

1-1-2002

The role of Buddhism in the changing life of rural women in Sri Lanka since independence

Lalani Weddikkara
Edith Cowan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses>



Part of the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Weddikkara, L. (2002). *The role of Buddhism in the changing life of rural women in Sri Lanka since independence*. Edith Cowan University. Retrieved from <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/746>

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/746>

Edith Cowan University

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author's moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).
- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

**THE ROLE OF BUDDHISM
IN THE CHANGING LIFE OF RURAL WOMEN IN SRI LANKA
SINCE INDEPENDENCE**

BY

LALANI WEDDIKKARA

**A THESIS IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF**

MASTER OF ARTS (RELIGIOUS STUDIES)

**At the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences
Edith Cowan University**

30th June 2002

**EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY**

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

DEDICATION

To my mother, my grandmothers, daughters, daughter in law,
sisters, sisters in law,
women friends
and
especially the women of Athale

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	vi
Declaration	vii
Acknowledgement	viii
Glossary	x

INTRODUCTION	1
Background to Study	3

CHAPTER 1 BUDDHISM : ITS GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION IN SRI LANKA

Introduction	7
Early Buddhism	9
Traditional Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism	14
Teaching and Practice of Buddhism	16
Protestant Buddhism	19
Contemporary Buddhism	21
New Changes	24
<i>Sarvodaya</i>	26
Religious Organisation: Ritual	27
Role of the <i>Sangha</i>	32
The <i>Sangha</i> and Politics	36
<i>Vanavasi</i> (forest dwellers)	37
Self Ordained <i>bhikkhus</i>	38
Female Renunciants	41
Conclusion	41

CHAPTER 2 RESEARCHING RURAL WOMEN IN A SRI LANKAN VILLAGE

Introduction	44
Methodology	46
First Visit to Athale	51
Research in 2000	52
Daily Life with the Villagers	54
Theoretical Foundations: Liberal Feminism	63

Locating struggles in Women's lives	66
Researching Women in a Village	67
Research Issues	70
Changes in the Village	86
Community	90
Economic Downturn	92
The Political Awareness of Women	95
Marriage and Land	99
Conclusion	104

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A BUDDHIST WOMAN IN ATHALE

Introduction	107
Impact of Teachings of the Buddha on Everyday life	
Of the Women of Athale	111
Changes	116
Buddhist Practices	118
Conclusion	130

CHAPTER 4

SRI LANKAN *SIL ATTHO*, "PIOUS WOMEN"

Introduction	132
Protestant Buddhism and <i>Sil Attho/ Dasa Sil Matas</i>	134
History of Renunciation	136
Self appointed <i>Dasa Sil Matas</i>	144
<i>Dasa Sil Mata/ Sil Attho/ bhikkhuni</i> in Modern Sri Lanka	149
New Developments	157
Conclusion	159

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION	162
-------------------	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHY	166
---------------------	-----

APPENDICES

Appendix A	Map of Sri Lanka	179
Appendix B	Athale Village	180
Appendix C	Map of Provincial Divisions	181
Appendix D	Letter to NGO and Women of Athale	182
Appendix E	Tables	
Table 1	Demographic and Geographical Data for Athale	183
Table 2	Demographic Data for Residents of Athale	185
Table 3	Level of Education of Women of Athale	188
Table 4	Unemployment levels for Province of Uva	189
Appendix F 1	Sample Copy of Questionnaire English	190
Appendix F 2	Sample Copy of Questionnaire 1 English and Sinhala	193
Appendix G	Sample Copy of Questionnaire 2 English and Sinhala	200
Appendix H	Sample Copy of Questionnaire 3 <i>Sil Attho</i> (Pious Women)	204
Appendix I	Plates	
Plate 1	Weheragoda <i>Aramaya</i>	206
Plate 2.1	Herbs and Plants	207
Plate 2.2	Suneela's Plot of land	207
Plate 3	<i>Vanavasi bhikku</i>	208
Plate 4	Athale Village Home	209
Plate 5.1	Interview Hall	210
Plate 5.2	Women at Aramaya	210
Plate 5.3	Meeting at Badalkumbura	210
Plate 6	Hostess's Home	211
Plate 7	Punsisigama Homes	212
Plate 8.1	<i>Bhikku</i> at Village Aramaya	213
Plate 8.2	<i>Samenera</i> and Friend	213
Plate 8.3	<i>Shramadana</i> Work at Aramaya	213
Plate 9	Athale Village Home Kitchen	214
Plate 10	Lady Blake <i>Aramaya</i> at Kandy	215
Plate 11	Navalapitiye Anuradha <i>sil maniyo</i> and <i>dasa sil mathas</i>	216
Plate 12	Ven. Susantha <i>bhikkhuni</i>	217
Plate 13.1	<i>Budu Pilimaya</i> (statue of Buddha)	218
Plate 13.2	Pre-School Children	218
Appendix J	Oral Life Stories	219
Appendix K	History of Renunciants	

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the role of Buddhism in the changing lives of rural women in Sri Lanka since Independence from the British in 1948 up to the present time. In this thesis I pose two questions: firstly, how important is Buddhism in the everyday lives of rural women and secondly, what impact has changes in Buddhism since Independence had upon laywomen and renunciants.

I have chosen the rural village Athale, in the dry zone of southeast Sri Lanka as my area of investigation. The history of the village dates back to the times of the great hero King Dutugemunu (161-137BCE) and it is part of a complex of villages that form a socio-economic unit. This research investigates the lives of the rural women who belong to this village and whose religious background is Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism, a way of life embedded in their culture. The thesis examines cultural, political, educational and religious changes since Independence, especially changes in Buddhism. The socio-economic problems of contemporary Sri Lanka resulted in the changes adapted to the spirit religion. The meditative tradition of Buddhism still flourishes under lay as well as the renunciants, in Sri Lanka.

Fieldwork in Sri Lanka took place in December 1997- February 1998 and in July 2000- September 2000. The Non Government Organisations have been active in the village since 1988. The data collection method used for this research was qualitative: personal interviews, participant observation, direct observation, informal conversations and surveys were used to gather personal and demographic details and how women practise Buddhism. The findings indicate that women have incorporated different methods of practising Buddhism to suit their needs at a particular time of their lives.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

LALANI WEDDIKKARA

30th June 2002

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis and the research from which it has been derived would not have been possible without the support, encouragement and guidance of several key people to whom I wish to extend my sincere thanks. First, I must thank my two wonderful supervisors, Anne Harris, and Ines Tyson, who offered supportive and scholarly advice, criticisms and read numerous drafts, particularly this year. Anne, I know I gave you some very difficult moments. I thank you very sincerely for your patience and support at all times. To Ines, I'm very grateful to you for your offer to supervise me, as a supervisor from Curtin University. Thank you for all the help and the valuable articles you provided and for your encouragement, at every moment of this long journey, giving me inspiration to go on writing for the women of Athale.

To all the women of Athale village, "*bohoma isthuthi*." (thank you very much). I thank you very humbly for welcoming me into your homes, your village and your hearts. I cannot sufficiently thank you, women of Athale and Punsisigama, for the valuable time spent talking with me, sharing your stories and sharing your food at the *aramaya*. Suneela and Ratna, my hostess and host, *duwa* (daughter) and *putha* (son), I will never forget the warm welcome to your home and the hospitality I enjoyed. The special breakfast of "porridge," made with leaves gathered on our way back from bathing at the river, or the berries we picked on our many walks to all the homes, are moments I will not forget. Thank you for your great hospitality.

My very sincere thanks to Dr. Kanthi Vitarana, of the University of Colombo, for helping me locate the village of Athale, and for travelling with me to the village on both occasions to settle me in and to find out about the village; also for your patience with me during the many telephone calls I made to get vital information quickly. To Seeliya, Khandawa and Kamalsiri, the NGO representatives for the Badulla district, I say a big thank you for all your help and support.

I am grateful to Edith Cowan University, Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences, for the generous postgraduate funds for travel to Sri Lanka; to Martin Wiltshire, Department of Religious Studies, for my undergraduate and Post

Graduate studies in Buddhism which led me to write this thesis; to Danielle Brady, of the Graduate School, for giving me the confidence to finish writing and for reading parts of the thesis.

I am enormously grateful to my dear friend, Fleurette Perera, for reading all my manuscripts, correcting them through the many years I have taken to finish the thesis, and for the delicious food supplied each time I went to her home. Thanks to Trouper, for the Butter cake! To my niece, and all my *kalyana mithrayao* (good friends), especially Rukmal, who supplied the family with food when I was away or too busy, I say a big thank you. To Professor Peter Seneviratne, I extend my thanks for the time spent in reading the initial manuscripts. My thanks go to Wendy who scanned all the photographs and formatted the plates included in this thesis. Gihan, I can't thank you enough for setting out all my questionnaires on the computer, designing them so beautifully that I was able to impress my supervisors. *Pin sithda wewa* (blessings on you!).

To my dear friends at the library at Curtin University of Technology who supported me in many ways especially to Libero Parisotto, Lynne Vautier and Jacki Hanlon a very big thank you. To all at the bindery and photocopying staff for the help given, I thank you all very sincerely.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the most important people, my husband Ranjith, for hours spent on the many drafts, my children Lilanthi and Rohimal, who had to bear the brunt of my frustrations, and had to fend for themselves these last few months, I say thank you, well done and carry on! Special thanks to Lil for the corrections on drafts. To Lakshini, thanks for encouraging me, when I felt like giving up. To Roshan, for reading the drafts, the valuable comments and for re-drawing the maps, I say a big "thank you". To Caitlin, thanks for your patience and support. To Monty and Mindy, thanks for listening, when no one else did.

GLOSSARY

<i>Abhiseka</i>	Consecration
<i>Amarapura nikaya</i>	Name given to an assembly of the sangha
<i>Amme</i>	Mother
<i>Anagarika</i>	‘Homeless’; originally an epithet for a Buddhist monk, Now denotes a celibate layman who observes the ten Precepts
<i>Anusassana</i>	A Buddhist message
<i>Arahat</i>	One who has attained liberation, the religious goal of Buddhism
<i>Aramaya</i>	A Buddhist temple; also a place where <i>Bhikkhus/Bhikkhunis dasasil matas</i> reside
<i>Asala Perahara</i>	Procession for the Tooth Relic
<i>Ata sil</i>	Eight precepts
<i>Atthisukha</i>	Pleasure of having material wealth
<i>Balibili</i>	Ceremonial sacrifice
<i>Bana</i>	Buddhist sermon
<i>Bavana</i>	Meditation
<i>Bhakti, Bakhti</i>	Religious devotion
<i>Bhikkhu</i>	An ordained male Buddhist renunciant
<i>Bhikkhuni</i>	An ordained female Buddhist renunciant
<i>Bhogasukha</i>	Pleasure of enjoying material wealth
<i>Bo Tree</i>	Tree under which the Buddha attained Enlightenment (<i>Ficus religiosa</i>)
<i>Bodhi Puja</i>	Act of worship of bo tree
<i>Bodhisattva</i>	Being who has undertaken to become a Buddha
<i>Brahmaccharin</i>	A title from the Indian past, meaning living in chastity

<i>Brahaman, Brahmin</i>	The first of the four classes of society in classical Indian theory
<i>Brahamas</i>	Holy states/gods
<i>Buddha Jayanthi</i>	A celebration for 2500 years of Buddhism
<i>Buddha puja</i>	Act of worship to the Buddha
<i>Budduge</i>	A replica of the Buddha is housed
<i>Caitya</i>	An edifice of varying shapes, built as the central feature of a Buddhist shrine to enshrine relics of the Buddha
<i>Chena</i>	Slash and burn agriculture
<i>Chullavagga</i>	Part of the Buddhist canon
<i>Dalada</i>	Sacred tooth relic of the Buddha
<i>Dana</i>	Giving- the first of the ten good deeds
<i>Dane</i>	A Sinhalese form of <i>dana</i> , particularized to mean the food Given to <i>bhikkhus/bhikkhunis</i> , <i>dasa sil matas</i> and <i>sil attho</i>
<i>Dagaba/ Stupa</i>	Relic container to enshrine relics. Also a burial mound
<i>Dasa sil mata.</i>	A Buddhist laywoman who has taken the vows to observe ten precepts
<i>Desapalanaya</i>	Politics
<i>Devale/Devala</i>	Shrine
<i>Devata/Deviya</i>	A goddess
<i>Dhamma.</i>	Teachings of the Buddha
<i>Dhammika dhammaladdha</i>	Righteous wealth
<i>Dhatu</i>	Elements; water, energy, air and earth; relics
<i>Dola</i>	Offering of food to a mean spirit
<i>Gal len</i>	Stone cave
<i>Gamavasino</i>	Village-dwelling <i>bhikkhus</i>
<i>Gamudawa</i>	Village development scheme
<i>Ganga</i>	River

<i>Gatha</i>	Pali verses
<i>Gilampassa</i>	Buddha offering consisting of beverages and medicaments made in the evening
<i>Goyigama</i>	The paddy-rice farming caste
<i>Grama sevika /Sevaka</i>	Government official for the village; female/male
<i>Irisiyawa</i>	Jealousy
<i>Jains</i>	An Indian religious group
<i>Jarooda pana jataka</i>	A discourse given by the Buddha
<i>Jataka</i>	Story of a former life of the Buddha
<i>Kaccheri</i>	Office of the registrar of births, deaths and marriages
<i>Kalammas</i>	Buddha's sermons were more in the nature of talks to individuals or a group. This talk was to the <i>Kalammas</i>
<i>Kamma /Karma</i>	Action, deed; in Buddhism the law of moral causation
<i>Kapurala</i>	A priest of a <i>devale</i>
<i>Kavadi dance</i>	A form of dance at Kataragama
<i>Kendaraya</i>	Horoscopes, generally read by an astrologer
<i>Killa</i>	Pollution
<i>Kulaya</i>	Caste
<i>Karuna</i>	Compassion
<i>Mahayana</i>	School of Buddhism
<i>Mahanayaka</i>	Chief Incumbant
<i>Maitreya</i>	The name of the Buddha to come
<i>Maligawa/va</i>	Palace or Temple of the Tooth
<i>Maniyo</i>	Mother
<i>Metta</i>	Loving
<i>Mudita</i>	Sympathetic joy
<i>Mudalali</i>	Village businessman

<i>Naga/s</i>	A kind of demi-god, a super-normal cobra
<i>Nirvana</i> (Pali)	The ultimate goal of Buddhist endeavour. Enlightenment that guarantees freedom from rebirth
<i>Nibbana</i>	Liberation from cyclic existence or freedom from rebirth
<i>Nikaya</i>	An organisational grouping or assembly of the <i>sangha</i> in Sri Lanka; ordination tradition
<i>Nona</i>	Lady (also given as a honour to an older woman).
<i>Pahana</i>	Oil lamp
<i>Pali Sutras</i>	Classical Buddhist text. usually a sermon by the Buddha
<i>Pabbajja</i>	Literally: 'going forth'; refers to entering the sangha
<i>Pancasila</i>	Five basic precepts
<i>Pansala</i>	Buddhist temple
<i>Pansil</i>	Five precepts
<i>Parinibbana</i>	Death of an enlightened person (esp. the Buddha)
<i>Patimokkha</i>	<i>Bhikkhus</i> confessional, 227 rules recited once a fortnight
<i>Paticca Samuppada</i>	Dependent arising forms the indispensable condition for the real understanding and realization of the teaching of the Buddha
<i>Perahara</i>	Procession, often religious. The Temple of the Tooth <i>perahera</i> at Kandy
<i>Peramunarala</i>	Leader of the procession
<i>Pilimaya</i>	Statue, image
<i>Pin</i>	moral good merit
<i>Pindapata</i>	<i>Bhikkhu</i> 's begging round
<i>Pirit</i>	Ceremony at which certain texts from the Pali canon are Recited
<i>Pirivena</i>	Place of learning for renunciants, also a university
<i>Pitaka</i>	One of the three parts of the Pali cannon
<i>Poruwa</i>	Dais

<i>Poson Poya</i>	The day Buddhism was established in Sri Lanka
<i>Poya</i>	Quarter day of the lunar calendar, full moon <i>pasalosvaka poya</i>
<i>Puja (va)</i>	Act of worship, an offering
<i>Rajakariya</i>	Work done for the king/temple
<i>Ramanna nikaya</i>	Name given to an assembly of the <i>sangha</i> . Admits candidates from lower castes
<i>Renunciant</i>	'Homeless'; denotes a celibate layman / laywoman who observes the five eight or ten precepts
<i>Rodi</i>	The lowest Sinhalese caste
<i>Samadhi</i>	Meditation. <i>Samadhi pilimiya</i> is a statue of the Buddha seated cross- legged in meditation.
<i>Samanera</i>	Buddhist novice
<i>Samatha</i>	Meditation of the yogic type, tranquillity
<i>Samsara</i>	The relentless cycle of birth, death, round of rebirth
<i>Samiti/Samitiya</i>	Literally means association/group
<i>Sangha</i>	Buddhist renunciant community
<i>Sarvodaya</i>	Buddhist concept; awakening of all
<i>Sarvastivada</i>	A Buddhist school
<i>Sasana</i>	Teaching; Buddhism as a historical phenomenon
<i>Shramadana</i>	Sharing of one's time, thought and effort
<i>Sil</i>	Precept: moral undertaking in the sets of five, eight or ten; also observance of the precepts
<i>Sil attho</i>	Pious woman who has taken the precepts
<i>Sima(va)</i>	Boundary; within which all <i>bhikkhus</i> should assemble on <i>poya</i> days and for ordination purposes
<i>Sil Maniyo</i>	Pious woman, who has taken the precepts
<i>Siyam nikaya</i>	Name given to an assembly of the <i>sangha</i> . Admits only from the <i>radalas</i> the top <i>goyigama</i> caste

<i>Silvantha</i>	Pious
<i>Stupa</i>	Large conventionalized burial mound containing relics
<i>Sudras</i>	(Indian) caste
<i>Sutta/Sutras</i>	Classical Buddhist text, usually a sermon by the Buddha
<i>Sutta Pitaka</i>	Buddha's teaching which consists of five baskets
<i>Thannaha</i>	Greed
<i>Tevava</i>	Worship of a Buddha image, rites associated with this
<i>Thera</i>	An ascribed author of a poem; also 'elders'
<i>Theragatha</i>	A collection of poems written by <i>Theras</i>
<i>Theri</i>	An ascribed author of a poem; also a <i>Bhikkhuni</i>
<i>Therigatha</i>	A collection of poems written by <i>Theris/Bhikkunis</i>
<i>Theruvan</i>	The three jewels (The <i>Buddha</i> , <i>dhamma</i> and the <i>sangha</i>)
<i>Thripitaka /Tipitaka</i>	The (Buddhist) Pali canon
<i>Thorana</i>	Pandal
<i>Tovil</i>	A name for a <i>bali</i> ceremony
<i>Upasampada</i>	Ordination as a <i>bhikkhu</i> or <i>bhikkhuni</i> ; the rite of Conferring the full precepts.
<i>Upasika maniyo</i>	Woman who has taken the ten precepts
<i>Upasaka(ya)</i>	Buddhist layman who has taken the ten precepts
<i>Upekkha</i>	Equanimity
<i>Upasatha</i>	Day of fasting determined by phases of the moon
<i>Vanavasi</i>	Forest-dwelling <i>bhikkhus</i>
<i>Vedamahatmaya</i>	Naturopath
<i>Vedas</i>	The four ancient collection of hymns, prayers, and incantations of Brahmanism
<i>Vihara(ya), Vihare</i>	Buddhist temple
<i>Vinaya</i>	Buddhist code of discipline for renunciants

<i>Vandana (va)</i>	Pilgrimage
<i>Vanavasi</i>	Forest dwelling <i>bhikkhus</i>
<i>Vandinawa</i>	Worshipping; act of worship
<i>Vinaya</i>	Code of conduct. Buddhist monastic discipline
<i>Vipasana</i>	Intuitive vision, that which is produced by successful concentration meditation
<i>Wesak/vesak</i>	Celebration of the Buddha's birth, death and enlightenment
<i>Yaka, plural yakku; yaksa</i>	Sprite, often maleficent
<i>Yantra</i>	Amulet

INTRODUCTION

...A culture is not something that can be known once and for all...[We] may stalk culture and meaning, but these elusive, will-o-the-wisp targets slip in and out of view, appear in many apparitions, look different from different angles (and to different stalkers), and sometimes move with surprising speed. Knowing a culture, even our own, is a never-ending story (Van Maanen, 1988: 45).

In order to understand human activity it is necessary to know the culture in which the activity takes place, that which constitutes the social and historical situation. Also essential for consideration are the geographical location and the lifestyle of the people whose activities form the object of the study. Accordingly, this kind of research calls for a 'multi-method' approach, a methodology which includes the use of qualitative approaches, such as unstructured interviews, women's stories, and participant observation, what Glucksmann (1994: 158) describes as 'multi-sourced' research. This study assumes the relevance of a feminist perspective to its research methodology, on a number of premises. The study takes female experience as its focus, considering the role of Buddhism in the changing lives of rural women in Sri Lanka since Independence from the British in 1948 to the present time. Conducting feminist interviews or a gender sensitive inquiry is important for this study. Liberal feminism and theories of power were used for analyzing the research. Oral history research enables us to listen to women's voices in the tales of their experiences. Joan Kelly (1984: 163) asserts that a "new direction is given for feminist theory as it lays emphasis on consciousness and insists on taking into account the importance of women's own experience of resistance and struggle to changing the attitudes held by society".

The purpose of this study is to consider the post-Independence role played by Buddhism in the lives of women in the village of Athale. How has Buddhism functioned as an empowering or disempowering force in the lives of these women, and how have the changes in Buddhism impacted upon their lives? What do the women say about self-empowerment? How many women think about it?

