban middle class women become the victims of this process more easily than the upper classes. They are those who are really in need of money. However, women in the middle class always have maintained a high level of education because for them it has been the only way to advance and maintain their social status, except for a few who by chance could enter upper society through marriage. They are caught between the need for money and social prestige since many middle class families maintain a social status that is similar to the upper classes while at the same time they are not financially capable of maintaining that status. Therefore, women's autonomy is determined by the economic prosperity of the family and other types of social support women receive which help them carry on their occupation or education, as well as the relationship between the spouses.

Urban lower class women usually engage in renumerative work due to their economic difficulties and these women receive more community help than the other two social classes. Therefore, their marriage and family life has not been negatively affected as a result of economic change. Rather, they have secured more opportunities due to the availability of more educational and career facilities thus elevating their position within the family.

Marriage and family life for rural women are affected somewhat differently. The embodiment of the whole country in a single economic system has had a significant effect on the culture of rural society. This is the first time that urban social attitudes regarding women are influencing traditional culture. On the one hand, this has had a positive effect on village women since some of the derogatory social attitudes regarding women, a result of the Hindu cultural influence throughout the country, are fast disappearing from village life. On the other hand, the freedom that women traditionally enjoyed in the village based on their socio-economic status which allowed them a certain amount of autonomy and authority within the family is seriously affected by the economic changes. The family farm no longer suffices to meet their increased needs. The alternative of exploitative work in the garment industry does not provide them with the autonomy or the status that the self-sufficient agricultural system granted them. Moreover, the exploitative nature in the factory work has created a new image of women as sex symbols or just as a cheap means of production. Since all the women in the village, regardless of social class, are engaged in a struggle for money, many of them have had to sacrifice their personal achievements, and as a consequence, have lost their independence within the family.

As a whole, women are developing many positive attitudes about women with regard to marriage. Both rural and urban women no longer blame women for all the mishaps of family

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life. Any type of abuse is highly censured and divorce is accepted and encouraged in those situations. Men are no longer regarded as the sole authority of the family or sexual life. While differing in rural and urban areas, women are achieving a certain amount of autonomy.

The question is whether the socio-economic situation of the country allows women to enjoy these attitudinal changes regarding womanhood. While the cultural influence on women's emancipation from the western world is stimulating Sri Lankan women to reevaluate their past, the economic super-structure that is being created is urging women to relinquish their personal achievements, imprisoning them within the dream of family prosperity. Thus the Sinhalese family which never was an agent of oppression for women, continues to be mother-centred, compelling women to sacrifice their individual freedom and development for the sake of the family depending on their social class.

The extreme attraction toward financial success within a liberalized economy above all other matters in one's life has a profound influence on the political and leisure activities of women. Because of the distrust created by the long term political instability and corruption in the country, many women are resentful when it comes to politics. This aversion is stronger in the urban sector than in the rural sector for several reasons. The urban community contains numerous facilities that wealth and proximity allows them to enjoy. However, urban women, especially women in the upper social classes are unobstructed from many cultural restrictions that would thwart the liberal aspirations of women in other social groups. Above all, the same social attitudes that seclude these women from public life alienate them from political activities as well, despite the fact that it is women from the urban upper classes and rural aristocracy who pioneered and who continue to be leaders of the political scene in the country. However, these

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women tend to be the exception due to their traditional family affiliations in politics.

Political and leisure activities cannot be separated in some instances because, apart from those who seriously engage in political activities, many women in Sri Lanka, especially women in the urban lower classes and rural women, consider political activities to be leisure activities. Nevertheless, it is within these social groups that increased political awareness and political aspirations are noticeable. Poor access to recreational facilities, the historically developed social acceptance of political activities among women of these disadvantaged social groups, mingled with the understanding of the political economy that oppresses them, has led many women in these social groups to enthusiastically engage in political activities while others pursue it just for pleasure.

In general, women in both the middle and upper classes, are content with the luxurious life style that money can purchase for them with little or no regard for the political economy that hampers their individual advancement. This alienates them from political activities while lulling them with the superficial liberation that they secure through many recreational social activities. Although both rural and urban women from the economically disadvantaged social classes have the same goals in terms of financial success, a lack of resources paves for them a path for a better political insight although probably in the last analysis, they also would have become alienated from the political activities due to the corruption and betrayal of their political leaders.