My interest in investigating the impact of Buddhism on rural women in a village in modern Sri Lanka was awakened after reading Richard Gombrich's (1991) *Buddhist Precept and Practice*. My study is based on interviews with the women of Athale, eight *bhikkhunis* (a female Buddhist renunciant who has accepted the 311 renunciant's

precepts, and given up the householder's life), four *dasa sil matas* (a female renunciant who has received the renunciant's ten-precepts or the householder's ten precepts and has given up the householder's life), some *Bhikkhus* (a male renunciant, who observe the 211 precepts, and has given up the householder's life), a number of *Sil maniyolupasika* (a female who has taken the householder's ten, eight or five precepts, has not given up the householder's life, and some *Sil attho* (women who observe the precepts). The interviews also include the health nurse, the *gramasevika* (female government representative) of the village and representatives of the NGO for the district. My interview with the Professor of Buddhism and Pali at the University of Peradeniya, opened up other avenues for this research, which helped me immensely.

I have addressed a broad set of topics, relating to the impact of Buddhism on agriculture, health, education, work and daily living of the women of Athale¹. The major aim of this study is to listen to the voices of Athale women as they explain the role of Buddhism in their daily lives, how they cope with events beyond their control, and how they have grasped opportunities to bring about change. My intention in this thesis is to provide a voice for women and a voice for Sinhala terms and names, for example in the usage of the name 'Athale', rather than 'Atale', as was used in colonial times.

The thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 1 forms the introduction and background to the study, providing information about Buddhism, and its growth and transformation in Sri Lanka. This chapter identifies original Buddhism, traditional Theravada Buddhism, and the influence of Buddhism after changes in European colonisation. Discussion of the modern period investigates the impact of Protestant Buddhism since Independence in 1948, and the section on contemporary Buddhism refers to Buddhism's impact on politics, women, and as it is practised today. Chapter 2 researches rural women in a Sri Lankan village. This chapter contains discussion of the study's research methodology and theoretical foundations, as well as the daily life of the villagers. Land rights and marriage practices are also discussed. Chapter 3 constitutes the core of the thesis, and it is here that the research questions are addressed. The discussion includes issues such as the impact of Buddhism on women, the status of education for women, and their practice of Buddhism. It asks what it means to be a Buddhist woman, and also includes

¹ Although the name of the village is spelt Atale on the maps originally produced before Independence, the villagers like to call it 'Atha-le.' I have spelt it as Athale, to honour the Sinhala language.

research questions, analysis of interviews, Athale women's struggles for survival in the face of poverty and gender bias which occurred during colonization. Chapter 4 deals with interviews I had with renunciant women *sil attho* (pious women), and their life stories. Chapter 5 forms the conclusion of the thesis, and discusses the accomplishments of the study, together with their implications and directions for future research.

Background to the Study

Although I am not a Buddhist myself, my interest in Buddhism was encouraged by my father, who was a scholar in comparative religion and encouraged my love for learning about all religions in Sri Lanka. Since I lived in Sri Lanka myself, my own interest was also kindled, as I interacted with the majority of the population who are Buddhist.

Sri Lanka gained Independence in February 1948 after four centuries of European colonisation by the Portuguese (1505-1638), the Dutch (1638-1796) and the British (1796-1948). The colonial experience transformed the political, social and religious fabric of the island. This dissertation deals mainly with the contemporary period from 1948 to the present time.

In the last colonial period of 150 years of British rule, English was made the official language of Sri Lanka. This limited the education of the rural population, who were the economic backbone of the country. During the first 50 years of British rule, the small village temple schools continued to prosper. However, with their traditional curricula and lack of English, they could not compete with the English language schools opened by the missionaries (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 208). This was the case until after Independence.

Rice and vegetables were grown in the rural areas and the products were distributed to urban areas. The British developed a very good railway system throughout the country, especially in the tea growing areas, linking them with Colombo, the capital of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Communications improved with new roads linking the main cities such as Kandy-Colombo, Galle-Colombo, Negombo-Colombo, and many other internal routes linking with the capital.

With the introduction of Christianity, and preference being given to Christian schools by the government, Buddhism and its influence declined in the urban centres. Education declined in the rural areas as English teachers were not sent to these areas. The *bhikkhu* lost his place as intellectual leader to the schoolteacher. The rich and middle class families in urban areas were able to educate their children and the English-language school was the sole point of entry for the ruling elite (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 208). Although caste² was once important, it is no longer openly considered to be a barrier in social interaction. However, a *bhikkhu* would still need to be in the *goyigama* caste to join the *Amarapura*, or the *Siyam nikaya* (two organisational groupings of the *sangha*).

Under British rule, the traditional forms of kinship and marriage were systematically brought under state rule until 1948. In the districts of Uva province whose jurisdiction includes Athale village, several forms of marriage seemed to occur simultaneously. Polyandry and polygamy were common, and group marriages between families were also found where several brothers and sisters were married jointly (Risseeuw, 1988:17).

Between 1948 and 1958, Sri Lanka was described as a 'model democracy' by the politicians of the time. The electorate ousted the sitting government at each election and voted in a new government. Between 1956 and 1977, *desapalanaya* (politics) came to the village from the sophisticated dwellers of the cities, disrupting an older and relatively harmonious order of things based on the Hindu caste divisions (Spencer, 1990: 11). The village headman of the old system was replaced by a new government official, the *gramasevika* (village government official). This divided the village into factions along political party lines, causing friction and disharmony. Colonialism disrupted the village lifestyle, as the colonisers were interested in introducing the 'colonised' to Christianity. Mohanty points out that:

Colonialism brought about long term changes to social and political structures, land tenure, land use and labour patterns, resulting in the disruption of whole societies. Land degradation, enforced relocation, commercialisation

² The Sinhalese caste system is historically related to the Indian: although with fewer castes. The *goyigama* caste, (farmers) mainly the Kandyans, is the chief caste found in the hill country with a few sub-castes. During the time of the Kings, certain groups of people performing specialised functions, in effect became separate castes. In the low country the *Karawa* caste is dominant. Society was divided into *Goyigama* farmers and the service castes (Gombrich, 1991:343-371). See Hans Dieter Evers, 'Kingship and property rights in a Buddhist Monastery in central Ceylon [sic].

of agriculture, labour migration and weakened pre-colonial trading links, put tremendous pressures on women's ability to meet their expected responsibilities (1991: 9).

The re-definition of ideologies regarding identity, status, kinship and marriage had unexpected consequences for the contemporary lives of both women and men. These changes, which began in the colonial period, continue to be felt by women today. While I am aware that those changes also impacted on men's lives, in this thesis women's voices will be given prime consideration.

With the growing public awareness of the disadvantages in education, social privileges and the influence of Protestant Buddhism, nationalist ideas surfaced in the village. These were propagated by socially distinct elements such as different political party members within the community, as nationalist ideas were a possible medium for mobilisation into the party system (Spencer, 1990: 16). The Buddha *Jayanthi*³ celebrations of 1956, together with S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's promise to lift Buddhism to its rightful place and the 'Sinhala only' language policy, won Bandaranaike the election, and he came to power as the prime minister of Sri Lanka. Since that time Buddhism has been considered the national religion of the country, and the 'Sinhala only' policy in government has, as a consequence, alienated the Tamil population (Spencer, 1990: 22).

The research questions of this study relate to the two central themes of women and Buddhism, and I concern myself with the relationship between feminism and social research. Reinharz argues,

We continue to discover ways in which previously gathered information has been distorted by androcentrism and we continue to identify topics that have been male centered and need to be re-thought in terms of women's experiences (1992: 47).

Rituals of pollution, which barred women from performing religious acts, are one such instance that will be discussed in Chapter 1, and other examples of androcentrism include the barring of women from certain jobs in the rice-paddy planting process. I was

³ The celebration of the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 340).

keen to find out how Athale got its name, when an older resident started talking about the village.

A story I heard on my first visit to the village in 1997- 1998 is told by Sudu Menika, an elderly inhabitant of the village:

The story my mother told me, was that king Duttugemunu (161-137 BCE) while returning from the war with King Elara, suddenly realised that his hand was bleeding ("Atha"- hand. " Le" - blood). It is said that the king's sword was stuck to his hand, by the blood. Therefore the place was named Athale (Interview, 5th Dec 1997).

The selection of the village of Athale is the result of assessing various options and criteria. This particular village is an ancient village, totally Buddhist, and has a population of less than 1,000. It also has many older people who are able to remember the time before Independence. The community is typical of remote isolated communities in that the *aramaya* (Buddhist temple) is the main meeting place for women; it is here that women have their discussions and share the village gossip. It is here I had talks with the women of the village regarding their concerns for the village, their hopes and aspirations for their children and their *aramaya*. With this information, I constructed a background picture of the village.

This thesis constitutes an account of the activities of women in rural Sri Lanka woven together by myself as female researcher. I explain in the chapters some of the problems I faced when researching rural women. An important issue for me was to build trust between us. I wanted to develop empathy so that their voices might be heard. Pauline Bart (in Reinharz, 1992: 29) observes that in order to encourage the development of trust, some feminist researchers describe themselves as learners and listeners rather than "researchers." Ann Oakley (1985: 11) suggests that feminist interviewing involves commitment on the part of the researcher to form a relationship, and on the part of the interviewees, to participate with sincerity. Jessie Bernard described how participating in a consciousness-raising group forced her to recognize that she had to be trusted if she hoped to obtain information about people's lives (in Reinharz, 1992: 29). I was a learner and listener; I formed relationships, and clearly my consciousness was raised, as will be seen.

CHAPTER 1

BUDDHISM: ITS GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION IN SRI LANKA

Introduction

“Impermanent are all component things, they arise and cease, that is their nature; they come into being and pass away, release from them is bliss supreme” (in Piyadassi, 1991:64).

This chapter provides the groundwork for an understanding of Sinhala Theravada Buddhism. With a brief discussion of early Buddhism it will examine the establishment and transformation of Buddhism in Sri Lanka.

With Independence Sri Lanka claimed the rightful place and re-established the *dhamma*, (teaching of the Buddha) and is discussed in this chapter. Protestant Buddhism, an ideology created in the late 19th Century by Dharmapala, is a phenomenon that is relevant only to Sri Lanka. Anagarika Dharmapala re-awakened the Buddhist people, and reminded them of their Buddhist obligations. The impacts of this as seen today is discussed here. Efforts made by lay Buddhists to make Buddhism relevant to the contemporary world, such as the *Sarvodaya* (Buddhist concept of awakening all) movement, and meditation by lay people, and the changes taking place in modern Sri Lanka, are presented.

The *bhikkhus*, trying to hold on to their power, while lay and renunciant women are making changes to Buddhist practices is introduced, while different authors opinions are stated. Modern living has caused difficulty, to villagers, as they leave village life behind in search of employment, and settle in big cities, and how they make Buddhism relevant to their needs are scrutinized.

The terms nun and monk will not be used in this thesis, as they are artefacts of Christian terminology, although many authors have used these terms. The terms *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni*, or *dasa sil mata*, *sil attho* and *upasika* will be used instead, out of respect for Sinhalese Buddhism.

Theravada Buddhists consider their belief system to have three jewels: the Buddha, the *dhamma* and the *sangha* (*Buddhist renunciants*). Gotama Buddha attained enlightenment and preached it to the suffering world, founding an order, a *sangha*, consisting of those who wanted to devote their lives, striving for enlightenment and to preserving Buddhist teachings.

The teachings of the Buddha have been preached in varying ways to suit the needs and background of the different people for whom they were intended (Nicholas and Paranavitana, 1961: 39), such as the educated, the uneducated, the rich or the poor. According to these teachings, people were guided to follow the ‘middle path’, which was formulated as the Noble Eightfold Path, namely right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration (Piyadassi, 1991: 74). Briefly, the central tenet of Buddhism is to remove suffering by finding its cause, and subscribing to the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, as explained by Bhikkhu Khantipalo (1977: 39). These are *Dukkha* (suffering); knowledge of the true causal arising of *dukkha* (its arising); knowledge of the cessation of *dukkha* (its cessation); knowledge of the right path leading to the cessation of *dukkha*. As is evident, this is a brief explanation only. The path to spiritual perfection is graded into four stages, three of which can be realised by most people. Only a person with no possessions whatsoever can attain the final stage of being an *arahat*. The teaching of the Buddha was not only concerned with the private destiny of the individual, but with something much wider: the entire realm of sentient beings, described as the whole of consciousness.

The Buddha made it quite clear that the monastic order was to develop high morality, high wisdom and meditation through the cultivation of the ‘Noble Eightfold Path’. *Bhikkhu Dharmarakshitha*, at the *Weheragoda pansala*, said:

Bhikkhus are to be spiritual guides, not social activists or schoolteachers. In Buddhist scriptures it's clearly stated that both men and women have the same potential to become enlightened. Buddhist teachings penetrate all levels of society into religious consciousness: from ordinary people to the royalty (Interview, 31st July, 2000).

Weber, in his *Sociology of Religion*, speaks of a

...Transformation of (ancient) Buddhism; its transformation, that is from the position of a religious 'technology' of wandering and intellectually schooled mendicant bhikkhus, to that of a world religion commanding allegiance among large masses of laymen...[sic] (1963: 152).

According to Malalgoda (1976: 12) this transformation involved two aspects: i) at the level of belief and practice, accommodating the religious needs of the (predominantly peasant) laity; and ii) at the level of religious organisation, developing links with secular authorities whose backing was necessary for the propagation and establishment of Buddhism in different Asian communities. By meeting these needs, Buddhism was able to transform itself to the status of a world religion.

As Malalgoda points out, Buddhism was first introduced into Sri Lanka in 250 BCE by which time King Asoka had already established Buddhism and political authority in India and had a great impact on the kind of Buddhism that eventually developed in Sri Lanka. "From the very beginning (the first to be won over to Buddhism was the king himself) Buddhism came to be very closely associated with the institution of kingship in Ceylon" (1976:12).

Early Buddhism

The reign of Tissa (250-210 BCE), Asoka's contemporary in Sri Lanka, established a landmark not merely in the religious, but also in the political history of the island's formal establishment of the institution of kingship⁴. Pomp and pageantry were introduced with the monarchical form of government replacing other forms of rule that had prevailed since the time of the early Aryan settlements. Malalgoda (1976: 12) makes a point that for the first time in Sri Lanka, an *abhiseka* (consecration) ceremony, a necessary rite of passage in the Indian tradition whereby a prince was acknowledged

⁴ According to an account in the commentarial legend of the conversion of Sri Lanka by the Missionary monk Mahinda in the mid 3rd century BCE, "the king of Sri Lanka eagerly accepted the new faith and enthusiastically built great monasteries and shrines. At the completion of all of this the King asked the missionary if Buddhism could now be considered established. Mahinda replied that it was established but would not take root until a Sri Lankan, born of Sri Lankan parents took robes in Sri Lanka, learned the discipline in Sri Lanka and recited it in Sri Lanka" (Carrithers, 1984: 133).

as sovereign, was held in Sri Lanka. The Sinhala king, far from being a secular ruler, was ritualised as a god. Although such grandiose ceremonies and rituals were not strictly prescribed by Buddhism, Buddhism did not come into conflict with them either according to Malagoda (1976: 15).

It was from this time on those vast overwhelming temples, their mysterious rites, their intricate land tenures, their jealously held privileges became part of the mystification and ritualisation of divine kingship (Yalman, 1962: 145).

A close relationship developed between King Devanampiya Tissa of Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka and the Emperor Asoka of Pataliputra in India, the latter inviting the former to take refuge in the Buddha, the *dhamma* and the *sangha*. A Buddhist mission under Mahinda, a son of the Emperor Asoka, and his daughter, the *bhikkhuni* Sangamitta, arrived in Sri Lanka at Mihintale, bringing a sapling of the *bo* tree under which the Buddha is said to have attained *nirvana*, and they established the *sangha* of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* in Sri Lanka (Nicholas and Paranavitana, 1961: 49).

Malalgoda (1976: 12) asserts “if the institution of kingship helped to unite the country at the political level then the establishment of Buddhism united this unity at the ideological level”. Today, Theravada is the branch of Buddhism observed in Sri Lanka. The pre-existing traditions of Hinduism had considerable influence in shaping and conditioning Buddhism, and in building the character of the *vinaya* (the discipline of the *sangha*). Malalgoda (1976: 129-30) relates the central ritual of the *bhikkhu* was the *pattimokha* (the list of rules of personal conduct which all *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* are to recite once a fortnight at an assembly of *bhikkhus*), and was introduced into Buddhism following the custom of the *Jainas* who gathered on *Upasatha* (when the *patimokkha* is recited) days to discuss the *dhamma*. The Buddhists transformed this tradition into an occasion at which the *vinaya* (discipline) rules were recited; the practice of observing ‘retreat’ during the rainy season grew out of similar rules. The Theravada tradition considers the *vinaya pitaka* to be of the utmost importance and to be the heart of Buddhism; this is the simple life based on owning the minimum of property, and cutting off all ties with the family and community. The Buddha is said to have told his *bhikkhus* to live as “...islands to themselves, their own resorts; they were to be self reliant, depending on no external resource...” (Gombrich, 1988: 89). This of course, is very different from the actual behaviour of the *bhikkhus* who are very much dependent

on a variety of external resources, such as the supply of all their food by the village women.

Ling (1973: 247-250) asserts, in the kingdom of Sakkiya in India, where Buddhism began, the role of the *sangha* was undermined by the power of the *Brahmins* (Hindu priests). As a result, the whole of Buddhist culture in India suffered. Political, social, and economic factors have also attributed to Buddhism's decline: political, as seen in the variously hostile or friendly attitudes of rulers towards the *sangha*; social, as in the existence or absence of social castes such as *Brahmins*; and economic, which was the inability of the economy of India to support the *sangha*. The disintegration of Buddhism in India can be seen as directly linked to the economy. However, in Sri Lanka, the *sangha*'s essential place was preserved, and with it a strong Buddhist culture developed (Ling, 1973: 206-7). Sri Lanka's economy was able and willing to support the unproductive *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis*. A power relationship existed between ordinary people and the renunciants. The renunciants depended on the lay people for their daily *dana*. The people had an area in which it was a simple matter to earn merit and of meeting the needs of the renunciants (Ling, 1973: 253).

Originally, the *sangha* regulated its affairs independently, but King Asoka began to exercise a degree of control over the *sangha*. According to Bechert (1994: 253):

...The *sasana* reform... was generally regarded as a great service in the interest of their religion... The *sangha* had in fact lost part of its original independence. During the following centuries, the *sangha* of Theravada Buddhism became an integral part of a particular socio-political structure, which may be described as 'traditional Theravada Buddhism'.

From this point on, the Buddhist community was transformed: highly elaborate and divergent philosophical systems were created in schools such as Theravada and Sarvastivada. In oppositional response to this scholasticism, a new mystic movement known as Mahayana Buddhism emerged to fulfil the spiritual needs of the masses.

Yalman asserts that Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka at a time when caste was the basic political, economic and social structure of the Indian kingdom. "It was, as if you built the kingdom with bricks and the bricks were castes" (1962:144). Particular families and castes held much of the usable land in the kingdom in tenure, and

agriculture was organised on a feudal service *rajakariya* (tenure/work done for king or *aramaya*) arrangement. The structure of land-based caste service can be seen to this day in the organisation of temple lands in the Kandyan regions,⁵ and is discussed in detail by Evers (1972) and Seneviratne (1978, 1997). “Even to this day a symbolic register of all the temple land that is held by the temples is carried at the head of the annual pageant at Kandy by the officer at the front (*peramuneralala*) riding an elephant and attended by traditional insignia” (Seneviratne, 1997: 140). Caste has become embedded in Sri Lankan civil society. Although the Buddha’s teachings say that all people are equal, it certainly does not seem that way in the most important event held by the *Dalada Maligawa* (Temple of the Tooth in Kandy).

A relationship exists between Buddhist *vihare* (Buddhist temple) and Hindu *devales* (Hindu temple or shrine), as seen at the palace dedicated to the Buddha in Kandy, which is treated as a *devale* (shrine dedicated to the deities) for the purpose of caste and political structure. The *Dalada* (the sacred tooth relic of the Buddha) is of great importance, and “...to this day is seen as a symbol of sovereignty and legitimacy of power. It is also considered a symbol of Sinhalese national unity” (Evers, 1972: 5). The victorious party at the general elections, or the winner of the presidential elections, considers it their first obligation to worship at the *Maligawa* (palace). Evers (1972: 63) points out how the division of the temple into pure and impure areas is paralleled by the division of ritual activities into inner and outer services (*pitakattale* and *atulkattale rajakariya*). Only those engaged in the inner services (high castes) are allowed to enter the pure areas. This division is also reflected in the basic structure of the Kandyan caste system, which is clearly divided into a high caste, the *goyigama*, and a number of ranked lower castes. The *Diyavadana nilame* (water-presenting officer) was in charge of the ritual. Concepts of purity and pollution are indispensable for the understanding of the rituals.⁶ As Evers points out:

...The ritual (*tevava* and *naumura*) was identical in the *vihare*, the *devale* and royal palace... It was performed in an established sequence before the Buddha, the gods and

⁵ Pieris (1956) has brought together a vast amount of information on the Kandyan kingdom and the functioning of the kingdom in great detail.

⁶ These rituals at the *vihare* were performed by a *bhikkhu* of the highest caste. A *Kapurala*, belonging to the highest caste performed the rituals at the *Devale*. The *kapurala* and the other *devale* tenants had to avoid polluting events, which cannot happen to a *bhikkhu*, such as the birth of a child, the first menstruation of a daughter. Major polluting events also barred villagers from entering a *devale* (Evers, 1972: 63-65). Ames (1966: 27-50) has outlined these differences in detail.

the King. The officiates treat the god of the temple like a king. The ritual of the Buddha consists of bathing, washing, dressing. These intimate duties have to be performed daily to keep the god alive (1972: 66).

Douglas (1966: 125) argues, “caste pollution represents what it claims to be, a symbolic system, based on the image of the body, whose primary concern is the ordering of a social hierarchy”. Forms of ritual are crucial to understanding pollution. In Athale, some of the pollutions are used as analogies for expressing a general view of the social order. The women have learnt to cope with what men call pollution. Women are aware it has all to do with power. As Anthias (1992: 5) argues, “it is power that renders the symbols of inferiorisation effective”. By rendering women impure, men in general, and *bhikkhus* in particular, exercise power over women.

Kataragama *deiyo* (god Skanda) was the most important deity of the Tamil Hindus of Sri Lanka. However, he has become the most influential and popular god in modern Sri Lanka for the Sinhalese, and Kataragama is now a place of pilgrimage for Buddhists, Muslims and Roman Catholics, as well as Hindus. Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988: 164-174) state:

...In Kataragama (Murugan or Skanda), the famous and mysterious jungle shrine in Southeast Sri Lanka, the god comes on a visit to his human consort, Valliyamma, with whom he has a secret love affair. The god is taken in procession every night to visit his beloved, and is then returned to his own temple for the night. The ritual consists of the basics of worship. He is served by priests (non-Brahmin, now Sinhalese male or female), he is bathed, dressed, given food offerings which are returned to the worshippers, and offered lights by dancing girls and then taken to bed and put to sleep. The annual pilgrimages to the distant site indicate that the connection between god Kataragama and *Valli* befits a powerful god. The basic theme of the god being served as a king by his worshippers is repeated as at Kandy, where the inner sanctum of *devala* in Sinhalese is a (*maligava*) palace. The treatment of the king in Kandyan society was clearly part of the same ritual idiom. The king was powerful as a god.

According to Douglas (1966: 128) the most unheard of behaviour by devotees is not only tolerated here, but also encouraged. People wear different costumes and women become “possessed” while ecstatic worship of the god takes two emotional directions-

joy and celebration. The firewalkers are now Sinhalese, and so are the *kavadi* (a form of dance at Kataragama) dancers.

Douglas (1966:128) states:

The analysis of ritual symbolism cannot begin, until we recognise ritual is an attempt to create and maintain a particular culture, a particular set of assumptions by which experience is controlled. The rituals enact the form of social relations and in giving these relations visible expression they enable people to know their own society.

Seneviratne (1978) and Appadurai (1981) also write about these rituals of purification, which are designed to establish the identity of the Buddha, the king and the gods. However, the overtones of fertility rituals at Kataragama are incompatible with the principles of renunciation.

According to Rahula (1956) *devales* have always existed side by side with the *vihare*. Temples for gods already existed in the 3rd century B.C.E. A *devale* can be a small shrine within a *vihare*. Buddhists are said to operate on two 'wavelengths', as observed by Wickremaratne (1995: 225). He argues that they continue with their *samsaric* transcendence and resort to the forms of worship that go with it on the one hand, and, caught up with the stresses of living, they readily patronise *devales*, and even deal in sorcery on the other. The religious centre of Kandy with the Temple of the Tooth (*Dalada Maligawa*) and the temples of the four Hindu guardian deities, Vishnu, Natha, Kataragama, and Pattini, are considered Buddhist centres of worship and pilgrimage.

Traditional Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism

Like other religious traditions that began in ancient India, Theravada Buddhism makes a sharp distinction between the worldly and the supramundane. The traditional spirit religion of Sinhala Buddhists is practised with the aid of the *kapurala* (professional intermediaries). Gombrich (1991: 47) assert that the Sinhalese, who form the majority of the inhabitants of Sri Lanka, have been predominantly Buddhist while Buddhist oral traditions in Sri Lanka can be traced uninterrupted to the time of the Buddha himself, although these histories were written nearly a thousand years after the Buddha's death. Nicholas and Paranavitana (1961: 92) contribute to Theravadin accounts in the

*Mahavamsa*⁷, a written history of Sri Lanka begun by Buddhaghosa in the 5th century BCE, inform, that within a few centuries of the Buddha's death, three Buddhist councils established the scriptural Pali canon (*Tripitaka*), and expelled heretics. To this day the Pali canon is the standard doctrinal orthodoxy for all Theravada Buddhists, as Buddhaghosa translated them from Sinhalese commentaries into Pali. According to the Theravadins, *Mahayana* Buddhism (mystic movement), which became influential in Tibet, India and the Far East, grew from other sects, different scriptures, and elaborate philosophical systems, since the religious needs of the masses had to be met.

Nicholas and Paranavitana (1961: 173) point out that, Sri Lanka, as the homeland of Theravada Buddhism and is considered to have the most ancient surviving form of the religion. The Pali *sutras* (teachings or sermons) provide the richest resources for the early history of Theravada Buddhism which include Sri Lankan historical chronicles, the *Mahavamsa* which gives accounts of the reign of Anuradhapura kings, while the *Chulavamsa* gives accounts of the reign of Polonnaruwa kings and the *Dipavamsa* gives accounts of the Kotte period as well as commentaries on the Pali *suttas* (texts). Nicholas and Paranavitana (1961: 174) demonstrate that the *Mahavamsa* was composed in the reign of King Moggallana I and was the work of the *thera* Mahanama. The old Sinhalese exegetical literature, which contained commentaries on the *vinaya* (discipline) was preserved until the tenth century and was translated into Pali by a *bhikkhu* named Buddhaghosa, and this became the Theravada canon.

Trainor (1997: 144) contends, the authority of the Buddha's teaching believed by followers of the tradition is closely intertwined with the authority of the *sangha* (members of the renunciant community) which has been the custodian of this teaching and makes it available to the lay community through *bana* (sermon) and meditating. Although the historical Buddha has passed out of the realm of *samsara* (the cycle of rebirth) and is not directly accessible, his presence, mediated through the texts, relics and images, continues to shape the behaviour of Theravada Buddhists. The Buddha's teaching was intended for all of humanity, and the goal of Buddhism is to strive earnestly to end suffering by realising the truth (enlightenment) in order to attain *nirvana* (the ultimate goal of Buddhist endeavour).

⁷ The *Mahavamsa* is primarily a dynastic and religious history. The four main themes are the visits of the Buddha, the Indo-Aryan colonisation of the island, the introduction of Buddhism and the epic of Dutugamunu. It was compiled in the sixth century by a *thera* named Mahanama (Nicholas and Paranavitana, 1961: 11-12).

Gombrich (1988: 55) maintains, that “from ancient times, the Sinhala people believed in a variety of deities as being an agricultural community, natural phenomena were closely associated with traditional rituals involving local deities”, moreover, as Obeyesekere (1966: 142) points out, some of the gods in the Sinhalese pantheon are not necessarily those found mentioned in the Theravada Pali texts, but rather local and foreign deities who have been incorporated into the pantheon. For example, the gods of the four quarters, who are important to many rural villagers, and various *Brahmas* and *nagas* are not given much prominence. As a belief system, Buddhism does not subscribe to any deities, but has in practice, absorbed whole pantheons of pre-existing deities. Some guardian deities who are considered the protectors and guardians of the Buddha *sasana* (Buddhist teaching) in Sri Lanka have major pilgrimage centres such as Kataragama (south), Saman (west), Vibhisana (east), and Gana (north), while other guardian deities such as Vishnu, Nata and Pattini are regarded as less powerful. Interestingly, Bechert (1984: 16) discusses a claim in the *Mahavamsa* that the Buddha installed Uppalavanna as the protective god over Ceylon (formally Ceylon, now known as Sri Lanka). This is a useful myth for modern governments to exercise power.

Teachings and Practice of Buddhism

Khantipalo (1977: 37) reports that it was in the Deer Park at Isipatana in Benares, the Buddha is said to have given his first sermon to five ascetics whom he had met on previous occasions. This discourse is known as setting in motion the wheel of his teachings, enunciating the middle path, formulated as the Noble Eightfold Path, and the four noble truths. Gombrich (1991: 80) explains at the centre of Buddhism are the Three Refuges or the Three Jewels, described as the Buddha, *dhamma*, and the *sangha*. A plethora of specialists such as Horner (1989), Rahula (1956), Yalman (1962); Obeyesekere (1963); Ames (1966); Malalgoda (1976); Bechert (1984); Carrithers (1984); Gombrich, (1988) and Bartholomeusz (1994) have added to these discussions on Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka. However, the Pali commentaries on the discourses of the Buddha give the enthusiastic reader of Buddhism the teachings of the master in great detail. It must be remembered that Prince Gotama used an oral teaching tradition, and that everything he is believed to have taught has been recorded in written form by followers in different historical periods.

The goals of Buddhism as taught by the Buddha, are both ultimate (*nirvana*) and proximate (a better rebirth). Ideal action in Theravada Buddhism can be described as *punna kamma* (meritorious action) and the highest stage of spiritual self-realisation is the state of *arahatship*. It is important to note that with the disappearance of the *bhikkhunis in Sri Lanka*, only high caste men can achieve *arahatship* (i.e. the highest level) while women can achieve only the level of *punna kamma*, through their meritorious behaviour!!

According to Buddhist teachings, one's actions are totally beyond the power of *kamma* (action or moral law of causation) and *samsara* (rebirth); qualities that characterise ideal behaviour and attitudes are truthfulness, generosity, loving kindness, compassion, equanimity, wisdom, and morality, to mention only a few. Rahula (1967: 11-12) states:

As the Buddha explains this famous simile in which his teaching is compared to a raft for crossing over, and not for getting hold of and carrying on one's back. "In the same manner, *bhikkhus*, I have taught a doctrine similar to a raft it is for crossing over, and not for carrying (getting hold of). You, *bhikkhus*, who understand that the teaching is similar to a raft, should give up even good things (*dhamma*); how much more should you give up evil things (*adhamma*).

Theravada Buddhism teaches the ideals of selflessness, wisdom and compassion, which are identified with the person of the Buddha and the goal of *nirvana*. It also establishes moral principles and rules necessary for social harmony.

Conversion to Buddhism requires no 'initiation ceremony', and one is considered to be a Buddhist through acceptance of the Buddha, the *dhamma* and the *sangha*. Rahula states that there is no evidence in Buddhist culture of persecution, or of the shedding of blood in converting people to Buddhism because "from the beginning, a spirit of tolerance and understanding has been one of the most cherished ideals of Buddhist culture and civilisation" (Rahula, 1967: 5).

The most frequent religious act of Buddhists is the recitation of a few lines of Pali. Generally, the women at the village of Athale recite this at least twice a day in private or in public. This is what they say:

“*Namo tassa Bhagavato arahato samma sambudhassa.* (Worship to the blessed arahat (enlightened person) truly fully enlightened. (3 times). *Buddham Saranam Gacchami.*(I go to the Buddha for refuge). *Dhammam Saranam Gacchami. Sangham saranam gacchami.*” (I go to the doctrine for refuge; I go to the order for refuge) (Cited in Gombrich, 1991:78).

A person who accepts the Three Refuges and five precepts is thereby a Buddhist layperson. A layperson may take the eight precepts, which are:

I undertake the precept to abstain from taking life.
I undertake the precept to abstain from taking what is not given.
I undertake the precept to abstain from unchastity.
This means giving up all sexual activity.
I undertake the precept to abstain from telling lies.
I undertake the precept to abstain from intoxicating liquors which occasion heedlessness.
I undertake the precept to abstain from eating at the wrong time.
I undertake the precept to abstain from seeing dancing, music, vocal and instrumental, and shows; from wearing garlands, perfumes and unguents, from finery and adornment.
I undertake the precept to abstain from high beds and big beds.
The sixth precept means no solid food after midday. Seventh means dressing in plain white, with no more ornament than maybe a bead necklace. The eighth means sitting or lying only on mats on the ground (cited in Gombrich, 1991: 78).

Traditionally it has been customary only for elderly people to observe the eight precepts. It is possible for laypersons to observe *pansil* (five precepts) on *poya* days, or the ten precepts (*dasa sil*). These latter are formed by splitting the seventh into two, and adding “I undertake the precept to abstain from accepting gold or silver,” as a tenth precept (Gombrich, 1991: 78).

Sinhala Buddhists practise their religion by observing the precepts, following the *dhamma*, meditating and by giving alms to the *sangha*. They also honour the Buddha by the offering of flowers in Buddha *puja* (offering of cooked food and water before an image of the Buddha), by paying homage to the Tooth relic of the Buddha at the Temple of the Tooth at Kandy and by the veneration of the *bo* tree which offered shelter to the Buddha when he attained enlightenment. In addition to the performance of these acts,

Buddhists may visit certain places as acts of veneration, on pilgrimage to places such as Mahiyangana, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, and Sri Pada is believed to confer merit on the devotees.

Protestant Buddhism

Protestant Buddhism has its roots in the latter half of the nineteenth century with the encounter between Sinhala society and the British Colonial power. Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988: 202) provide reasons for the development of Protestant Buddhism. A primary factor was the role played by the activities of the Protestant missionaries from the Dutch Reformed, Anglican, Methodist and Baptist churches in setting up Christian schools and converting people. This provided a stimulus for Buddhist response. Modern knowledge acquired by western education, the print media and the rise of a new educated middle class was another reason for the reaction. *Bhikkhu* Gunananda began to print replies to Christian propaganda, and this opened a dialogue between Christians and Buddhists. The most important event was a weekend debate at Panadura in 1865, a town south of Colombo, between a Christian priest and *bhikkhu* Gunananda that ended in a victory for the *bhikkhu*. Colonel Olcott⁸ of the Theosophical Society published the debates in the English papers and with the help of Madame Blavatsky (who assisted Olcott organise the Theosophical Society of New York), founded the Buddhist Theosophical Society (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 204).

Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988: 215) assert that it was Anagarika Dharmapala⁹ who promoted the relationship between the layperson and renunciant that gave rise to the *upasika/upasaka* (persons who have taken the 8 precepts, but live in the world), a status which promoted renunciation. Dharmapala campaigned against British imperialism and called on the Buddhist Sri Lankans to look to their past glory. He called on the laypersons to permeate their life with Buddhism, which became the hallmark of Protestant Buddhism. *Brahmacarin* is another title taken from the Indian past, meaning living in chastity was also encouraged by Anagarika Dharmapala.

⁸ Colonel Olcott helped rally the Buddhists by designing a Buddhist flag (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 204).

⁹ Anagarika means home-less and Dharmapala means defender of the Buddhist doctrine (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 205).

The Maha Bodhi Society was set up by Dharmapala to promote Buddhism. Gombrich and Obeyesekere, (1988: 211) state when Buddhist schools opened in the style of the Christian schools, a new English-language educated elite sprang up in Colombo. The Pali canon (Buddhist texts) was translated into English and printed by the Pali text society in London. The educated Sinhalese had access to the canon, *Jataka* ballads and other novels not in their own language Sinhalese, but in English. Some of the characteristics of Protestant Buddhism included the abandonment of the way Buddhism traditionally treated other religions and it claimed that Buddhism was not a religion but a philosophy; and it depended on and incorporated English-language concepts (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 218).

In early British colonial times, the control of education was in the hands of Christian mission schools, which were modelled on the English public school system. Gombrich and Obeyesekere, (1988: 211) write in 1880 Buddhist mission schools, sponsored by the Buddhist Theosophical Society, (founded by Anagarika Dharmapala) established more new Buddhist schools. These too, were modelled on the missionary school and teachers recruited to the Buddhist schools were educated in Christian mission schools based on Victorian-Protestant (Anglican, Methodist and Baptist) ethical ideas. A similar pattern was adopted in Buddhist schools, with the adoption of army chaplains and the formation of young men and women's Buddhist associations, Sunday schools for Buddhists, and various other types of Buddhist associations. Dharmapala initially influenced a stratum of Sinhala society consisting of the village intelligentsia, such as the village schoolmasters, village headman, ayurvedic physicians and state employees.

Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988: 206) state Anagarika Dharmapala travelled widely first to Japan, India, Burma, Thailand and Europe, and the United States. He raised an awareness of Buddhism in these countries starting a propaganda campaign, for Buddhism in the West. Christian methods such as preaching were adopted by Buddhists; Buddha statues were erected at roundabouts and important street junctions in Colombo and other major cities in Sri Lanka.

The Europeans dominated Sri Lanka by their superiority of military strength, colonial administration and material advancement. They changed all that was held dear by the Sri Lankans: their religion, their language and their very way of life. Very little seems to have been addressed by historians with regard to the religious, moral, cultural and

psychological values destroyed or influenced in the process of colonisation. The colonial occupation influenced people, that they copied western life style, forsaking their Buddhist traditions. These changes continue to affect the Sri Lankans even to this day. The Europeans introduced the consumption of beef and alcohol, the practice of cigarette-smoking and established the English-speaking class and the Sinhala-speaking class, giving rise to a divisive influence with the country after Independence. Some of the older women in the village remembered these times, and were able to talk about the changes in life styles now (This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3).

Contemporary Buddhism

With Independence in 1948, the transference of political power to the Sri Lankans can be seen as the first most important change to affect Buddhism in modern Sri Lanka. By 1956 the initial dominance of the Christian population and the ‘middle class’ decreased; and an effective transfer of power to the Sinhalese-speaking population took place and this dominance still continues. For all practical purposes, Buddhism is the State religion today and it is important to review the social and political conditions that led to this.

Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988: 223) assert how traditional Theravada Buddhism emerged as a factor, in legitimising political authority and power within society. The structure of Buddhism was transformed, and in 1948 with the advent of Independence, it was considered time for the Sri Lankans to claim their “rightful place” as rulers of the island and to re-establish the *dhamma*. The election of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike to power in 1956 is considered a turning point for Buddhism.

Smith (1972: 4) contends that the appearance of ‘Buddhist modernism’ was in response to “societies experiencing accelerated social change, and the inability of traditional religious thought forms and institutional patterns to adapt creatively to these pressures”. Modern education is much more than the simple acquisition of knowledge. The English-educated middle class had children who were studying the Sinhala language at school, while speaking English at home to their parents. Buddhist children also attended scripture lessons at school (if they attended a Christian school) and were examined in their knowledge of the Bible, with some even winning the Christianity prize. Yet they

returned home to Buddhist households. It was a case of Christianity for public life, and Buddhism for private (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 209).

Schalk (in Bartholomeusz and De Silva, 1990: 69) has used the term 'Dharmacracy', to describe what he sees as the fundamentalist views of some Buddhist *bhikkhus* in Sri Lanka which can be interpreted as the need for acceptance of Buddhism and the infusion of its values into all areas of political life. He proposes that there should be a conscious attempt to preserve continuities with the past through the words of the Buddha. Swearer (in Bartholomeusz and De Silva, 1998: 68) "relates religious fundamentalism to nationalist goals. He asserts that 'fundamentalism' is extracted from the 'sacred source texts' of Sri Lanka (myths and legends) and has been incorporated into nationalism".

Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988: 215) argue that the second most important change in modern Buddhism is the influx of people from rural areas seeking work in Colombo. This has created a situation, where a large number of impoverished persons were living in and around the cities and major towns. These were the poor villagers looking for greener pastures, and also entrepreneurs residing in Colombo who had left their villages and were now becoming alienated from their peasant society, missing their supportive kith and kin, village rituals, and local deities. Since the tradition failed to provide rituals for worshipping gods appropriate to the new social context, Hindu customs helped fill the gap. Thus, the villagers and the village entrepreneurs appealed to Kataragama, and to Kali. Ecstatic religiosity and devotion have appealed to these people from the villagers in their attempt to give some meaning to their lives.

A new type of Buddhism, which Obeyesekere (1988) labelled Protestant Buddhism, came into being after Independence, due to the rise of an educated urban middle class and the departure of British Protestant missionaries from Sri Lanka. Conservative Buddhists blame colonialism for destroying the traditional role of the *sangha*. There was much frustration among educated laypersons over the issue of how Buddhism could relate effectively to modern society. Therefore, the emergence of new patterns of authority within the Buddhist community comes as no surprise. While some stress the role of Buddhist identity as a means of political empowerment, others stress the role of Buddhist values as a means of developing a morally conscious society (Holt in Bartholomeusz and De Silva 1998: 187).

Although Dharmapala condemned belief in gods and rejected the traditional communal religion of the Sinhalese, it certainly survives among the educated middle class. Lay religiosity seems to be here to stay with lay leadership and self ordained *bhikkhus*, Sai Baba followers, emotional *Bhakti* religiosity and the worship of the goddess Kali. The focus of some modern religiosity is often concentrated in a personal deity. Smith (1972: 84) observes “that various forms of Buddhist re-interpretation are now visible as a continuity of socio-economic developments are occurring in modern life”. The active role of lay Buddhists in the propagation of Buddhism into their own hands is discussed later in this chapter.

Obeyesekere (1993: 135) argues that the teachings of the Buddha do not provide a “doctrinal justification for cultural identity, violence and intolerance of others”. He declares that the Sinhala leaders have used ‘Buddhist history’ to justify a national identity. The late President Premadasa came to power as a strong supporter of Buddhism, identifying himself with King Asoka and seeking to link his role as head of state with that of the ancient and ideal Buddhist kings. President Premadasa initiated social welfare projects that seemed to embody Buddhist values, such as the village development scheme (*gamudawa*), which was patterned after Sarvodaya’s¹⁰ village-uplift projects. He pursued policies of an open market economy which Tambiah (1992: 26) has described as ‘political Buddhism’.

Tambiah (1992) argues that Rahula, in *Heritage of the Bhikkhu* asserts the great reawakening of the *bhikkhus* and lay persons regarding current religious, social, economic and political problems. Rahula ends with a thought that “*bhikkhus* who are the ‘sons of the Buddha’, who work for the benefit of the common person, should hereafter be regarded as ‘political *bhikkhus*’” (in Tambiah, 1992: 27). Since the 1950s, politics among the Sinhalese has been dominated by an appeal to Buddhist loyalty. Buddhism has been given a special place in the nation’s series of constitutions, with each new government stopping just short of declaring it the official religion of the State. In practice however, it has functioned as such, at least publicly, for the Buddhists in power.