This situation is very similar to that observed by researchers in many parts of the world. This study supports many research studies which examines women's education, work, family, politics, and leisure. The study also questions some of the findings of previous

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researchers or extends their arguments further. I conclude with them.

The study supports the view of many researchers (Tinker and Bramsen, 1976; Beneria, 1982; Beneria and Stimpson, 1987; Leacock and Etienne, 1980; Leacock, 1981; Mies, 1988) that colonialism or any other form of capitalist penetration of which economic liberalization is also apparently a form (Logos, 1981), has introduced new forms of sexism and patriarchy both at home and in the work place. It also has exacerbated the already existing forms of discrimination against women. This is accomplished by way of the camouflaged `freedom' that comes with modernization and westernization. This `freedom' actually obscures the diminishing position of women which is a result of the "systematical exclusion of women" (Mies, 1988) from benefitting from capitalist development. As Bossen(1975) argues, equating modernization and westernization with egalitarian treatment of women does not reflect the reality within a highly stratified society like Sri Lanka especially since it has not been able to offer complete autonomy or equality to all women in western societies. Such a view altogether ignores class and status differences among women.

Urban educated women are seen as one of the most vulnerable groups for patriarchal exploitation aggravated by the liberalized economy. The other group is the rural women who are deprived of benefitting from the increased educational facilities. Education no longer guarantees them upward social mobility due to class and political encumbrances. Neither does it provide them with increased necessities. The significance that Boserup (1970) attributes to education as an avenue for women's emancipation, therefore, as Beneria and Sen (1981) argue, mystifies the reality concerning educated women (especially urban educated Sinhalese women), due to their high unemployment rate and the question of the double day of work

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(Samarasinghe:1985; Jayasinghe:1982; Jayaweera:1989b, 1991b). However, this study extended the analysis of Beneria and Sen (1981) and others on the problems of educated women in order to investigate the ways that development has worked against these women in diminishing their position, intensifying their dependent status regardless of their education and professional training. The problem does not completely lie with the existing class and gender hierarchies, or with the problems of unemployment and the double day of work that is created by those hierarchical structures, but on the newly created economic concepts.

Success is now measured by economic indicators, and family precedes the individual success of a woman since it is the woman who is expected to make the sacrifice. Expanded educational facilities which upgrade the intellectual and professional standards of women, therefore, are not being used in the long run for their personal advancement, but mainly used as a gate way to a better marriage. In a society which lacks social support systems, these women become more vulnerable due to the newly created family values that require them to stay home. Within a money economy, education does not provide them with the autonomy that Sinhalese women had enjoyed for centuries within the traditional culture. The husband now becomes the sole provider. Thus educated women become more dependent than less educated women who are still expected to be providers to the family economy due to their low family income.

Modern development is viewed as having a tendency to create the public-private dichotomy among women in Sri Lanka. The conceptualization of the public-private dichotomy as a "continuum rather than a dichotomy", as Tiano (1984: 11) did by applying it to the work roles of Third World women, is thus not applicable within the Sri Lankan context. The common assumptions behind the modernization thesis and the Marxist feminist approach according to

Tiano (1984) are the treatment of the monogamous nuclear family as important in conditioning women's work in capitalist societies, capitalism/modernization as leading to a private-public separation, capitalism/modernization as the source of the continuation of a sexual division of labour and sexual socialization as the source of maintaining this separation. However, Tiano (1984: 12) concludes that the public-private dichotomy "cannot account for the diversity of Third World women's economic roles".