¹⁰ Sarvodaya at first developed as a work camp movement or *shramadana* - “giving of labour to assist others” - which attracted many people to the movement. This process begins with the individual and radiates outward through the village, the nation and the world (Bartholomeusz and de Silva, 1998: 38).

Tessa Bartholomusz (1999: 2) points out how the election of Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga as Prime Minister of Sri Lanka in 1994 was influenced by her use of religious metaphors on motherhood in her political aspirations. The theory of dependent-arising (*paticca samuppada*) gives us an insight into the President's plan of campaign. Buddhist literature contains a fair amount of veneration given to mothers, as the embodiment of responsibility, co-operation and compassion. Kumaratunga's appeal was for the people to regard the President as the living symbol of such idealized qualities. The female president can then be constructed as the all virtuous, meritorious mother of the nation, thus enshrining the merit-gaining subservient behaviour of women as ideal. She has the power to reinforce other women's oppression. The basic theme of President Kumaratunga's *Vesak* message after her election was about realizing the *Mahavamsa's*¹¹ image of Sri Lanka as the "*Dharmadeepa*" (land of righteousness). Holt (in Bartholomusz and De Silva, 1999: 194) states that some Sri Lankan Buddhists have kept alive the nineteenth century Buddhist mythic vision of the past. The revival of Buddhism contributed to the formation of a new national political consciousness. At present, Buddhism is consciously invoked by politically motivated Sinhalese to advance their own empowerment for political gain. What Sri Lanka might recover is not so much its "image as the *dhammadipa*, but its lost and more recent "image" as a model multiethnic and multireligious society" Holt (in Bartholomusz and De Silva, 1998:194).

Women's assertion of power have not only taken in the secular form that we associate with modern politics, but also involved protesting against the roles ascribed to them by religious leaders. The *dasa sil matas* of Sri Lanka have done just that, in defying the roles ascribed to them by society, they are seen as a threat by some Buddhist leaders.

New changes.

Some new monastic associations have been formed in Sri Lanka with the aim of overcoming Buddhist nationalism and implementing the Buddhist concept of universal tolerance (Bechert, 1994: 259). There are Sri Lankan *bhikkhus* and laypersons working together for change and though they are a minority, they do represent change and hope

¹¹ The efforts made by the President's government to promote Buddhism throughout the country in order to "win back our fair name as '*dharmadeepa*' in all its glory" (Holt in Bartholomusz and De Silva, 1998: 192).

to contribute towards a solution to the ethnic problem in the country. An ongoing problem between the Sinhalese and the Tamils has erupted off and on for many years. (Since the early 1980s a Tamil terrorist group asked for a separate state in the north of the country, which led to a war between the government and the terrorists). Norwegian peace brokers held talks between the government and the Tamil tigers in Thailand in August, 2002 to try to bring peace to the country.

In early Buddhism we read that women were the equals of men and it is fitting to know that one of the most important modern revivals is the tendency towards the re-assertion of women's rights in contemporary Buddhism. Other recent trends include a worldwide movement for the renewal of the *bhikkhuni* ordination in the Theravada and the Tibetan Buddhist communities. In 1998 the *bhikkhuni* order was re-established in Sri Lanka, although it is not recognised by some of the *bhikkhus*. Bartholomeusz's (1994) study of *dasa sil matas* shows that despite the controversy surrounding the contemporary *dasa sil matas* in Sri Lanka, the latter are considered to be the mothers of Buddhism, a title used by the Buddha himself (in the Mahayana tradition), and therefore highly honoured. It is a significant fact that women are allowed to participate in the preparations for the worship of the Buddha's Tooth Relic in Kandy.

The Buddhist English-educated elite felt it necessary to maintain and even elevate the *arahat* ideal. "They also wanted to create a group intermediary between lay and renunciant, but one involved in the field of social work. They hoped to replace the Christian nun working in hospitals" (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 289). However this did not happen as the new *dasa sil matas*, particularly those with a good education and higher ideals, wanted to meditate. They modelled themselves on the *vanavassi* forest *bhikkhu* (see: Appendix I plate 3) and established *vipassana* meditation centres. Some *dasa sil matas* and *bhikkhuni* I interviewed share high ideals, as seen in the following comment of Nawalapitiye Anuradha Sudharmika:

I wish to teach meditation to all the people that come here. I have discussions on the Pali sutras. Men also come for meditation lessons; this is one way I can help society. I also teach English to children and help them with their homework (Interview, 12th August, 2000).

A new focus on the renewal of the ideals of the *vanavasi bhikkhus* (who devote their life to meditation) is particularly strong in Sri Lanka. *Vippasana* meditation¹² (tranquility) has become a new type of mass meditation, which has a strong appeal to the middle class. There is an emphasis on lay religiosity which has survived from Protestant Buddhism, which states that laypersons should “...permeate his[sic] life with his Buddhism, and strive for *nibbana*” (Gombrich, 1988: 199).

There are *vanavasi bhikkhus* at the Salgala hermitage, some of whom are Europeans, and they live alone in caves or with their disciples. Their lifestyle is intended to bring about a revival of ancient practices, which have long lapsed. They are part of the phenomenon Bechert calls ‘Buddhist modernism’ (in Gombrich, 1991: 331).

***Sarvodaya* (Awakening of all)**

This is a form of teaching that developed with the impact of Protestant Buddhism, and is now called the *Sarvodaya* movement. It attempts to form a Buddhist social and economic ethic for modern Sri Lankan society (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 242). The leader, Ariyaratne, aims at both individual and national awakening, as it involves the spiritual, moral, cultural, social, political and economic elements within society. According to Ariyaratne, the concept of development relies on *dharmic* notions such as *paticca samuppada* or the inter-connectedness of all things. *Sarvodaya*’s idea of a *dhammadipa* would mean creating a government whose policies on all levels conform to the *dhamma*. His vision of a *Sarvodaya* society is based on Buddhist values - a society where a person is not ranked on account of his/her birth, but a society which accepts the humanity of all (Bartholomeusz & de Silva, 1998: 40). He appeals to the Sri Lankans to unite in bringing peace to the country by working together to achieve this. *Sarvodaya* believes that the *bhikkhu* must promote social and economic welfare and it enlisted the services of a very influential *bhikkhu*, Venerable Nanasiha. He converted the *Bhikkhu* Educational Institute into a *Sarvodaya* training institute, in order to produce a new generation of *bhikkhu* to involve them with the world.

¹² There are two types of meditation that have become popular in Sri Lanka. The principal objects of *Vippasana* are the three cardinal Buddhist principles of impermanence, sorrow, and non-self, and *Samatha* meditation is more of the yogic type, borrowed from non-Buddhist techniques of ancient India (Gombrich, 1991: 331).

Some certainly do participate in forbidden activities: "Monks at *shramadana* have been known, not only to help roll boulders, and pass buckets of dirt, but also swing the mammoth shovel in cutting a road...." (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988: 253-254).

This is seen as a definite violation of the *vinaya* rules. This is a change that could not have been anticipated by the laity nor the *sangha*. An ardent *Sarvodaya* advocate from the USA, Joanna Macy (in Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 254) argues that the role of the *bhikkhu* should not be modelled on Buddha and the *arahats*, but on the Mahayana tradition of the compassionate *Bodhisattva*, who postpones his salvation, for the welfare of the people. The ideal of the Sinhala Theravada Buddhists is to reach for the ideal of *arahat*.

Religious Organisation: Ritual

Symbols and institutions, places and objects of worship that centred on the community inspired veneration at the wider social level. The *bo* tree and the *cetiya*s (*stupa*) in which the *dhatu* (relics) of the Buddha were enshrined became symbols of political unity. The Tooth Relic which was brought to Sri Lanka was kept in a shrine within the royal precincts. Relics have always followed close upon the spread of the doctrine; the arrival of the Buddha's begging bowl, his right collarbone¹³, and a branch of the sacred *bo* tree are some of the relics that are enshrined in Sri Lanka.

The Buddhists venerate the Buddha at the festival of the Tooth¹⁴ Relic that was sent from India. It is celebrated as a festival with all rituals attendant on the occasion of its public exposition (Malalgoda, 1976: 13-14). Tourists come to see this procession from all parts of the world. Trainor (1997: 18-21) states that "relic veneration practice started because it was the Buddha's wish that his relics be distributed, a wish said to have been expressed by the Buddha at the time he entered *nirvana*". This is a very useful myth! used by politicians. Sri Lanka does boast of important Buddha relics.

¹³ King Asoka sent the Buddha's begging bowl and some of his bones, of which the right collar bone was enshrined at Ceylon's [sic] first stupa, the Thuparama, at Anuradhapura (Gombrich, 1991: 34).

Temple festivals are the highlights of religious life while also providing entertainment for the villages. Evers (1972: 68) describes four annual temple festivals, beginning with the new year festival in April, the important temple festivals such as the *Vesak/Wesak* (the anniversary of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death) in May and the *Poson* festival in June to celebrate *bhikkhu* Mahinda's arrival in Ceylon (as it was then known). The procession for the Tooth Relic is celebrated in Kandy (*Asala Perahara*) in August-September and the festival of Lights (*kacci* or *Kartika mangalaya*) takes place in October-November. The Theravada Buddhist aspect of this festival is that it signifies the end of the rainy season retreat for *bhikkhus* by the *vinaya* rules. The presentation of robes to the *bhikkhus* (*Kathina pinkama*) also takes place and small oil lamps are lit at all *aramayas*, *dagabas*, and by the *Bo* trees. The New Rice Festival is celebrated in January. This is a State ritual, and the timing is determined by the *Duruthu* full moon day of the Buddhist calendar. This takes place after the Hindu festival of *Thai Pongal* (a harvest festival). *Buddavandana* (venerating the Buddha) is the process by which Buddhists call to mind the greatness of their guide and teacher. This act of reverence is in the thoughts, speech and deeds of the devotees when they meditate on the virtues of the Buddha. The offering of flowers before a Buddha image is a common sight, especially on *poya* days in Sri Lanka. Devotees both young and old light lamps or burn incense while meditating on the Buddha, the *dhamma* and the *sangha* (Gombrich, 1988: 73).

Buddhists at all the temples celebrate the *Vesak* poya day by observing *pan sil* (five), *ata sil* (eight precepts), or *dasa sil* (ten). *Dane* (cooked food) is brought to the temple by those who do not participate in *sil*. The laity partakes of the food after the *sangha* have eaten their meal.

The *bhikkhus* as members of the *sangha* at one time walked the streets of the village, going from house to house with an alms bowl for their *dane*. Today, the villagers take the *dane* to the temple or the *aramaya*. *Bhikkhus* are expected to be celibate; hence celibacy was a convenient state for their role, since a man without a family could live and travel as he pleased, and the wandering stranger received a welcome from householders. The villagers gained merit by making donations to a holy man and by

¹⁴ During the reign of King Mahasena (334-361 BCE) the famous tooth relic was sent from India but arrived after the king's death. This relic became the palladium for Sinhalese royalty until the British conquest of Kandy in 1815 (Gombrich, 1991: 35).

feeding and ministering to him. Ames (1966: 30) has discussed reciprocal transactions and non-reciprocal transactions in detail. A non-reciprocal transaction, for example, would include offerings made to the Buddha (Buddha *Pujava* or *vandima-pidima*), or the giving of material goods. To perform this act of worship *bhikkhus* and laity go before a Buddha statue, pay homage and then present offerings of flowers, vegetables, rice and curries. The purpose is to show reverence to the Buddha and to symbolise renunciation. Its purpose is not to influence the recipient, but to improve one's own merit. Villagers enshrine a Buddha statue (*Buduge*) in the home and they participate in this ritual morning or evening. Obeyesekere (1972: 66) argues that the *Buduge* idea was popularised, if not introduced, by Anagarika Dharmapala.

Merit is also earned by the giver's own actions, such as paying respect to one's parents and elders (*garu kirima*) as well as to the needy. According to Obeyesekere (1966:15-16) in the Buddhist practice of worship, the villagers performed daily rituals before an image of the Buddha, and performed rituals for the gods collectively after harvest. Demons were propitiated during sickness. These rituals commence with homage to the Buddha, the *dhamma* and the *sangha*.

Obeyesekere (1966: 22) has discussed local folk deities and local beliefs and how they differ from village to village. These have all been incorporated into a Buddhist framework. For example, in the village of Rammbadenitya, the *Bandara Deiyo* (lesser god) ritual called '*Adukku*' is essentially a ceremony of first fruits. Each villager brings a handful of rice from the new harvest together with coconuts and *Jaggerry* (a sweet made from the coconut sap) for use in preparing the god's feast. Then each partakes of the meal at the conclusion of the ritual. This also serves as an occasion for making vows to *Bandara Deiyo* (a local deity).

A rule in the village excluded women from participating in the *Adukku*, a rule, which validates the social inferiority of women and defines their inferior status in the social structure. It also validates the status distinction between the two major castes in the village, Goyigama and Dura. Yet, there was no caste division of labour. All castes in the village assisted in the performance of *adukku* (Obeyesekere, 1966:18).

This was a serious contradiction of the Buddha's teaching as he offered equality to all. However, this rule has changed and today the women are aware that they are not the

cause of pollution. Education has given them the opportunity to question these rituals. It was also a serious attempt at displaying power on the part of religious specialists.

A special ritual which Obeyesekere (1966:19) has cited is the *Vadi Perahera*, or 'procession of the *Veddhas* (the aboriginal inhabitants of Sri Lanka)', which is performed at Mahiyangana, close to the ancient capital of Anuradhapura. The Buddha was accepted by the *Veddah* community as a supreme being and treated like a superior deity. *Veddah* religion was radically different from Sinhalese religion. This religion was connected to Skanda and Saman. The *veddah* community has now been integrated into the rest of the community.¹⁵ These are the Hindu connections from the past.

Ames (1966: 32) states, the purpose of a pilgrimage by the villagers was to offer gifts to the gods (*deviyas*). The intent of the ritual is quite the reverse of non-reciprocal transactions. The purpose of the ritual is specifically to fulfil or terminate a contract made previously. If the request was granted, a special offering was made to the gods; if not, the villager did nothing. Petitioners offer flowers, a tray of food and recite hymns or ballads in honor of the *deviyas*. Sometimes they even hire a medium (*Kapurala*) or priest to present the offerings and perform the recitations on their behalf. This action could be compared to giving a bribe to someone superior. It is customary first to pay homage to the Buddha, then to go to the *devalaya* (spirit temples) to propitiate the *Deviya*. *Devala pujas* are performed at spirit shrines attached to Buddhist temples. *Graha deviyas* (planetary deities) and *yakuma* (exorcist rite) are all-night song and dance festivals in which *balibili* and *dola* are given to the *graha deviyas* and *yakas*. Highly skilled dancers and magicians are enlisted to exorcise one *yaka* (Ames, 1966:33-34). The followers of the Buddha incorporated rituals such as the worship of *yaksas* and *nagas* into their worship. Many of the old concepts and beliefs were adopted into the Buddhist system by the followers of Buddhism, but with a new meaning.

¹⁵ The *veddahs* (71 of them) carrying poles representing spears line up near the *devale* of saman, led by a chief carrying a bow and arrow. After circumambulating the *devale* three times in a graceful dance, the *veddhas* suddenly increase the tempo of their dance at a signal from the chief, and start yelling and brandishing their 'spears', frightening the assembled spectators. They stage several battles in front of the *devale* and assaulted the *devale* by striking their spears on the steps. They run toward the *vihare* and try to enter the premises of the *dagoba*, where the Buddha relics are enshrined. Two of the *devale* watchers block the path, the *veddahs* then place the spears against the *dagoba* in worship and run towards the *bhikkhus'* residence. They go the river, bathe and purify themselves and return to the *devale*. The *kapurala* chants incantation to Saman and Skandha (Obeyesekere, 1966: 19-20).

Gombrich (1991: 47) asks the question:

“Is Sinhalese Buddhism orthodox or syncretistic?” If it is orthodox, then is the Buddhism in the village today similar to the Buddhism which was practiced by the villager 2,500 years ago? If it is syncretistic, then most Sinhalese Buddhists believe gods and demons exist and make offerings to them under various circumstances.

Deities and gods have always been part of the Sinhalese pantheon and Obeyesekere (1966) has discussed this in great detail. Buddhism has always acknowledged Hindu gods’. Gombrich (1991:5) states “Supernatural beings were part of the Buddha’s universe as they are part of a Buddhist villager’s universe today”. Obeyesekere (in Bechert, 1994: 256) argues that “Buddhists have the freedom to construct a Buddhist economic and social ethic suited to the age. It has been proposed that such constructions should be in conformity with or at least not in contradiction to, the teaching of the Buddha”. However, Bechert (1994: 256) argues that Buddhist modernists have tended to rely on their own interpretation of the Buddha’s word and have never been able to achieve any reasonable degree of consensus concerning its social, political and economic ideas, although traditional Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka has been in a position to achieve all of this. While modernists generally belong to the highly educated and modernised urban elite, Bechert argues that a Buddhist revival could only succeed as a political force if it had the support of the rural masses (Bechert, 1994: 257). This has been demonstrated in Sri Lanka as well as in Burma. Although themes of power, caste, purity and pollution still exist in Sri Lanka and other Asian Buddhist countries, the new Buddhist countries in the west are rid of these ideas, but need to get Buddhism established and be the conscience of humanity.

Although scriptural Buddhism has no concern with ritual pollution, Sinhalese religion can hardly be understood without the notion of purity and pollution, which is connected to power and inequality. The religious organisation of Sinhalese temples - the *vihare* as well as *devala* is affected by the cultural theme of pollution (*killa*) as discussed by Evers (1972: 61-62). Some rituals are performed by a *bhikkhu* of the highest caste and assisted by people of the same caste. The *Siyam Nikaya* ordains only members of the *goyigama* caste. However there was no room within the Buddha’s community for the caste system or slavery. The Buddha did not preach against the social inequality of his time: he merely declared its irrelevance to salvation (Evers, 1972: 98). If the *sangha* were following the Buddha’s teachings, they would not consider themes of pollution or

importance of caste. It is written that the Buddha did not consider these aspects important for achieving the ultimate goal of *nirvana*. This seems once again to be an idea of the *bhikkhus*, based on issues of power. They consider themselves pure, and women and others of lower castes to be impure. In the Jataka stories, the woman is represented as enjoying exactly the same position of equality. “A Mother like a sire should be with reverend honour crowned” (in Horner: 1989: 9).

Role of the *Sangha*

It is important to discuss the role of the *sangha*, as the Buddha is reputed to have given them special instructions. The Buddha told his disciples:

Bhikkhus, the aim of the religious life is not to gain material profit, not to win veneration, nor to reach the highest morality, nor to be capable of the highest mental concentration. *Bhikkhus*, the ultimate end of the religious life is the unshakable liberation of the mind. This is the essence. This is the goal (in Wijeratne 1990: 156).

Gombrich (1988: 316) states that the Buddhist *bhikkhu* is the symbol of the great detachment preached by the Buddha. Instilling high moral and social values into the lives of the people has always been an important preoccupation in the life of the *bhikkhu*. The core of the strength of Buddhism in Sri Lanka has been the Buddhist renunciant community: the *sangha*. However, this service of the *bhikkhu* is becoming a story of the past and it would seem they have lost their forcefulness and influence in society. One reason for this may be the *sangha*'s lack of preparation for the rapidly growing forces of secularism and materialism. The *bhikkhu* has not been able to counteract the secular thinking that has been introduced by modern means of communication such as television, radio, and print media. Neither has the *bhikkhu* been able to keep up with the modern education levels to the same extent as the laity. Gombrich (1988: 317) indicates, two of the (oldest) present Buddhist *pirivenas* founded in 1873 (Vidyodaya) and 1875 (Vidyalankara), modelled on monastic schools and universities of ancient times, were given University status in the 1960s. However, they have no official religious affiliation and have become secularised. In 1966, the Vidyodaya University admitted women for the first time and continues to do so. The Buddhist and Pali University is new and admits men and women. The *dasa sil matas* are able to be educated there.

Malalgoda (1976: 87) states, in theory “Buddhist *sangha* were ‘casteless’, for caste is a social category, therefore of no relevance to those who had renounced the society. Yet, in practice, this ideal was rarely realized”. Sinhalese society was based on the institution of caste (an influence from Hindu India). It is no surprise that the three *nikayas* (organisational groupings of the *sangha* in Sri Lanka) reflect a split mainly along caste¹⁶ lines. The *siyam nikaya* is the sect of the Kandyan (hill) country; it is the oldest *nikaya* and its origin dates back to 1753. Gombrich (1991: 361) points out how it “carries on the old tradition whereas the other two *nikayas* have imported some customs from Burma”. The yellow robe¹⁷ is worn over one shoulder only by the *siyam nikaya sangha*. The *amarapura* and the *ramanna nikayas* are predominant in the low country. Both shoulders are covered by those who belong to these two *nikayas*. The *amarapura* was founded in 1800 when some *bhikkhus* were expelled from the *siyam nikaya* (Malalgoda, 1976: 145). The *ramanna* is the more recent branch and was founded in 1864 by a desire to follow the teachings of the Buddha to the letter, thereby hoping to restore the primitive castelessness of *sangha* and also castelessness among the laity (Gombrich, 1988: 360). A *bhikkhu* from this last *nikaya* preached *bana* to the people of the *rodi* caste (low caste) and this is seen as a step in the right direction by some *sangha* and some of the laity. The *bhikkhus* are rather embarrassed to talk about caste, as the Buddha did preach equality. However, these days, caste is not a deterrent to persons wishing to join the *sangha*. As a *bhikkhu* of the *ramanna nikaya* in the village said:

The Buddha was very much against the caste system. There were many castes in his time in India. When the Buddha became enlightened, he welcomed men and women of all castes to join the Sangha, and, he established the bhikkhu, bhikkhuni, lay woman and layman. When Mahinda and Sangamitta came they brought a retinue of followers, which consisted of all castes. We are wrong to judge a person by his caste. At this aramaya, we welcome all (Interview, 31st July, 2000).

When Independence was granted to Sri Lanka in 1948, Sinhalese society consisted of a small urbanised and English-educated middle class and a large traditional peasantry. Two types of *sangha* existed at this time. The *sangha* were recruited predominantly

¹⁶ Basic information on the formation of *nikayas* in the 19th century and their caste connections are presented by Dr. K. Malalgoda (1976) in his book *Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900*.

from the rural areas. Gombrich (1988:315) states, the *sangha* who progressed to Colombo for further education, were exposed to the views of lay intellectuals like Malalasekera and Jayatilleke, who were influenced by Anagarika Dharmapala. The *gramavasin* (village *sangha*), lived in an *aramaya*, were supported by the village people, or lived as *vanavasin* (forest dwelling) *sangha*.

Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988: 227) report educated lay Buddhists took over the leadership role that had once belonged to the *sangha*. Lay leadership had the same effect as in Christianity, that of sect formation. A Buddhist sermon (*Bana*) had been one of the main activities of the *sangha* from the Buddha's day. The *sangha* were criticised unless they actively involved themselves with pastoral activities. Christian influence was seen in the creation of Buddhist chaplains to positions in prisons, hospitals, military establishments and there was even the formation of a Buddhist mission to seamen. This was a radical change for the *sangha* of Sri Lanka. Protestant Buddhism influenced the educated laymen and educated *bhikkhus*. Some liberal Buddhists claimed that you did not have to call yourself a Buddhist to follow the Buddha's way. Just as Buddhism changed in the hands of the urban middle class, the spirit religion (devotion to the gods and deities) has changed in the hands of the urban poor.

In the late 1950s people began to question whether a *bhikkhu* should take a salaried job. This was contrary to the *vinaya*. It was argued by Protestant Buddhists that the *vinaya* should be adapted to modern times. The salary has given the *sangha* an economic freedom, which they did not previously have, and thus they do not feel the need to be attached to temples. This is a change that was not anticipated. Some university-educated *bhikkhus* at village temples are very frustrated with the current situation. A *bhikkhu* at Weheragoda said:

The government should support the bhikkhus, and help safeguard the teachings of the Buddha. Only Rs.1700 is given towards pirivena education, The Buddhist society sends useless books that are very old and not relevant to the Praccina examinations. A good education for the bhikkhu is necessary if the teachings are to survive. The worldbank will not give aid to Sri Lanka if the government

¹⁷ The robe worn over one shoulder denotes membership of the *Siyam nikaya*, which was brought from Siam (modern Thailand), and of the *goyigama* caste. The other two *nikayas* were brought to Sri Lanka from Burma (Gombrich, 1991:358-370).

is seen as supporting the sangha. This is a plot against Buddhism by the Christians (Interview, July 31st, 2000).

Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988: 229) state it is still very rare for the *sangha* to have jobs other than teaching. The Ven. Prof. Dr. Sri Rahula Maha Thera was the first Vice Chancellor at Vidyalankara University. A young *bhikkhu* named Nakulugamuve Sumana, who was completing his law degree, applied to enrol as an attorney at law. A bench of judges rejected his application on the grounds that he was improperly dressed: he was dressed as a *bhikkhu*.

The introduction of free education from primary school to university level has opened up opportunities to many people. Unfortunately, however, Sri Lanka did not have a future plan for those who obtained university degrees. The present government of 2002 has tabled a proposal to charge fees for higher studies at universities. The *bhikkhus* demonstrated outside parliament to show their dissension ("Fees", 2001), thereby contradicting the role of the *bhikkhu*.

The traditional Sinhala wedding was a secular affair. The bride's uncle performed the ceremony, and the couple stood on a *poruwa* (dais/raised platform) decorated with coconuts, rice and betel leaves. In Colombo, it has now become popular for the *sangha* to be involved by reciting *pirit* and giving a blessing to the couple. This is certainly a custom that has been taken from the Christians, where a priest is always present at a marriage ceremony. Gombrich and Obeyesekere state:

Monks [sic] now bless and officiate at all kinds of undertakings. They are found at the opening of Parliament, at the inauguration of a new bus depot. Radio Ceylon's [sic] broadcast begins by chanting *pirit* and a short sermon by a *bhikkhu*. They also chant *pirit* before the fire walking ceremony at the Kataragama festival. This represents a wish to Buddhicize not merely ordinary secular enterprises but even the activities of the spirit religion (1988: 227).

In the Pali canon it is stated that land was to be given as gifts to the *sangha*. This was usually unproductive land, such as a forest or a park. Since material wealth was given to the *sangha*, a category of lay people was given the task of looking after their affairs. Carrithers (1984: 136) claims that "the *bhikkhus* were given a status very much like that of lay lords. Land holding however tended generally to draw the *sangha* closer to the laity in attitude and social position, to domesticate the *sangha*, to render it no longer in

any sense, ‘homeless’”. The holding of considerable property by monasteries and the custom of passing pupillary succession to a relative so that he inherits monastery property are changes that have taken place. “The *sangha* has become Lords and heirs of vast estates, encompassing not only land and villages, but also irrigation reservoirs, canals and plantations. The *bhikkhus*, have become embroiled in the political economy of the country” (Carrithers, 1984: 136).

The *Sangha* and Politics

Gombrich (1991: 253) declares, that historical records indicate that the *sangha* has been involved with politics since the time of King Duttugemeunu (161-137 BCE), who went to war against a Tamil invader, and invited the *sangha* to accompany him and give their blessings. Accepting his invitation, the *sangha* told him “only one and a half human beings have been killed. A Buddhist and a partly converted Buddhist. They did this to justify blood shed in the name of Buddhist nationalism” (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 429). *Bhikkhus* became involved in politics especially in times of national peril; indeed this tradition was so ingrained in the people that they expected the *bhikkhus* to guide them in their decisions. This set a pattern that was to persist throughout history in Sri Lanka and continues to this day.

Seneviratne (1999: 273) asserts that many of the *bhikkhus* he interviewed while researching did not consider it wrong for *bhikkhus* to get involved in politics. In the period from 1970-1988 many *bhikkhus* even participated in protests; with the influx of liberal, socialist and Marxist views from the west, a wider education was being offered to the *sangha*, and with influences from ‘Protestant Buddhism’ a new type of *bhikkhu* emerged. The ‘political *bhikkhu*’ by prestige and personal ties is able to influence governments and appears on political platforms. Since Independence, especially after 1956, the *sangha* have been known to campaign for their personal supporters. The *sangha*’s political responsibilities and with it their social responsibilities, have been extended. A *bhikkhu* contested the national state assembly in 1977 but the public did not support him and he lost his election deposit (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 229). This was something that had never happened before and is a result of the changes made by the *sangha*. Venerable Nanaloka expressed fears, “*Bhikkhus* have fallen due to Politics. They lose their position of respect by participating in politics this way. We

should not be in particular parties. Politicians try to use *bhikkhus* to gain political advantage” (in Bartholomuesz and De Silva, 1998: 57).

The *sangha* is composed of two divisions: the village *sangha*, which consists of *granthadhura* (preachers), teachers and scholars; and the *sangha*, which consists of ascetics, meditators and *vanavasi* (forest dwellers). Meditation has become a special vocation, and an alternative to the established village *sangha*. Other types of the *sangha* range from the landed incumbents of the Kandyan monastic estate to the English-speaking scholars in the universities, to young *bhikkhus* in village temples. Carrithers asserts “...*bhikkhus* do not practice the *uposatha* recital, the *partimokka* is almost wholly unknown to many village *bhikkhu*” (1983:142). The traditional Sinhala adage “the country exists for the sake of the religion...” no longer seems relevant to political Buddhists. The “religion exists for the sake of those aspiring to control the state” may in fact be more accurate (Holt in Bartholomeusz and de Silva, 1998: 189).

***Vanavasi* (Forest Dwellers)**

Vanavassi ‘Forest dwellers’ (the ascetic option) is mentioned from about the sixth century BCE. During the reign of King Parakramabahu the first, the division of *bhikkhus* into *gamavasino* (village dwellers) and *vanavasi* (forest dwellers) seems to have become institutionalised. These labels reflect the lifestyle of the *bhikkhus* (Gombrich, 1991: 315). The individual with a vocation for the *vanavasi* (forest dwellers) life goes off to live in the forests and he lives in a simple *gal len* (stone cave) away from densely inhabited areas (see: Appendix I plate 13.1). Does he reflect the tradition of the renouncer or the Brahmin Gombrich (1988) asks? In Sri Lanka, even the deepest forest-dwelling Theravada *bhikkhu* is no wanderer, because the laity showers him with food and other comforts. The *vanavasi* (‘forest dweller’) survived Parakramabahu’s re-organisation of the *sangha* (Carrithers, 1983: 171). The ‘village-dwelling’ *bhikkhu* normally resides far from the village, with his *aramaya* built on high ground where possible. In a clearing of land, medicinal plants, herbs and spices and vegetables are grown. The villagers look after the *bhikkhus*’ needs. This was seen at the Athale *aramaya*. Below the rocks, herbs and medicinal plants were grown (see: Appendix I plate 2.1). The village women made sure the *bhikkhus* were fed, by organising themselves on a roster basis to supply *dane*. Suneela said:

We give a dane to everyone at the aramaya every January 1st; that is in addition to the rostered days. This has become the custom now. I get help from my friends. It is quite prestigious for us. We give the bhikkhus robes too. Some people in the village are jealous (Irisiya), as we get the respect of the bhikkhus and the people (Interview, 19th July, 2000).

The villagers supply the material for the robes, by collecting money from each family before the rainy season. One of the resident *bhikkhus* at the *aramaya* does the sewing. All Theravada *bhikkhus* share the same *patimokkha* (*bhikkhus'* confessional code), but they differ over its interpretation of *vinaya* (Buddhist discipline) matters not covered by the code, which are enforced by the three *nikayas*. However, some *vanavasi* hermitages do not recognise any of them (Gombrich, 1991: 315). In 1968, *vanavasi bhikkhus* received government recognition to form their own *nikaya*. The Salgalla hermitage was founded in 1934 by Kukulnape Devarakkita, who was a scholar associated with the Vidodaya University. D.S. Senanayaka, Sri Lanka's first prime minister, and a leading politician, Sri Nissanka, were instrumental in the founding of Salgalla. Carrithers (1983: 175) asserts, "In such a climate, we can see how Maha Kassapas' mixture of forest-dwelling ascetics and religious politics, mingled with the pious Buddhist nationalism attributed to King Parakramabahu". Part of the hermitage was to be a regular centre for training temple *bhikkhus* and part of it was for training a generation of *vanavasi* to restore the ideals of asceticism in Sri Lanka. Modern Sri Lankans are quite happy to visit the local *aramaya*, give *dane* and listen to *bana* preached by their local *bhikkhu*. Yet, once a year they go to Salgalla or one of the other *vanavasi* (forest *bhikkhus*) to give alms and listen to these pious *bhikkhus* preaching. According to Carrithers, "one had to book one year in advance to offer food to the *bhikkhus* at Salgalla; the *arahat* ideal is still the index of religiosity" (Carrithers, 1983: 323).

Self-ordained *Bhikkhus*

Carrithers (1973: 104) says in 1954, on the wave of religious enthusiasm for the Buddha Jayanthi celebrations¹⁸ (2500 years of Buddhism), many enthusiasts took to the streets with simplistic ideas about the life of renunciation. They were called '*Tapasayo*' (self-ordained ascetics). Subodhananda, a fully ordained *bhikkhu* renounced his robes and

¹⁸ The Buddha Jayanthi celebrations extended for one year in 1956 (Carrithers, 1983: 219)

ordained himself as a Buddhist ascetic. There was also an increase in the number of women renunciants as a result of the Buddha *Jayanthi* celebrations.

Tapasa Himi, from Vabada, and his followers, represented the most spectacular religious manifestation of that time. Carrithers (1983: 104-123) has dealt with asceticism in the streets, in the course of discussing the different paths of asceticism. Tapasa Himi was born on January 29th, 1934, exactly nine months after the death of Anagarika Dharmapala, the great modernist Buddhist hero. Tapasa Himi claimed he was the reincarnated Anagarika Dharmapala, and frequented a hermitage near his home at Maligatanna. It was here that he met Anadasiri, a young *bhikkhu*, who was well versed in Pali and in the traditions of the *sangha*. Tapasa Himi set up his abode at the cemetery, which was known and feared by everyone in the village. He did not have a begging bowl, so a woman made him a bowl out of a water pot. His sermons were directed at abuses within the religious establishment. Anadasiri and Tapasa Himi published a magazine called *Sasana Parihaniya* (Decline of Buddhism). Although this movement did not last long, it gave a message to the Kandyan aristocrats to reform the *sangha*. In a subtle way, the *dasa sil matas* are sending a message to the Kandyan establishments of Malwatta and Asgiriya to look into the practice of renunciant women.

Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988: 36) suggest that the most striking change in the urban Sinhala religious scene has been the widespread acceptance of 'possession' as something positive (see chapter 4). A woman in charge as a *kapurala* (medium) in temples is a new concept. Have women's liberation and feminism played a part in it? Or has change been accelerated by social and economic changes, and the inability of traditional religious thought forms to adapt to the various pressures of modern life? Membership is acquired by participation and not by formal initiation ceremonies. For modern devotees, the figure statue of the Buddha seems inadequate to fulfill their emotional needs. Some of these leaders practise *samatha* meditation, and the practise of going into a trance, evoking the help of powerful deities usually, Kataragama, Kali or Huniyam (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 41). All these leaders seem to think they are propagating Buddhism, as Buddha has a place in their teachings. They all claim special insight into religious matters and claim to be the 'true Buddhists.' Socio-economic trends seem to play an important part in these sects. The economic downturn of the country plays a major role in people resorting to the above methods. It is also a

quick and easy way to earn money in difficult times. The majority of the women call themselves ‘*maniyo*’ (mother) and come from poorer classes.

Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988: 57) question a new trend in urban areas, the popularity of the goddess Kali, the terrible goddess whose lolling tongue drips blood. Sinhalese, who are mostly Buddhists, have taken the cult of Kali from the Tamil Hindus. Kali was primarily appeased for vengeance. Since recent times Kali’s role has been generalized, to resolve interpersonal conflicts such as marriage break down, job satisfaction, prosperity. It is estimated that an overwhelming number of people came to the Kali shrine at Munnessarama and other shrines to gods, which until recently were considered the cultural property of the Tamil Hindus (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 143). The ecstatic devotion has some of the educated Buddhists rather worried about this situation, which is quite untraditional for Sinhalese Buddhists. Professor Randeniya of Buddhism and Pali at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, had this to say:

How can Buddhists live in such a society? By invoking Kali, Buddhist worship is getting degraded. Asking demons to help one prosper, is not the correct thing to do. Kali is being appeased today with Kiriammalage dane (Interview, 18th Aug, 2000).

This particular *dane*, which is given to mothers who have breast fed, is usually given after an epidemic. Kali is a very powerful female figure in Hindu culture and near the original mother goddess. Therefore it is easy to see that she is becoming popular as her vitality is very attractive to the oppressed.

Another new trend in Colombo is the popularity of Sai Baba among the middle classes. This is a communal kind of religion, where people of different religions meet for worship through the religious emotion of *bakhti* (religious devotion), although the majority of the people are Buddhists. Gombrich (1988: 206) states “the displacement of the *sangha* from the position of authority in spiritual matters has driven professionals, intellectuals and businessmen to decide for themselves on religious matters, following the advice of their meditation teacher, often a lay man or even the Indian guru Sai Baba”.

Female Renunciants

The laity supports the growing interest of educated women to establish *aramayas* for the *dasa sil matas* who could uphold the great Theravada tradition established by the Buddha. The spirituality of the women was visible in their intentions to seek a higher morality and not become mere social workers involved in worldly affairs. A new community of renunciant has been established in Sri Lanka. These issues will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

Conclusion

This chapter has recognised various issues pertaining to the changes that have taken place in Buddhism in Sri Lanka. The educated laity has taken over teaching meditation from the *bhikkhu*. Where possible, examples have been given and arguments by different scholars on the subject discussed.

The conclusion reached through this chapter is that Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism is still preserved in the hearts and minds of Sri Lankans. Individuals have brought some change into various practices. This element is normal and has always been present throughout history. Some new developments to the *sangha* are seen as necessary if one is to preserve the close association between the *sangha* and the laity. Carrithers (1983), in documenting the contemporary *vanavasi* movement, has shown what this great *vanavasi* tradition means to its practitioners, and that somewhere in the island the best in the Theravada tradition is preserved. The reforms of Anagarika Dharmapala (founder of the *Maha Bodhi Society*), Col. Olcott's visit to Sri Lanka, the rise of Protestant Buddhism and reforms of Buddhism have brought significant changes to the practice of Buddhism, changes which are seen today. Buddhism has appealed to non-Asians and reciprocally, Christian social service ideals are adopted.

In 1948, with Independence, it was time for the Sri Lankans to once again claim their rightful place as rulers of the island and to re-establish the *dhamma* after many years of foreign rule. Buddhism emerged as a factor of legitimisation of political authority and power within society and has continued to be. With free education, *bhikkhus* entered

national universities and supported left-wing politics. The 'political *bhikkhu*' emerged, and established his niche and his right to participate in politics. The economic situation of the country has influenced the way people practised Buddhism. The urban poor have brought significant changes to bear upon their practice of Buddhism. However, the leaders have failed to use the teachings of Buddhism for the benefit of all Sri Lankans and continue to reinforce the traditional caste structure in which women have limited power. A few individuals still support the 'Mahavamsa view' for their own benefit.

Efforts made by lay Buddhists to make religion relevant to the contemporary world have been presented by Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988), who argue in their discussions that some of the changes represent a break from the past. Bond (1988), however, sees many of the developments as authentic reinterpretations of Theravada Buddhism. Tambiah (1992) developed a different approach in 'Buddhism Betrayed'. He argues that the Buddhist *bhikkhu* actively engaged in politics and openly preached Sinhala Buddhist anti-Tamil propaganda, which is in contradiction to the teachings of the Buddha. There are rules linked in doctrinal terms to the *bhikkhu*'s vocation, which advocate non-violence, and a distancing from all forms of taking life and inflicting injury.

The efforts of Protestant Buddhism can be seen in contemporary developments, especially within the middle class. The rise of the *dasa sil matas* and recent interest in the *bhikkhuni sangha* are new developments. The socioeconomic problems of contemporary Sri Lanka have given rise to the rapid increase in the popularity of lay meditation. The *Sarvodaya* movement sought to follow an idealistic vision of a 'no affluence, no poverty' society. The leader, Ariyaratne, claimed that *Sarvodaya* is not interested in a Sinhala-Buddhist identity, but in a Sri Lankan, or even a global, identity. Christianity has also contributed to change as *bhikkhus* and *dasa sil matas* became social workers, visited the sick and baby sat children while parents were at work, and in some instances, visited people in jails.

Although historical Buddhism portrayed itself as being free from caste, sectarian or communalistic tendencies still go on. Since independence, people of different castes have joined the *sangha*. There has been a great increase in the political and social activities of Buddhist *bhikkhus* during the modern period. The god cults of Sri Lanka

belong to the heritage of the national Sinhalese tradition. Obeyesekere (1972) has discussed how the cult of Kataragama is being used as a political struggle.

As the Buddha himself philosophised “...as the sea has only one taste, that of salt, so this teaching and discipline has only one taste: that of release” (Piyadassi, 1991:406).

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCHING RURAL WOMEN IN A SRI LANKAN VILLAGE

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi said:

To call women the weaker section is a libel; it is man's injustice to women. If by strength is meant brute strength, then indeed is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably superior to man. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with women (in Narasimhan, 1999: 94).

This chapter examines the theoretical and practical aspects of the research. It includes the fieldwork at Athale village, methods used for data gathering, women's struggles against gender disadvantages, rural women's work, marriage practices, injustices due to colonialism, land occupation and land ownership, changes in education and how women confronted difficulties. The impact of Buddhism in women's daily lives and the changes will be presented. The discussion includes liberal feminist writings and the concept of power relations, relevant to the village. For my study of gender issues in Athale village, I discuss some of the problems faced when researching non-feminist women. The women of Athale or Punsisigama were not influenced by the government's programme 'women in development', unlike their counterparts in urban areas¹⁹.

The two villages of Athale and Punsisigama differ in terms of size and stability of population and period of settlement: while Athale is an ancient village and therefore

¹⁹ The idea pioneered by Ester Boserup's book "Woman's Role in Economic Development" (1970). The rural economy revolved around rice paddy cultivation. Rice farming is not merely a livelihood it is considered a way of life. In the historical past Sri Lanka was self sufficient in food and referred to as the "Granary of the East". With the advent of colonial rule farming in the Dry zone was neglected and food had to be imported (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 1998: 94).

more established, Punsisigama is a new village and in the process of becoming established. Punsisigama was easily accessible, as new roads were cut to it, while Athale did not have very many roads, but mostly bush tracks, and was difficult to access. This however, did not prevent my visiting any of the homes. Many of the inhabitants of Athale (see Appendix I plate 4) are of longstanding families who are descendants of original settlers, whereas the Punsisigama villagers are more recent settlers established by the *gam udawe* (colonisation scheme) in 1988. The government helped settle families in this area by giving each family an acre of land and building materials to construct a small house.