The public - private difference is analyzed within the Sri Lankan context as having little or no value (Jayaweera: 1986 ;1989). It is clearly delineated in Chapter Two that until colonialism penetrated Sri Lankan urban society, the public/private or productive/ reproductive spheres were not clearly distinct. Although this pattern eventually changed with educational development which encouraged women to seek paid employment, the liberalized economy which increasingly relegates women into low wage positions or places family prosperity above the individual status of women, has caused women to question the `worth' of their economic independence compared to the burden of the `double day', thus compelling them to retreat to their private and reproductive roles. Therefore, it is certain that liberalization leads to a public-private separation, and it will perpetuate and maintain the sexual division of labour through sex role socialization. Similarly, as Tiano argues, the nuclear family has become very important in conditioning women's work in the Sri Lankan context, through the decrease of social support from the extended family system which has worked against women's work in the Sri Lankan situation. As Gannage(1986) claims, in the case of working women, the extended family becomes a resource for easing her double day of work, and not a mere locus for gender oppression. In the absence of such an institution, on the one hand, the nuclear family becomes

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a source of the public-private separation. On the other hand, it has liberated women from the burden of the double day and exploitation. Therefore, in a society which lacks any welfare system that would replace the traditional social support for women such as extended family or domestic help, the public-private difference has come to emancipate women from the problems they are currently facing, while hampering their future advancement.

Social class is viewed as a major barrier for emancipation of women as a whole (Ostrander, 1973; Dobbins, 1977; Mallon, 1987). The division of women into different social classes and their differential achievement levels have pitted women against one another in their efforts to overcome the social impediments that hinder their advancement. This has blinded many women to the obstacles created by gender discrimination within classes that are detrimental to their own progress or to other women. Developing class consciousness among women as Ostrander (1973) suggests, therefore, would be an extremely intricate assignment in the Sri Lankan situation considering the class as well as regional differences among women.

Statistical increase in women's employment is not viewed as an instrument for women's emancipation since the statistical increase has a tendency to obscure the reality regarding women's work (Bossen, 1975; Tinker & Bramsen, 1976; Dobbins, 1977; Brydon & Chant, 1989; Neuhouser, 1989; Faulkner & Lawson, 1991). The gender inequality that has been assimilated into development either has marginalized them or has totally excluded them from development. Therefore, the inclusion of women in the workforce, instead of being able to challenge patriarchy or to annihilate the `persistent inequalities of gender' (Tinker, 1990), has made them become the primary tools of a capitalist development process within an exploitative

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framework. The high rate of unemployment of women is not only a result of increased labour force participation of women as explained by Gunarathna and Herath (1993), but is a result of the socio-economic structure that causes "domestication" or "housewifization" (Jayaweera, 1989) of women and the limited career possibilities that women face as a consequence.

Blumberg's theory (Blumberg, 1988) which posits the differential authority that males and females have over income as the main source of gender stratification becomes obsolete in the Sri Lankan context.

Sri Lankan evidence illustrates that control over income does not always provide the basis for gender stratification. In the traditional Sri Lankan family, it was the wife who frequently controlled income as explained in Chapter Two. The new patriarchal society created under colonialism relegated women to the domestic sphere (although not in rural agricultural society). The `bread winner' concept that elevated the male authority undermined women's wealth, such as land and other property which gave her economic power. The post-colonial era marks an increase of women's employment opportunities which with the help of other social support systems, obviously resulted in elevating women's self-esteem and their decision-making capacity. Within the last few decades, the fast disappearance of the traditional social support systems has left women with a double burden, at work and at home; inability to manage both properly often jeopardized family life, and ultimately their own future.

This provided a perfect occasion for men to acquire more control. A woman's monthly income in a life time of employment is not seen as sufficient to compensate for the risks she has to take regarding the well-being of the family. In fact, the concept of dowry which became almost obsolete (not always practically) with the increase of women's education,

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reappeared and took on even more significance. Working women either had to compete with these women to successfully maintain both roles at work and at home or had to relinquish all their renumerated work outside the home leaving them with neither an income nor inherited wealth. They were thus compelled to submit to absolute male domination, since having a source of income alone did not supply them with any authority unless women could fulfil their socially expected duties as wives and mothers.

Hence, from the perspective of working women, especially among the urban middle class, income does not mean an increase of authority within a nuclear family system where women are seen as incompetent in fulfilling their socially expected duties. It increases neither her independence nor family well-being (except in economic aspects). Paradoxically, entering into the labour force has provided her with an income, while depriving her of independence, exposing her to a merciless expropriation of her labour. Economic independence in the face of family crises, does not reduce the gender differential unless accompanied by a transformation in social attitudes, especially those of men, including a government welfare strategy to assist women in securing employment.