We did not have a house like this before. We lived in a small hut made out of mud; the roof was covered with coconut palm leaves. My parents, brothers and sisters lived in one big room. The kitchen was outside. We had to use the communal toilet. Things are quite different today: my children can have some comfort, if we can find work, and life can improve. Since the NGO's representatives have worked in the village, we have learnt to save money, and now we can borrow money from our own bank (Sisiliyawathi, Interview, 19th July, 2000).

According to the women of Athale, environmental pollution causes several health hazards, such as water contamination and the spread of mosquitos. By short-term economic gain, people turn a blind eye to long-term repercussions and as a result, the natural ecological balance of the area has been disturbed by chemical pollution of the land through the use of pesticides and insecticides. These are unethical in terms of Buddhist values, as Leelawathi observes:

It is important that we learn to balance and co-operate with nature. This is the reason I have plants that are beneficial to the soil and to the creatures. Right livelihood is part of our Buddhist teaching, we have to leave a better place for the future generations (Interview, 20th August, 2000).

Methodology

I approached my fieldwork with an open mind and the objective of my field work was to understand the everyday experiences of rural women. Often, the developing world has been studied beginning from perspectives evolved from western experience. I saw a need to begin from the experience of women from the developing world. I spent three months in Athale village in 1997-1998 and again for three months in 2000 exploring. The purpose in this chapter is to make sociological sense of my fieldwork: the difficulties and experiences I had and how I dealt with them. A series of interview techniques which included structured interviews, in-depth face to face, semi structured interviews were conducted. Informal discussions, observations and questionnaires were also used in my research. Informal conversations during meal times, walking together; bathing at the river and listening to *bana* at the *aramaya* with the women provided me with rich in-depth information. Associating with the women at their *samiti* (meetings) and other activities gave me an opportunity to understand their way of life, their hopes and dreams for the future. Interview data was translated the same day or as close as possible. Athale women's voices are used as the analysis for this research; interview summary notes and the researcher's journal/diary are referred to throughout the process of the analysis.

Background information relating to the village was obtained from the representative of the Non-Government Organization (NGO). Fieldwork is a vital component of the study, as talking with people in the field is essential in order to verify theoretical and recorded evidence, and to identify established patterns. The oral evidence from Athale was obtained through conversations, which were conducted in the Sinhala language with the women of the village, including the *gramasevika* (the government representative for the village) and the health nurse for the area. The health nurse is highly respected in the village, as she moves around giving help and advice to all in the district. Both are seen as influential persons in the village. The local school principal, D.M. Piyasena, knew almost everyone in the village, as he has taught in that school for a long time. He is an authoritative figure in the village. The NGO's senior representative is Khandawa, and the two assistants are Seeliya (female) and Kamalsiri (male), who are seen as powerful in the village. Renunciant women and *bhikkhus* provided information on how Buddhism is practised at the village along with the lay women.

Women from the village of Athale as well as the neighboring village of Punsisigama were contacted (see Appendix I, plate 7). As some women from Punsisigama were participants in 1997 I visited all of them. A total of 120 rural women participated in the research in 2000, ranging in age from 18 to 84 years. I conducted conversations with 80 of the women in their own homes, and with 40 of the women at the hall in Athale. Since the *dasa sil matas* had left the village, I contacted 8 *dasa sil matas* in Kandy, and interviewed them at the *aramaya*.

Dr. Kanthi Vitarana recommended that I seek initial approval from the representative of the NGO for the area as this would be useful for entry into the village. In 1997, I made contact with the NGO representative for the area²⁰ Mr. Khandawa and he helped me significantly over the course of my research. I had written to him (see Appendix D), and spoken by telephone from Perth many times regarding entry into the village. This 'pre-entry phase' of the research is essential as ethnographic research depends firstly on finding people who are willing, and also able, to communicate with the researcher. Secondly, the research depends on selecting a setting that is relevant to the purpose of the study (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995).

In collecting data both oral and written information was used. I also used a variety of methods and sources which included: informal unstructured conversations, formal structured questionnaires; observation of and participation in meetings at the *aramaya*; informal unstructured and formal structured interviews of individuals and groups, ranging from casual conversations to household surveys; and accessing documents such as *aramaya* records, and government records kept at the Secretarial Division of Badalkumbura.

From my experience of talking to rural women, I found them to be enthusiastic about talking to a female researcher. Their intentions were apparent by their hospitality, and their eagerness to simply talk. They asked questions about the research, and shared their views on important topics. They were open and sometimes critical of their own handling of village matters such as listening to the young people of the village during a dark period in Sri Lanka's history when people were killed for being a member of a different political party.

²⁰ In the village it is customary to refer to the NGO representative as NGO *mahatmaya* (a term of respect.e.g Mr.)

Jayawardena (1986) has discussed the women's movement in Sri Lanka and how its origins and development were essentially a result of the movement for national independence. As Independence was granted, women were able to win rights to education, suffrage and judicial equality through peaceful negotiation, resulting in gradual advancement. This imposed certain limitations, as the educated and the wealthy women worked within certain parameters. Patriarchal social structures were not questioned, nor the role of the family in the subordination of women. Once Independence was won, interest in reform ceased. The urban women organized their own methods of struggle, and achieved some changes in their existing system of power relations. These women pushed for economic power relationships, but failed to change the patterns of subordination in their homes (Jayawardena, 1986: 135-6). While liberal feminists saw education as the main means to provide women with power, the urban women were in a much better position than rural women to empower themselves, because of their access to education. Consciousness-raising among women, and the concept of 'empowering', is directed towards social change (Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 37-38).

Jagger (1977: 6) writes "The main thrust of the liberal feminist's argument is that an individual woman should be able to determine her social role with as great freedom as does man". Some of Bryson's analysis fits neatly with Jagger's. Bryson states that liberal feminism is "Based upon the belief that women are individuals possessed of reason, that as such they are entitled to full human rights, and that they should therefore be free to choose their role in life and explore their full potential in equal competition with men" (Bryson, 1992:159).

Millen (1997: 1), conducting feminist research on non-feminist women states that feminism is a powerful conceptual tool for critiquing traditional sociological research, but conducting feminist research may contain some unchallenged assumptions about who should be researched and which methodologies should be used. Empowerment and equality of the research relationships are discussed.

Oakley (1981: 33) highlighted issues of methodological problems which proved to be very useful in my research. Oakley fills the gap between the textbook 'recipe' for interviewing and her own experiences as an interviewer. The textbook interview

situation is a one-way process, in which the interviewer elicits and receives, but does not give information. In her interviews, Oakley shared information with her interviewees. Mutual trust was established between the interviewer and interviewee.

Jayawardena (1995: 164) states, that Alexandra David Neel frequently expressed the need for understanding “the other,” in order to understand oneself. David Neel’s feminist awareness enabled her to probe the lives of independent women in Tibet and South Asia as she travelled alone across Tibet, and wrote extensively on Buddhism in Tibet. In the village of Athale, I made it a point to use probing questions in order to understand women’s lives. I spoke about their interests and dreams they had. Nandamalini shared her frustrations and dreams:

We don't have resources. Education alone is not enough for our village, as we need skills which are not provided. The government needs to spend more on rural areas to lift the motivation of women. I would like to go into politics, but I know, voters are reluctant to vote for female candidates, and men are reluctant to recruit women (Interview, 31st July, 2000).

Oakley (1985: 12) was the first researcher to highlight the importance of establishing rapport with women. It was a new model of interviewing that strove for intimacy and included ‘self disclosure’ and ‘believing the interviewee’. She suggests that feminist interviewing involves commitment on the part of the researcher, to form a relationship and on the part of the interviewees to participate with sincerity. Women became close friends of the researcher. More than a third of her interviewees continued their ties with her after four years, as they knew she could be trusted. The “interviewees felt ‘valued’ as individuals rather than ‘data providers’” (Oakley in Reinharz, 1992: 28). Some of the women of Athale correspond with me, as they are interested to know how my research is progressing. I have kept them informed, of the progress I have made on my thesis.

Finch (in Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 57) argues that women are more used to accepting intrusions through questioning about their lives than men. Their experience of motherhood, when they are subject to questioning from doctors, midwives and health visitors, give them confidence to talk. They also find it more relaxing if the interview is held in their homes, in an informal way. The interviewer becomes a ‘friendly guest’, not an ‘official inquisitor’. Occasional interviews, however, were important to explore

questions such as why women felt it a great honour for their sons to become *bhikkhus* (see: Appendix G). The method chosen, therefore, had to establish an easy intimate relationship between two women (invariably there were more than this), in friendly comfortable surroundings. There are of course great advantages to be gained from capitalising upon one's shared experiences as women. Finch (in Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 58) has discussed exploitative potential or power inequalities by the establishment of trust between two women. However, interviewers could take advantage of this situation, and ruthless researchers could exploit the interviewee, with the information interpreted and used in ways quite different from the interviewee's intentions. Rural women also have the power to withhold information. Feminists can and should inquire into all sorts of women's lives in a diversity of ways and define feminist research in terms of values, rather than techniques used as Millen (1997: 1) has discussed. Feminist methodology implies not just that "feminists select research topics on a different basis to non feminists, but when a feminist investigates a particular topic, the whole process of research will reflect her commitment to feminism" (Hammersley, 1992: 191).

The isolation of women is well documented by Hobson (in Roberts, 1981: 54). Rural women who are house-bound feel isolated, and welcome a female who is easy to talk with, and can be called a 'marginal member' into their home. Many women, are not allowed to travel anywhere out of their homes unless accompanied by the husband. It becomes difficult for them to make friends even in their own locality. A female interviewer entering this situation and guaranteeing confidentiality finds it easy to get women to talk. Therefore, a woman-to-woman interview conducted in a familiar setting is a very special experience.

A feminist approach to methodology was adopted during fieldwork and data collection, where the emphasis was on understanding the social and cultural context of events, as well as the events themselves. Mauthner (1998) discussed principles which were relevant to, and utilised in, this research, such as power relationships, participants' voices, the researcher's voice, and emotions in the research process. The methods used such as encouraging women to tell stories, fitted well into this research, as the older women gave me their life stories and revealed how life was before Independence, and is now. The younger women discussed the most significant day in their lives such as the birth of their first child, the first day of school for children, the first words spoken by the child, and a few did mention the day they were married. Mauthner discussed a series of

topics, rather than using questions to gather information. The topics included contact patterns, changes in relationships, school years and significant events in their lives, which was one of the methods I adopted.

Bell (In Roberts 1981: 54) asks the question “shouldn’t the researcher also be called to account for his or her own experiences, in the same way as informants are asked to be?” The field journal/diary written by the researcher is the response to this, and as the researcher I discussed my experiences and my field journal/diary is used for writing this research.

First Visit to Athale

The purpose of the study was explained to potential informants at the initial gathering in the hall and also at each home visit. Each participant was advised that they could withdraw at any time from the study without any disadvantage. The protection of privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of informants was assured, and it was advised that all data collected would be held securely by me for five years after submission of the thesis.

I conducted preliminary interviews in November 1997- February 1998 with the help of three NGO representatives (two female and one male), gathering information regarding full name, age, address, number of children, employment, level of education, and how the women practise Buddhism. Seventy women were gathered at the hall (see Appendix I plate 5.1), where I conducted interviews (see: Appendix F). These were more detailed interviews, and were conducted face-to-face. I had previously organised lunch and morning tea for the interviewees, prepared by villagers taking part in the interviews. In rural Sri Lanka, relationships are more personal than impersonal. A few women preferred not to have the discussions recorded on tape, but allowed me to take down notes at the time. This changed the way I had planned to collect data. My tape recorder was put aside while some informal conversations were held. The women were more open when I talked to them informally in a conversational way. With this approach, I was able to gather information about their lives, which was subsequently written down in a notebook.

Additional field trips were undertaken in January 1998 to a similar village close to the coast town of Galle, in southern Sri Lanka (see Appendix A). The village of Madawala was also identified with the help of Dr. Vitarane, as I wanted a completely different but compatible setting to contrast Athale. This village was small, Buddhist, and being a coastal village, had Christian influence as a result of Portuguese, Dutch, and British contact. Informal conversations were held with 25 women and I conducted preliminary interviews. I also travelled extensively in Kandy (see Appendix A) in the central highlands of Sri Lanka, to investigate a training village in permaculture at Galaha, situated 15 miles from Kandy (see Appendix A). Farmers from all over Sri Lanka come to this village, where they live for a couple of weeks and learn new methods of farming, so that they can obtain increased yields in paddy rice, and learn improved methods of growing vegetables and yams. I interviewed the women from the village and some women who were participating from other parts of Sri Lanka. These visits gave me a comparative perspective of village life, and I also met several *dasa sil matas* at Kandy, and discussed my study with them. This helped me a great deal in organising questions for my second visit to the village.

Research in 2000

In July 2000, for the second stage of my research, I decided to concentrate on one village. I chose Athale, as I had been able to keep in contact with the women of the village through Mr. Khandawa, who with his assistant Mr. Kamalsiri, helped me locate a home to live in for the six weeks of my visit. I met Khandawa and Kamalsiri at Badulla (see: Appendix B), who gave me a warm welcome and supplied me with more information about the village and the family that I will be living with. I then continued on the journey to Athale with Kamalsiri as guide (riding his motorbike) arriving at the village late in the evening. The home belonged to Suneela, Padma and their two children, a girl aged 15 and a boy aged 18 (see Appendix I plate 6). The father (Padma) worked away from home and as he was unable to find work in the village for nearly six months, he visited the family once a month. As was the custom in Sri Lanka, I gave gifts to the family, and my sister sent food items such as rice, lentils, green gram, sugar and other sweet foods. We spent a very pleasant evening getting to know each other, and I shared photographs of my family in Perth, and discussed with them the work I hoped to accomplish.

The next morning, with the help of Kamalsiri I found the venue, where 42 women were gathered. 24 of the women had met me on my first visit to the village in 1997-1998 and were happy to exchange news. I received a warm welcome and we discussed the work I wanted to accomplish, and I asked for their help in achieving this. This was a good introduction to the women as there were known and unknown women. By the end of five hours, I had talked to all the women and learnt their names and something about their families. They learnt about my family, my name and why I was interested in their village.

When collecting data researchers often find themselves in complex and conflicting surroundings, with competing values, perspectives and ideologies (Denzin, 1989). In these circumstances, it is important for the researcher to be rigorous and systematic throughout the research process. Rossman and Rallis (1998: 54) assert:

Data collection and interpretation occur through the filter of the researcher's background and experiences; in order to be rigorous, researchers need to be aware of their personal perspectives and inbuilt interests, including bias, opinions and prejudices. Contrary to this argument we must leave our bias, opinions, values behind in doing research.

I was encouraged to overcome the difficulties I encountered in my fieldwork due to my love for the rural women, and a great respect for Buddhism. One cannot really leave one's values behind as Rossman and Rallis (1998) assert; but I attempted to gain experiences as close to the reality as possible. I chose to live in Athale, as it was a Buddhist village. It was a poor village (NGOs are established only in the poorer villages) and I ate what the family had, slept the way they slept on a mat, and like them, walked miles to have a bath in the river.

Feminist research drew my attention to power relationships, especially as early research suggested that the power relations between the researcher and the researched should be "non-hierarchical" (Skeggs, in Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 79). Current researchers, however, argue for an acknowledgement of power differences between women. I experienced both similarities and differences with the women of Athale. Earlier, in my life, I had lived in the same country and gone through some of the difficulties they faced, and I was able to talk about these. Nonetheless, I had managed to escape from

them due to education and living in the city. I was an insider and outsider, an issue that I will address later. Some feminist researchers have argued that studies of women in a particular country should be done by women of that country (Reinharz, 1992: 260). However, I feel as women we should be able to study anything, in any country. As we study women's experiences we think we do not share, we sometimes find that we actually do share it in some way with women.

According to Spradley (1980) the position of the researcher is both an insider and an outsider. As an insider (as I understood the culture), I was to some extent part of the situation, and able to empathise with the participants. As an observer, I was separate from activities and viewed the impact of Buddhism on women as an objective of the study. I attended the *aramaya* every afternoon, in order to observe as fully as possible how the women participated, and asked questions about Buddhism, what each person did, and why they did it. I also perused documents and maps made available to me at the *aramaya*. Listening to the *bana* with the rest of the women made me feel part of the situation; however, I could never be truly an 'insider', as I do not belong to the village.

Daily Life With the Villagers

I was very much at home at the village, although I had not lived in the country for a very long time. I was reminded of my changed history - for instance that at the completion of the fieldwork I would be returning to another country, my family, and to my work, while they had to live under the same conditions, not knowing if they could find work or how they could feed the children. Finch (in Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 58) suggests that "feminist researchers side with the subject when doing interviews with women and that she (the researcher) shares the powerless position of the women that she interviews". Women who are interviewers are relatively powerful in comparison with other women. I also had the power to access their lives. When they had agreed in 1997 to participate in research interviews, it was to some extent a demonstration of their powerlessness. Although they were able to leave the interview at any stage, only two of them did and that was due to ill health of their children. In 2000 they made a decision to come for the interviews, and invited me to visit their homes, as Kumari Hami said:

We are happy to welcome you to our village, and please visit my home. I will like it very much (Interview, 17th July, 2000).

The other women also agreed with this, and nodded in agreement. The women made a decision to invite me to their homes. I brought to the study a critical analytical mind, and my love of the country, the people, and their religion. Having lived in the country for many years of my life, I had a binding affinity with the rural people and love of its nature, although I had never lived for a long period in a rural area. My background in religious studies, psychology, anthropology, and Asian studies helped me with my research topic and the formulation of research questions. Rossman and Rallis (1998) claim that a relationship always exists between the researcher and those who are being researched. This means, the participants react to the researcher and the researcher reacts to the participants and their world. Sri Lankan rural folk have a friendly approach to people in a very natural way, and a desire to be helpful, which sometimes caused a problem. Women dropped into my home sometimes to give a different story: some women did not feel comfortable contradicting another woman in public, but they desperately wanted to give their own side of the story as they saw it. This did cause a few problems for my hostess. However, I was able to cross-check some of these stories by observation. I listened to some of the tapes when I got home, and transcribed them, as quickly as I could. I re-listened to the tapes many times. The women were pleased that I was living amongst them and the older women addressed me as *duwa* (daughter), while I addressed them as *amme* (mum/mother), and younger women called me *akka* (older sister) or *nanda* (aunty) while others addressed me as Lalani, or Lalani Miss.

The majority of the women I interviewed were married, with children, while some were single, and a few were widowed. Some women were educated, while others had received little or no education (see Appendix E, table 3). Other than associating with the women in informal ways, I also participated with them in their *samiti* meetings and activities and asked questions about these. I began my research with a group discussion, I found this most appropriate for group interviews and subsequently used semi-formal interviews. I followed this up with informal conversations, during which the women talked of their life experiences, their past and present religious beliefs and practices. Older women related their life histories (see Appendix J 2) and their understanding and practice of Buddhism, which has changed over the years.

We believed that illness was caused when the gods became angry with us, so we had to ask the kapurala to boil water with lemons and do mantara (ritual chanting) to ward off evil. Now we know this is all superstition; now we go to the temple to reverence the Buddha, but we get medicine from the hospital or the doctor (Agnes Nona, Interview, 28th July, 2000).

The use of semi-structured interviews has become the principal means by which researchers have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives. I found this method to be constructive, as I began to listen to the women talk about their lives.

Semi-structured and unstructured interviewing is a qualitative data technique which differs from ethnography, as it includes free interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. Interview research typically includes opportunities for clarification and discussion, which survey research typically excludes. Open-ended interview research explores people's views of reality, and allows the researcher to generate theory (Reinharz, 1994: 18). I asked questions such as 'what issues trouble you?' 'What do you want from your weekly meetings'? And what do you get when you offer *dane* to *bhikkhus*, *dasa sil matas*? Rural folk spend their money on ritual specialists, such as 'devil dancers,' or for the religious rites at Kataragama. There is a relationship between religious practice, power and status at Athale. The women described themselves as more religious and took a keen interest in the activities at the village *aramaya*.

*We had to spend a lot of money last year as my mother got very sick. The doctors couldn't find anything wrong with her. She kept fainting, and going into a trance. We did a thovil ceremony as a last resort. She felt better for a couple of days, but in the end we had to leave her in hospital for various tests they did. We gave a big *dane* at the *aramaya*. Now she is better, everyone at the village attended the *dane* (Seeta, Interview, 20th July, 2000).*

Interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher. A questionnaire relating to age, length of time lived in the village and religious habits (see Appendix F) was used in the two villages. Punchi Menike, an older resident, continues with her story:

Elephants roamed these roads. Well, we didn't have roads. It was the jungle. Elephants destroyed all the trees we planted. Well this was their home. In the early 1960's people settled here. The elephants were chased to other areas. We did business. We grew vegetables and sent them to Colombo or Badulla. We also did paddy rice cultivation. This kumbura (rice paddy farm) now belongs to my daughter, but she doesn't live here, so I have to get people to work on it (Punchi Menike, Interview, 5th August, 2000).

Observation of participants was used as the primary and constant method of data gathering throughout the fieldwork. The interviews were semi-structured in the sense that I prepared areas of questioning, based on the dimensions of the social situation I observed on my first trip. Judy Wajcman (in Reinharz, 1994: 30) used a semi-structured questionnaire and believed that trusting relations led women to raise additional topics over and above those she had prepared. Christine Webb (in Reinharz, 1994: 31) adopted the role of patient advocate, regarding the interview as an exchange of information, and was able to develop an intimacy with the women, and in return learn in great depth and richness about their feelings and experience. I experienced this with the women at Athale, especially during one-to-one conversations, when we exchanged ideas relating to the birth of children, children growing up, and husbands. I was able to share many stories with the women, as I did not have the support of my extended family because I lived in Australia. One story I shared was about my daughter, who stuffed peas inside her nose, and had to be rushed to the hospital. The women had a good laugh, and then went on to give their stories.

Duwa (daughter) was very quiet, so I went looking for her outside. There she was under the tree, with mud all over her from head to foot, and the dog licking it off her (Vasanthi, Interview, 17th July, 2000).

Fieldwork observations, questions and experiences were recorded in two A4-size manuscripts, and I used a personal journal to record the daily schedule. Since these notes were in Sinhalese, I translated them into English and transcribed them. Notes that I took during observations were completed in full each day. I used the fieldwork journal to record personal experiences. I tried to put each woman at ease during the interviews, by beginning each interview with an 'ice-breaker' enabling the women to relax and talk about themselves. The informal conversational approach was considered most

appropriate for the oral history interviews, because the women disclosed information very well-known to them and they felt at ease, they were convinced that the interview had relevance to them as individuals. As Sudu Amme revealed:

For thirty years I lived in the jungle. We only had a small hut and there were no roads. I walked miles to get water from the well. I looked after four small children, cooked, worked in the fields, and worked in the home garden, where I planted vegetables for daily use. I had a few chickens, and a goat to get milk for the children. We used oil lamps. My husband had to go and sleep on top of a tree to safeguard our maize from the elephants. They would beat on the drum or sometimes they light fire crackers to frighten away the Elephants. A few men went together. They sang songs to keep awake. Today, life is much easier for the women, as they can get water from taps, and they have good homes. But they are not happy. They have to work hard, as the husbands don't have work. Now my husband and I spend more time at the aramaya and take sil often (Interview, 30th July, 2000).

Personal interviews proved to be a relatively flexible method of gathering data. Respondents were able to clarify any unclear questions, and I was able to pursue ambiguous answers to open-ended questions in search of clarity. Several opportunities to become a participant observer arose during my time spent at the village. An invitation to attend a monthly women's meeting, which was held at my hostess' home proved very interesting, as I observed the *samiti* meeting (see Appendix I, plate 6). The meeting was conducted in a professional manner. The women paid homage to the Buddha, and discussed their plans to plant more trees, as forest re-growth. I was invited to speak to the women, informing them why I chose their village and the reasons for doing research. Another opportunity came up when I was invited to attend the district meeting with the representative of the NGO present, and I was able to make a speech in Sinhala, which I had not done for a very long time. I also met women from other villages. Kanchana explains:

We meet once a month to discuss what the home samithiya is unable to do in their branch. We can submit plans to start a business, or for education or to build a road, a toilet. This has to be passed at this meeting. We have to give an estimate of costs, and time for the project. Normally we get approval very quickly. If you don't have a good plan or estimate, then it will not be passed (Interview, 29th July, 2000).

During a face-to-face interview with the women each person's view regarding different aspects of living the *dhamma* through application was discussed. I asked the respondents about their participation at the local *aramaya*, how they participated at the temple, their daily habits of reverencing the Buddha, and how much time was spent on these activities. The woman's working history, her attitudes towards Buddhism, and her Buddhist practices were discussed, and these discussions lasted from three-quarters of an hour to an hour and a half which is discussed in chapter 3.

Secondary sources proved useful in gaining an initial overview of the villagers, as well as other information. For example, the government office at Badalkumbura (division of the district secretariat) provided me with official statistics. Coakes (1997) asserts:

An important aspect of official statistics is their ability to describe social conditions, economic trends, rainfall for the area, temperatures, and measures of community and social well being.

There could be several possible limitations in the use of official statistics, for example, most women in the village believed that official statistics are totally objective, while some believed that they are a reflection of the institution that collected the data. In this instance however, official statistics proved to be a useful source of information as I was able to verify the statistics I received from the *gramasevika* of the village with the Badalkumbura information.

Golde (1986: 81) argues that all fieldwork should encompass some form of reciprocity, that researchers should offer services or materials in exchange for the privilege of studying and disrupting other people's lives. During my research, I offered the women of the village valuable information about how to get information for education needs and health advice. I also presented the women with small gifts such as soaps, blouse materials, pencils and erasers, pens, hair ornaments, picture postcards of Perth, and some toys for children when I visited them at their homes, which is common practice in Sri Lanka when in a situation of indebtedness. We had informal conversations after I finished my work. We talked about reforms needed for the village or sometimes just indulged in 'women' talk.

I met and conversed with women from seven districts at the NGO's meeting, held at Badalkumbura in the district of Monaragala. I met two women who had travelled from a distant village with their very small infants. In Sri Lanka, it is very common to see women breastfeeding babies in the bus, or wherever they are if the baby needs to be fed. It does not stop women from breastfeeding. The babies wanted to be fed (as usually happens) during the meeting. These women simply gave the attention the babies needed, while listening to what was being said at the meeting. It brought back some memories for me, as living in Western Australia in the 1970s I could not find a place in the city to breastfeed a baby. I was offered the use of the women's toilets at a very big shopping complex. It has changed in the 21st century, and women do have separate feeding rooms, although it is still regarded as something women should not do in public. I was glad to share some personal stories with the women of Athale.

In the literature, it has become obvious that authors show their bias in the presentation of facts, since they are written from the subjective perspective of the author. I always felt I had a duty to let the women's voices be heard. I have let women speak as much as possible in every chapter, but particularly in Chapter 3.

If we will not make the mistake of assuming our experience of the world is the experience of all, we still need to name and describe our diverse experiences. What are our commonalities? What are our differences? How can we transform our imposed otherness into a self-defined specificity? (Hartsock, 1990: 171).

Renata Klein suggests that we cannot speak for others, but that we can, and must speak out for others (in Reinhartz, 1994: 16). "Giving a voice to the marginalised is today not only possible, but as always, necessary" (Hilsdon, 1995: 30).

On some visits, I missed some of the women in their homes, and in some instances, the women were out in the rice fields, or cutting sugar cane and it was good to be able to speak to her out on the field but out of earshot of other women. Indra Malini said:

I had an urgent job to finish. Thanks for coming here. Today, I have cut the sugar cane into smaller pieces, so that it would fit into the tractor that's picking it up. Unlike those days, we don't have to carry it on our heads, we just cut them and it is collected and taken to the factory (Interview, 16th August, 2000).

On all the visits, my hostess or an assistant accompanied me from the NGO's office (this was village etiquette). It is a custom that women do not walk by themselves in the village, especially an outsider to the village. However, generally I was able to be alone with the women while speaking to them (children played around us, or sat on mother's lap at times). I held interviews and discussions at the *aramaya* where the women gathered in the afternoons. I was able to incorporate new questions into my interviews as topics arose, such as "Can you remember a time that you felt really happy?" "Can you describe it for me?" Some of the women remembered the day their first child was born. Helena describes:

I know I went through pain for a couple of hours, as the child was born and I held her in my arms, a love surged over me, something I have never known or felt before (Interview, 26th July, 2000).

In some instances, some women preferred group interviews, which were undertaken at the hall. Individual open-ended discussion sessions took approximately one hour, and I repeated discussions on topics which I had planned with these women, such as their work habits and how long they spent on housework (see Appendix I, plate 9), cooking and childcare. Due to some good networking by the NGO representative's assistant, we held an open conversation, which took place among friends and acquaintances at my village home. As Mallika Rathna Menike said:

At the samiti (groups) we are like a close-knit family, we discuss not only terms of labour exchange; we also discuss personal and economic problems during the weekly group meetings. The women, who could not share their problems with anyone else, now had an opening to discuss their problem and even get a solution. Sometimes it was a relief to know that you were not the only one facing difficulties. Younger women benefited as older women played a mentoring role and shared their experiences (Interview, 20th July, 2000).

This is important as the older women are given an equal status with men. For instance, these women are empowered to help younger women through their wisdom and experience. These women now take a keen interest in the economy of their village. The ability of NGOs at Athale has had an impact on macro-economic policy. Women have questioned laws affecting women's full participation in economic development. At the

joint meeting I attended at Badalkumbura, the discussion was on the contribution the NGOs made in organizing the women to collect Jak fruit from their area on a particular day, so the fruits could be transported and sold in other areas. This venture had been a great success and the money collected was deposited for the use of women in their *samitis*.

The money we collected from the sale of Jak fruits helped us get a bigger loan to buy two cows that we wanted for our samiti. These are milking cows. We sell the milk to the government co-operative (Karunawathi, Interview, 3rd August, 2000).

Risseeuw (1988: 206) declares that although the socialist government developed specific programmes for women, it tended to reinforce the vulnerability²¹ of women. The five-year development plan of 1972 emphasised development of the small-scale labour intensive sector in the rural areas, involving agricultural and industrial projects on a co-operative basis. While it did try to involve women, it did not change the former structure. Jayawardena (1985: 85) states the unequal wage structure and low level of skills and income for women remained the same. The women's bureau was formed in 1978 and took the form of a 'watch-dog' function. The working conditions of women improved in 1979 due to the United Nations' ruling opposed to all forms of discrimination against women. Athale women did sewing in the village, or cooked food to sell at the shop to earn some extra money. The older women of Athale help with childcare, cooking and cleaning, without payment. Although the position of women increased on the 'policy level', since the 1980s, women in the subsistence sector and those engaged in income-generating home-based activities are still regularly excluded from official statistics or used as 'unpaid family helpers' (Risseeuw, 1988: 207).

The political awareness of the women grew from the times when women agitated for independence. They are aware of their right to vote. Unlike in early times however, they do not vote as their husbands and fathers wish, but make their own decisions. Since Independence, women have been involved in political struggles.

²¹ The women's development centres, organised by the department of Rural Development in order to enable women to participate more effectively in 'development', led to training in "feminine", but not marketable, skills in 90% of the cases (Dias in Risseeuw, 1988: 206).

Well, an election is coming up soon, so it is now, they have thought of improving our main road. The road has so many potholes that it has become dangerous to even walk on the road, as the buses and cars avoid the holes and swerve on to the edge of the road. This show of interest is not enough to get my vote (Seeliyawathi, Interview, 20th July 2000).

Theoretical Foundations: Liberal Feminism

Jayawardena (1995) in *White Woman's Other Burden* argues that feminism can be defined as a consciousness of injustices based on gender hierarchy and a commitment to change. She argues that feminism in the 19th century meant it was not only a critique of patriarchal structures which included church and state, but was also a challenge to colonialism and the subordination and exploitation of women in the colonies. Jayawardena (1995: 9) attempts to cast an "Asian feminist gaze" on the activities in India and Sri Lanka during British colonialism of women missionaries, reformers, doctors, theosophists, disciples of gurus and Marxists to highlight their contribution to the cause of women's liberation. Jayawardena (1995: 264) highlights the campaign in 1931 for adult franchise for women, especially by European women, working as school principles, doctors and nurses, as well as the Ceylon Left movement members and union women working towards liberation. National liberation struggles are also discussed.

Socialist women such as Doreen Wickremasinghe introduced many reforms in her school which have left their mark on her pupils, inspiring many women to confront feudal values, to repudiate caste and ethnic barriers, and participate in movements for social and political change (Jayawardena, 1995: 267). It was these pupils who have influenced the village women. The women of Athale joined various *samiti* (groups) and these have helped them in their struggles. Community elders were generally men, however women have gained power through their local organizations, particularly through group linkages with markets and other organizations outside their community, thereby gaining the respect of the community.

Tong (1998: 12) explores both classical-liberal and welfare-liberal streams of thought. Contemporary liberal feminists seem to favour welfare liberalism. Susan Wendell (1989) described contemporary liberal feminist thought while stressing the need to

commit to major economic re-organisation and considerable re-distribution of wealth. This is because one of the modern political goals most closely associated with liberal feminism is equality of opportunity (Wendell, in Tong, 1989: 12). Tong argues for an overall goal of liberal feminism, which is to create a “just and compassionate society in which freedom flourishes” (Tong, 1989: 12). Tong states that only then can women as well as men thrive. Wollstonecraft argued for women to be treated as, and to act as, autonomous decision-makers. She recognised that it is in the interest of women to be economically independent of men; to achieve sexual equality or gender justice, society must give women the same education as men and it must provide women with the same civil liberties and economic opportunities that men enjoy (in Tong, 1989: 16-17). In Sri Lanka, women have the opportunity for education. However, the government did not plan how this education was to be utilised for the best interests of women and the country. They did not provide rural women with the same civil liberties and economic opportunities that a man enjoys. Until this opportunity is provided for all women, rural as well as urban, the country will not develop to its full potential. Women were disadvantaged and were enmeshed in gender struggles since British times. Seneviratne (1999) argues that caste and gender oppressions express Buddhism’s potential for achieving a civil society. However, can Buddhism’s liberalism, tolerance and pluralism bring about a total social transformation in Sri Lanka for the future?

Non-liberal feminists have criticised liberal feminists for a number of reasons, in particular their tendency to give political rights priority over economic rights, and to emphasise the equality of women and men. Einstein claimed that liberal feminists are wrong to put a high premium on so-called male values (in Tong, 1998: 11). Liberalism is the school of political thought from which liberal feminism has evolved. The single most important goal of women’s liberation is sexual equality, or as it is sometimes termed, gender justice (1998: 32).

Rosemarie Tong discusses liberal feminism, which presents a great challenge to feminists to unite women in, through, and despite their differences. As bell hooks says:

Women do not need to eradicate difference to feel solidarity. We do not need to share common oppression to fight equally to end oppression... We can be sisters united by shared interests and beliefs, united in our appreciation for diversity, united in our struggle to end sexist

oppression, united in political solidarity (hooks in Tong, 1998: 244).

Kumari Jayawardene (1986: 115), a Sri Lankan feminist writer, states that "...feminism has no particular ethnic identity..." as there are no boundaries in the women's movement, and it can be seen as global. She argues that many people in the third world are not aware that their countries have a history of active feminism, or of early movements for women's emancipation, that were supported both by men and women. People who dismiss feminism as a foreign import are using that idea to keep women in a subordinate position, she argues. It was in the context of resistance to imperialism and other forms of foreign domination, exploitative local rulers and traditional patriarchal religious structures that feminist struggles emerged in Asia.

For over a decade, Sri Lankan feminist writers (CENWOR, 1985, Jayawardena and Jayaweera, 1985, 1986) have been attempting to change current beliefs and foster an ideology, which holds men and women as equals. The All Ceylon Women's Conference was formed (ACWC) in 1947, and this addressed the many legal, economic and political demands of women. Over the years, the ACWC steered educated women away from purely charitable and social service activities and led demands for the further emancipation of women. The exposure of Asian societies to Western influences also made women of all classes aware of feminist movements in the West. Born out of these influences, women's movements are now active in all Asian countries and active in political agitation. These movements have taken up issues that affect women in their village such as dowry, rape, abortion, prostitution and deaths, while exposing the male domination that underlies all social practice (Jayawardena, 1986: 129-131, 260).

Haleh Afshar (1998: 2) pleads with scholars of development studies to move towards a more integrally gendered approach to issues of empowerment. What is empowerment? Is it power over resources? Is it the ability to make choices? Is it about access to resources and how they are controlled, politically or economically, by NGOs, by political parties, by the state? Scholars of development studies must be explicit about the relevance of different ideologies and historical contexts.

Defining empowerment as a process, and something which cannot be done to/for women, but which has to be their own, raises questions for development agencies. In Athale village the *samiti* have helped some women to empower themselves

economically as well as gaining confidence. By making a monetary contribution to the family they have strengthened their bargaining position in the family.

Malathi de Alwis (1999: 181-2) points out how the Women's Franchise Union (WFO) was formed in 1927 to agitate for the granting of the franchise to Ceylonese²² women. The movement faced much criticism for the demands it made, not only from the British press, but also from Sinhala men, who described it as power hungry, racially impure, anglicised and westernised. De Alwis notes how the granting of franchise to women was likened to 'casting pearls before swine,' by a respected senior Ceylonese legislator, who went on to assert that it would defile the sacredness of the home and lead to the destruction of the family (1999: 182). The Sinhala press commented specifically about the WFO, on whether women should be given the right to vote. Did Ceylonese women not realise that with the introduction of Buddhism to the island they had been accorded "their appropriate place and freedom, through the rehabilitation of their norms of 'respectability'?" (De Alwis, 1999: 182). Women always had the freedom to care for parents and elders so that the general "*vili-biya*" (respectability) of the country is safeguarded (De Alwis, 1999: 182).

Locating struggles in women's lives

Women's situations in Sri Lanka are changing rapidly at the present time, partly in response to changing social realities, and partly in response to new theoretical perspectives. It is women's suffrage that Bryson (1992), Tong (1989) and Jagger (1977) find important to the development of liberal feminism. Sri Lankan women, both rural and urban, participated in the suffrage movement, and made their voices heard. Jagger argues that individual women should be able to determine their social roles with as great a freedom as man (1977: 6). Liberal theory traditionally sees a need for a division of human endeavours into public and private spheres. Women as a group have traditionally been associated with the private realm, they have been unjustly denied access to the public sphere. Bryson's analysis of the core elements of liberal feminism is based upon the belief that women are individuals possessed of reason, and that as such they are

²² I have used Ceylonese if discussing the period before 1972, and Sri Lankan after 1972 as the name was changed with the adoption of the 1972 constitution.

entitled to full human rights, and therefore should be free to choose their role in life and explore their full potential in equal competition with men (1992: 159).

We owe to liberal feminists many of the educational and legal reforms that have improved the quality of life for urban and rural women. It is doubtful that, without the effort of liberal feminists, so many women could have attained their new found professional and occupational stature. To be sure, there is more to feminism than educational and legal reforms aimed primarily at increasing women's professional and occupational position. Liberal feminists still have much work to do before all women's educational, legal, and professional or occupational gains are entirely secure (Tong, 1989: 38). What these authors view as strengths and weaknesses of liberal feminism might be seen as indicative of difficulties with the very category itself. The boundaries between liberal feminism and other frameworks are much less clear than we might expect, particularly in terms of scholars' descriptions of the gains of the women's movement. Jayawardena (1986: 130) maintains, that the "rise in women's consciousness brought about by education was channelled into struggles for political and franchise rights". She argues that although Sri Lanka was one of the first countries of Asia to achieve women's suffrage, their presence in the political structures has been marginal, and this has not changed much over the years. Sri Lanka had free education since Independence but rural girls were disadvantaged as parents kept them home to do house chores.

Researching Women in Athale Village

Buddhism has existed in this village for generations. The main road runs via Badalkumbura to Buttala (see Appendix B), and connects Badulla and Monaragala, two important cities of the dry zone. According to the *gramasevika*, the female government representative of the village, the total population of Athale is 869. The village has an arable land area of 278 acres, of which 105 acres have been allocated to paddy farming, while the remaining 173 acres are used for 210 homes and gardens, where vegetables are grown. The main local cash crops include sugar cane, pepper, and coconut oil, while the main domestic crop is paddy rice, with vegetables, manioc, and varieties of beans being additional crops. The village has one Buddhist *aramaya* (temple), one pre-school,

and one primary school (statistics provided by *gramasevika*. See Appendix E 1). The *gramasevaka* of the neighbouring village tells the story:

The early settlers acquired land along the fertile slopes of the Menik Ganga. They cleared the jungles and grew food they required for their use by slash and burn agriculture. The excess of vegetables was used for bartering for salt and other goods. Buddhism has been the main religion of this village for generations. Most of the women are descendants, or spouses of descendants of inhabitants of Athale, or of one of the neighbouring villages (Interview, 3rd August, 2000).

Athale is 30 kilometres from the city of Badulla, the capital of the Uva province in the dry zone (see Appendix C), which covers about two-thirds of the country. The village location was often determined by the availability of water resources for irrigating paddy fields and the *menik ganga* (river) flows through this area (see Appendix B). Despite efforts to modernise some rural areas, some villages scattered throughout the dry zone remain unchanged, due to lack of water for irrigation, good roads, and other basic amenities. An attachment to the traditional homelands, however, prevents such communities leaving their villages, and often some families continue living in their ancient homelands as their parents and grandparents lived off the land in previous generations.

The population of Athale area has increased due to migration from the wet zone, due to the diversion of the *mahaweli ganga*²³ (see Appendix A). Attempts have been made in the past, and are still continuing, to resettle people by clearing the jungles. Punsisigama is one such village that was settled in 1980 with the *gam udawe*²⁴ scheme. Old water tanks have been repaired, new roads opened, and buses organised to take children to school on the main road. The children of Athale benefited, as previously they had to walk to school. All stages of new settlements are planned ahead and the government provides infra-structural requirements for community life, health, schools, marketing, postal services, and other amenities.

²³ Mahaweli river diversion at Polgolla was launched in 1976 and continued until 1990. The total number of families settled from 1975-1996 was: farming, 86,387; and non-farming, 29,420 (Economic progress of Independent Sri Lanka, 1998:158).

²⁴ A project to alleviate housing shortages in rural areas was started by Prime Minister J.R. Jayawardene in 1977 and continued by President Premadasa, from 1989 (Economic progress of Independent Sri Lanka, 1998: 22-23).

In Athale, one impact of these developments has been that the new houses differ greatly from the traditional mud houses with their thatched roofs. The materials used in construction include the use of roof tiles, aluminium or asbestos roofing, which add a foreign touch to the entire village complex. Each house now has its own toilet, unlike earlier times when the villagers shared a row of toilets. Each householder owns a small garden with an assortment of trees seemingly planted at random, including coconut, jak, mango, breadfruit, paw paw, and other fruit trees. Where there was once only one well for the whole village, now 4-5 households share one well, and since 2000, some of the homes have electricity and tap water.

Earlier villagers' lives were built around farming, and their social activities centred on the *aramaya* (temple) and the village bazaar, where interested parents even arranged marriages. The village store was the focal point, and the men sat on the benches and chewed betel and tobacco and smoked cigars. Some would discuss politics while sipping tea. Young men became involved in national politics, and spoke of greener pastures. Sometimes a young son of a farmer, considered to be an intellectual, would read the newspaper aloud and afterwards discuss the events of the day, and judgements were made about local as well as national politics (Spencer, 1990: 5).