Sri Lankan women are generally viewed as politically aware. However, political involvement is decreasing due to the increased materialistic view of life propagated within the liberalised economy together with the political corruption that led to a rejection of politics. Also political involvement is perceived as a recreational avenue for many lower class women. Women leaders are not seen as specifically beneficial role models for women. Finally, the class factor is considered as having a high impact on women's political involvement, specifically women in urban upper class and rural aristocracy or the influential class having the political

power while the urban poor and the rural peasant become the followers of those leaders. Hence, the political awareness of Sri Lankan women, as Charlton (1984) argues, has not been capable of inspiring women towards understanding the political reality behind the powerlessness of women, or to take any action that would assist in overcoming gender or class discrepancies. Lack of recognition of the political bases of women's powerlessness has made Sri Lankan women incapable of working as a "claiming category" as Peattie & Rein (1983) suggest, providing them with no "justificatory rationales for action" (Peattie & Rein, 1983: 134). Thus, each group holds onto its own problems at the expense of interests that concern women as a whole.

Based on this discussion, we can arrive at two major conclusions. One is that the liberalized economy through the increased integration into the world economy has alienated women from the process of production by domesticating them. The other is that economic liberalization has created numerous employment opportunities for women which has integrated women in the process of production within an exploitative framework. Either way women are being seduced by the economy obscuring the political economic reality of their exploitation. The result is a new form of patriarchal social system which apparently offers them many opportunities in the form of a disguised liberation but which actually incarcerates them in this new form of patriarchal system. Unless development integrates women in an indigenous perspective that would capture the regional and social class differences of women, and change the social expectations of women by compensating their domestic role with other social support systems, any effort to include women in the process of development would not be conducive to an actual advancement of women which would liberate them from their household bondage and

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ruthless exploitation in the work place.

Appendix

BASIC SURVEY: <u>Women's Social, Economic and Political Change</u>

Area: Date: Serial No.:

1. Head of the Household (Status):

2. Status of the Respondent within the Family:

Wife	
Wife & Mother	
Single Mother	
Daugther	
Grandmother	
Other	

3. Age Level:

18-24	
25-34	
35-44	
45-54	
55-64	
65-74	
over 75	

4. Level of Education:

No Education	
Primary	
Secondary	
Higher Education (Specify)	

5. Occupational Status (example: Housewife): Specify

6. Income Level of the Family (Monthly):

less than 999	
1000 - 2999	
3000 - 4999	
5000 - 6999	
7000 - 8999	
9000 - 10,999	
over 11,000	

7. Marital Status:

Single	
Married	
Common Law	
Separated	
Divorced	
Widowed	
Other	

8. No. of Children

Male	
Female	
Total	

9. Family Type:

Nuclear	
Extended	
Joint	
Other	

10. Religion:

Buddhist	
Hindu	
Muslim	
Catholic	
Other Christian	
Other	

11. Living Conditions:

	Ownership of the House	Appearance of the House	Water	Sanitary	Ventilation	Other Comment
1.	Own	Permanent/Earn Electricity	Running Water	Washroom Attached	Very Good	
2.	Rented	Permanent/ Flectricity	Well	Separated	Good	
3.	Parented (House)	Half Built	Common Well	Common	Enough	
4.	Given by Parents	Temporary	Common Taps	No Washrooms	Hardly Enough	
5.	Given by the State	Luxury House (Air Cond.)	Road Taps		Not Good	
6.	On a Loan	With Fans	Other			
7.	Given by an Institution	No Fans				
8.	Slum	Other				
9.	Shanty (Temporary)					

12. Family Assets:

Ownership of Land (perches)	Vehicle	Use of Media	Other Observations
No Land	Motor Bus	Television	
9	Car/Jeep/Van	Video	
10 - 14	Tractor	Radio	
15 - 19	Three Wheeler		
20 - 39	Motor Bicycle		
40	Bicycle		
	Other		

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