Spencer has discussed how the introduction of cheaply available battery-operated radios in the 1980s brought significant change to villages such as Athale. *Bhikkhus* broadcast *bana* over the national radio in Colombo, early morning and late at night, and villagers were able to listen to the message from the *bhikkhus*. This changed the life of the villager in Athale, as those who could not read or write listened to the broadcast. Advice from the health department regarding the use of clean water, washing hands before preparing or eating food, and inexpensive nutritious food preparation methods, are also broadcast on the radio. Efforts are being made to get children immunised against a number of diseases by broadcasting the location of free medical clinics. Family planning is encouraged, and frequently asked questions are discussed on the radio by eminent doctors. "From a largely oral and local culture, the village has now transformed to a radio and print culture. Not only local news but world news has certainly brought about much change" (Spencer, 1990: 5).

Research Issues

This thesis relies upon a variety of evidence material, of which oral sources are important for the insights they provide about perceived interests. This fieldwork constitutes a vital and important component of the study, because personal interviews are important for cross-checking material against theoretical and existing evidence to assist in identifying established patterns. The data is discussed using the Athale women's voices. Despite difficulties, my fieldwork was successful. I was able to go in to the village and came back with data.

Issues of power, liberal feminism, changes in Buddhist practice and other changes need to be discussed in order to provide a framework for analysis. Giddens argues:

Power is defined as the ability of individuals or the members of a group, to achieve aims or further the interests they hold. Power is a pervasive aspect of all human relationships. Many conflicts in society are struggles over power, because how much power an individual or group is able to achieve governs how far they are able to realize their own wishes at the expense of the wishes of others (Giddens, 2001: 696).

As Giddens (in Jary and Jary, 1995: 514) expresses, power must be recognised as a primary concept in social analysis. A major distinction made by Giddens is between two types of resources involved in power: control over material resources or authoritative resources. Feminist analyses of both social relationships and social structures revealed persistent patterns of inequality based upon the subordination of women to men.

Jary and Jary (1995: 514) see power as an aspect that affects all areas of society and all institutions. In modern societies, the major concentration of power is in nation states and capitalism. Studies of the distribution as well as the implications of power in modern society have occupied a central place with its focus on the elites and the ruling class. Jayawardena (1995: 263) states that in Sri Lanka it was the European secular women, social reformers doctors and missionaries, who brought their liberal feminist consciousness to South Asia. Many of them had been involved in contemporary struggles against slavery and particularly campaigns for women's education. Their work in education and health made them conscious of the condition of women. They were

brought face to face with various social and religious practices, which affected women and children.

During the Malaria epidemic, we had many white people coming and working in our hospital. This was the first time we had seen white women. They worked very hard. Some Sinhala nurses also worked side by side with these doctors and nurses (Missi Nona, Interview, 1st August, 2000).

Gunawardena (cited in 'Agarwal, 1994: 148) asserts that in the Kandyan Sinhalese villages in Sri Lanka, "neither dominance nor authority was vested in the husband. In fact, both spouses were considered as household heads with equal participation in decision-making on most matters". Risseeuw (1988: 148-149) describes how the position of women deteriorated, not so much due to a direct move to curb their position, but more as an indirect result of an intensified struggle over resources among the more powerful spouse, that is, the husband. For an answer to the question as to why the men were more powerful, we may have to look into male and female activities: the male was associated with forms of hunting, killing, or 'taking of life', while in contrast, the female, because she gave birth, was associated mainly with life-giving and sustaining (gathering) activities. Sanday (1981) defines 'power' as the ability to act effectively on persons or things, while writers such as Gramsci, Althusser, Foucault and Bourdieu have located power as a phenomenon based on consensus, which dwells in systems of beliefs or ideologies (Risseeuw, 1988: 155).

One of the most important reasons why inequality between the sexes remains, according to Komter (in Risseeuw, 1988: 160) is that it is interpreted as 'normal' (i.e. inequality is based on consensus. Women have learnt to give their power away). Komter found in her study of marriage relationships in the Netherlands, the women of both lower and middle classes accommodate more to the marriage expectations of their spouses, than vice versa. Komter (in Risseeuw, 1988:160-1) states "with her amazing intuition, she pursued his unspoken orders and with great determination clung to what she had discovered them to be". Komter's concepts seem to best describe *Sudu Nona*.

My husband has never told me to do these things. I know that when he comes home he likes to have a cup of hot tea so I always make it. He likes to have dinner at 8pm. I get it ready and we eat at that time. He likes to have his tea, as

soon as he wakes up, so I make it for him. We have an understanding (Interview, 30th July 2000).

Komter summarises three characteristics of the ideological hegemony of consensus which maintain the status quo and enforce existing power relations: i) the ideology is dominant because it has become part of the common sense; ii) the ideology organises and creates social cohesion as it negates contradictions and presents them as one; and iii) the ideology succeeds in presenting what is required as 'freedom.' Thus, the social interests of dominant groups are presented as those of general interest, which can be freely accepted by the dominated group (cited in Risseuw, 1988: 165). Komter finds these concepts extremely useful as ideologies are produced and reproduced through educational institutions, the media and religion.

Gramsci's analysis examines this process in relation to the state, social classes and political parties, while Komter's analysis of marriage relations extends it to the formation of 'femininity' and 'masculinity'. Stereotyping women and men reflects the imbalance of power between the sexes. "The constant pressures can conform in varying degrees, it can also create tensions between their personal experiences and their beliefs, concerning what those experiences should be e.g. that women be 'good mothers', housewives and lovers" (in Risseuw, 1988: 165).

Trusting relationships had to be established during my research. Gaining and earning trust and developing mutual respect takes time and flexibility. There needs to be an awareness of ethical issues, values, and privilege. Extreme disparities in choice and power impact upon the entire research process. I found the building of relationships was a gradual process. My hostess in the village and other friends and acquaintances offered advice about culture and context, and appropriate dress codes. Cultural and religious etiquette were important, as I visited the local *aramaya* (see Appendix I plate 8) almost every day.

As we have to walk through the forests, make sure you are wearing your covered shoes, as there are snakes searching for water at this time of the year. A long skirt is better, as we are going to the aramaya and don't forget to take your towel, as we will stop at the river for a bath (Heen Kumari, Interview 18th July 2000).

I certainly did not need prompting to wear my well-used boots, as I knew we would see snakes in the area. I took plenty of long skirts, as I was aware of the village etiquette. The initial experience in 1997-98 helped me develop an understanding of village life; however, the experience I gained during my visit in 2000 was outstanding as I feel that one cannot live amongst people and not be touched by their lives. By listening to their life's struggles, and living like them I was able to empathize with the women.

I was truthful about why I was at Athale and what I was doing. I was also invited to address women's meetings that were held in different homes every week. I enjoyed the company, their beautifully prepared food, and the way they welcomed me into their homes. I was quite humbled when both women and men thanked me for my interest and the opportunity to talk about culture, politics, Buddhism and their life experiences. I realised that I was not just writing about them, but for them. I discovered that some topics were 'taboo,' such as wife battering and male violence, and the women quickly changed the subject if their husbands appeared. I was taken by surprise when as I was talking to a woman during one of my in-home interviews, her husband and his brother, who was visiting the home at the time, told me that I should talk to them too if I wanted a balanced interview. I apologised for the lack of time available to explore male perspectives and explained my purpose in obtaining women's views. I sympathised with the men in being left out of this study.

It is not often we get to say how we feel about conditions in the village, our home and families. So I'm very happy that you are writing a book about the village. I hope my children will be able to read it someday. We are happy that you can share this information with people in another country. May be they will like to come and see how we live in this country (Anulawathi, Interview, 18th July, 2000).

We had to change the topic as the husband walked in, and he was interested to know about my research in the village, which I explained to him. In rural Sri Lanka, the patriarchal social structures, the subordination of women, the perception of the man as the breadwinner of the family, are still prevalent in many homes, although women work just as hard and often longer hours. Caste consciousness still exists in homes, particularly with respect to marriage. I understood the necessity of being gender-sensitive while conducting interviews. I also faced the same spatial limitations as the women I interviewed. The women had to know that they were safe and out of earshot of others while being interviewed.

I visited Alice *nona* whom I met on my first visit to Athale. I noticed sadness in her voice. I saw her husband lying on the bed. He has not gone to work for a long time, and is not interested in working anymore. Alice *nona* said:

Our son was killed in the war last year. With the money we received from the government we extended our house. My husband doesn't like to talk about it. He is very sad. I'm sad too, but I like to talk about my son. He didn't die for nothing. He died for the country. He is a brave young man. He would be pleased about the house (Interview, 17th July, 2000).

The conversations were conducted in the Sinhala language, as I am conversant with the language. Some women preferred my note taking while others wanted me to tape record and play it back to them. Sometimes the women would stop my writing, and get me to read it back to them. Approving, they would exclaim *hari, hari* (meaning yes, yes), or asked me to change something by saying *naa, mehema kiyanna* (no, say it like this). The conversations were very relaxed as all the women wanted me to use their own names, and they felt rather proud to be included in such a study. However, to protect all concerned, pseudonyms have been used. One of the older residents of Athale village, Karunawathi, added:

The men would go out and drink together, but women always had to stay home and look after the children, cook and clean. Then, work in the fields. With the samiti, we can plan how to improve ourselves, and get cash by working together. We do not have to depend on the men. We get our own shares from the bank (Interview, 21st July, 2000).

This conception of freedom and women's rightful place in society was at odds with women's demands for the franchise, and their search for employment outside the home and involvement in the labor movement elicited the response: "rebellious women who exhibit male characteristics, should never be given power to operate independently, as it will lead to the destruction of the country, destruction of the nation and the destruction of age old traditions and customs" (De Alwis, 1999: 182). It is a situation that is also prevalent in many other countries.

This is certainly "power over" and it certainly displays a threat to men's confidence. Miles (in Anthias, 1999) has pointed out that it is difficult to distinguish between the

effects of class inequality and gender inequality. This is an important issue in the village regarding caste and gender in Sri Lanka. Rowlands (in Afshar, 1998: 190-1) defines empowerment as:

Bringing people who are outside the decision- making process, into it. This puts a strong emphasis on access to political structures and formal decision making, on access to markets and incomes that enable people to participate in economic decision making. It is also a process whereby women become able to organise themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination.

Afshar (1998: 3) argues that the key to alleviating poverty and empowering women is an understanding of the sources of women's lack of power. Women faced unequal power relations in virtually all their daily interactions: not only in their families, but in all local institutions that dominated women's daily lives, which included marriage and kinship systems and also household and extended family, lineage, kinship and caste groups. Afshar continues, "The patrilineal system is a structured dependence of women on men: that is, women are conditioned to be economically and socially dependent on male kin and have limited direct independent access to resources and markets" (1998: 4).

"Sexual inequality is the result, not of nature's decrees but of society's customs and traditions" (Tong, 1989: 38). The women of Athale could easily fit into that description. It is custom and tradition that have prevented these women from improving their lifestyles. These women were taught that discipline and order are important and religious practices reinforce these. It also gave them a sense of being in control of the family's destiny. However, many of the younger educated women are looking for greener pastures away from the village while some even leave the country. Liberal feminist efforts have improved the quality of life for women as a result of many of the educational and legal reforms that were aimed primarily at increasing women's professional and occupational positions. With better education, women can empower themselves. Women would still face struggles, but will be better prepared to face them. The answers to the questionnaires revealed that women want better educational opportunities for themselves and for their children (see: Appendix G). Out of the 120 women interviewed 38 had an education up to year 5, 25 studied up to year 10 and 22

women completed GCE Ordinary level, while 12 women completed GCE Advanced level. Out of the 8 *dasa sil matas* interviewed, 4 had an Arts degree, 2 had completed year 12 and completed the *praccina* examination. 2 *dasa sil matas* completed year 10.

Carr, et al (1996:3) assert that theorists interested in empowerment seek to find the cause of subordination and oppression of a specific powerless group, in this case that of women. These are: (a) Whether women's roles are determined by patriarchy or kinship (b) whether their role is defined by reproductive or productive factors and (c) whether it is women's experience, subordination or powerlessness in multiple domains? Schuler and Hashemi (1993: 5) identified six specific components to female empowerment: sense of self and vision for the future, mobility and visibility, economic security, status and decision-making power, within the household; ability to interact effectively in the public sphere; and participation in non-family groups as vital.

According to Calman (in Carr et al, 1992: 5) women's rights' advocates see women as equal citizens with men, and aim for equality under the law. The women's empowerment advocates see women's concerns as issues of economic and social rights. Risseuw (1988: 19) asserts that the original Sinhalese system carried an exceptionally high degree of female rights, of which "primitive" peoples were previously considered to be incapable of, and the British administrators were confronted by the traditional Sri Lankan conditions of marriage and divorce, which were far more liberal and potentially advantageous to men and women, than their own (British) new proposals would be. The rural women of Athale were proud of their marriage rights which they had inherited. Growing movements, such as violence against women, dowry, caste, land rights, alcoholism and, lately agitating for peace in the country, are things that affect the women of Athale. Rural women are beginning to question their rights as women, as women's consciousness has suddenly come alive, and this is certainly seen in the village today as women are being educated. Athale woman Seeliyawathi tells her story .

Our children join the army, not because they want to. They see it as a way of not only serving the country, but as a way of helping their parents. If they die, the parents get some money from the government. We want peace for the country. We don't want our children to die. We have a vote, therefore we have a responsibility to our country. Unlike earlier times, when husbands told us who we should vote for, now we make our own decisions. Peace, education, land rights for women and protecting the

environment, are major issues for us. We will see who will support us, and vote accordingly (Seeliyawathi, Interview, 22nd July, 2000).

The women of Athale were formerly under the control of the *mudalali* (village businessman), as they borrowed money from him, or worked for him. He controlled their lives with money. It is only since various NGO's have been in the village that the villagers, especially women, are not indebted to him. Now women have their own savings bank (like the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh). Educated women now work at the Banks and at the rural Women's Development Societies and are able to get loans at a nominal charge of interest to start a cottage industry, or a small business.

Since I do sewing for the village. I needed a new sewing machine, as my one belonged to the lady who came to teach us sewing and it had belonged to her mother. The thread keeps breaking all the time, and I waste time and thread. I would never save enough money to buy one. However, I was able to get a small loan. I will finish paying off the loan at the end of the year (Suneela, 19th July, 2000).

In the village of Athale, women are more involved in dry-land farming than in rice-paddy farming. Wickramasinghe (in Prorok and Chhokar, 1998: 92-93) has demonstrated how women carry out 30 percent of the tasks in paddy farming, but almost 65 percent of the dryland farming. Almost 30 percent of this is unpaid family work.

Women are involved in time-consuming, labour intensive tasks such as transplanting, weeding, harvesting, in paddy rice farming and clearing of land, burning, sowing, harvesting in dry land farming while men do the ploughing of fields, using buffaloes, (some now use tractors) sowing of paddy and transport of harvested produce (Shantilatha Interview, 20th July, 2000).

According to responses to the questionnaire, majority of women work in agriculture, and are involved in field preparation, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing and cleaning. The women do not do the sowing, as they would have to walk backwards in rice paddy cultivation, therefore this is left to the men. I would like to introduce the Hindu idea from the Mahabaratha epic literature that draws on the analogy of seed and field. Dube (2001: 121) asserts, the woman is compared to the field and the man as the

seed. A verse in the “*Atharva Veda*” says “...In the male indeed grows the seed that is poured along in to the women; that verily is the obtainment of a son. Women are created for offspring; a woman is the field and a man is the possessor of the seed”. The idea that only the man can sow the seed possibly grew out of the above idea and has continued on.

Wickramasinghe (1998) produced a study carried out in villages in the dry zone of Sri Lanka which evaluated the multiple tasks undertaken by women, in both small-scale farm operations and in the domestic sphere. Integration of women into the development process is fairly new in Sri Lanka. Since 1978, the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP) has been adopted for developing the rural areas of Sri Lanka. A separate set of women’s projects was introduced, which aimed at reducing poverty among rural women by providing assistance for income-generating activities. However, it has not been able to obtain equal participation of men and women (Wickramasinghe, 1998: 89). The economically active group as in many countries is male-dominated; however in rural areas, the proportionate share of women in agricultural sectors varies spatially and seasonally. The women take examples from Buddhist teachings, to help them with daily life, such as the Buddha’s discourse on the *Sigalovada Sutta* which has discussions on meditation, agriculture, respect for the wife and respect for husband.

Traditionally, women as wives and mothers are expected to see to the well being of their family. Due to hardships in rural societies, the males migrate to other villages or cities to earn a living, as do many of the males at Athale village. These are struggles women had to face. “This adds pressure on women, to produce food for family consumption; often it forces women to invest their time and energy in agricultural activities, especially in small scale crop production increasing household requirements” (Wickramasinghe, 1998: 93). Seelwathi speaks of the difficulties faced:

My husband couldn’t find work in the village for six months. He was very upset by it. He decided to go to Badulla, where he found work in the building industry and enjoys it very much. He lives there now, but comes to see us once a month for a couple of days. This has put a lot of pressure on me as I have to tend to my business of sewing, plus do all the cooking, tend to the vegetables and make sure the pepper is picked at the correct time to sell it. My son helps, but youngsters don’t like to do that type of work anymore. I have to get daily labourers to come and help me. My health is not the best, I have to help my daughter

with schoolwork, I really have no time for myself, and my son helps by bringing water from the well. I have to be mother and father to the children (Interview, July 30th 2000).

Women have little time for themselves, as I saw in the village. With the introduction of high-yielding varieties of crop to dry zone farming, the involvement of women in agricultural production has increased. Pulses, legumes, tubers and vegetables are grown, either in rotation or in mixtures during the rainy season. Although women have little time for themselves, they attend to a range of activities such as “clearing land, weeding, burning of shrubs, sowing, harvesting, processing and winnowing. Almost 65 percent of production activities in dryland farming are done by women” (Wickramasinghe, 1998: 93). The women of Athale tend to their own garden as well as helping the women in the *samitiya*. This has helped the women, especially at harvesting time, when they share each other's work. Now, women who share common interests, work together in their fields which give them time to spend on other interests.

Discrimination against women in economic, social and cultural spheres in patriarchal societies are issues discussed. Seneviratne (1994: 594) argues against the accepted values and attitudes which arise from cultural and religious practices. The majority of women interviewed carried out certain religious practices, which subordinated them and placed them in a lower rank. There are many beliefs and customs, some of which are tied to religious notions that relegate women to a subordinate status. In Athale village, women are very involved with the *aramaya* as discussed previously.

This is my karma. I must have sinned in previous lives. I take dane to the bhikkhus twice a week, have bodhi puja, light a lamp everyday. My life does not improve. I carry on doing the same things my mother did. Although I'm educated, I can't do anything better. I hope my daughter will have a better life (Kusumalatha, Interview, 30th July 2000).

Life has become very competitive now due to much unemployment in Sri Lanka. This causes much tension even in the village. The women claimed to treat each other with respect and equality. However, the very human vice of *irisiyawa* (jealousy) among the women of Athale is seen at the village. Unemployment among the skilled is a growing global problem and competition for educational and employment opportunities is so severe as *Punya Kanthi* discovered.

I had to take my daughter to another village for the Year 5 government examination, as she was considered clever, and the teacher thought it would be good if she received a scholarship, to go to a better school. I was so happy, that I wanted to share this news with everyone, as I thought they would share in my joy. However, I was surprised that my immediate neighbour stopped talking to us, and started rumours about my daughter (Interview, 20th August, 2000).

Although women said Buddhism helped them to get over such things, human nature does take over sometimes. Even at the village of Athale, there are struggles between women. However, as the women said, they confront them now, unlike before and deal with misunderstandings quickly.

Dual parenting, extended parenting and communal care networks are essential to women's empowerment, as Rita Gross (1998: 277) discusses. She stresses the importance of women teaching Buddhism, in order to break the male monopoly, and to introduce spiritual discipline and *nirvana* (Buddhist enlightenment) while men take on their share in childcare. Gross claims that changes would take the next generation towards *samsara* (the cycle of re-birth). The younger women of Athale share household work and childcare as well as working in the fields with their husbands.

It was really good to have the dasa sil matas teaching us meditation in the village. We help each other now. It is good that our husbands share the housework and child care with us. My husband brings the water from the well nearly a mile away, as our well has dried up. He also helps with the cooking in the mornings (Sudu Menike, Interview, 27th July, 2000).

The *dasa sil matas*, who teach meditation in the village urged people to meditate and pray for peace to prevail in the country. Many *dasa sil matas* took part in a "Samadhi walk" in 1992 which aimed at bringing unity to the various ethnic groups in the country which I read in a news letter, held at the *aramaya*. The *dasa sil matas* take it as their role to preach the Buddhist message of non violence.

I also drew upon journals, newspaper reports, diaries, consultancy reports, NGO reports, temple records, government reports, Colombo Archives and hand-drawn and other maps during my research, for cross checking information given by the women. These are

important as they show conditions before and after independence in 1948; interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, most of this archival material dating from before Independence was written in English.

Useful sources of secondary information were in the form of archival and historical documents. Official records, all of which were used in this study; were oral histories (see Appendix J 2), where long term residents reflected on past events; and historical records of Athale, which proved useful in documenting the history of the village. The documents relating to the location of the *aramaya*, and Weheragoda temple, and the historical evidence to confirm the length of time they have existed, were useful to this study, as some of the family names in the village appeared in the old temple books, such as the name of the family I lived with.

Living with the family helped me empathise even more closely with village life, the difficulties faced by villagers, and happy family times, such as finding a marriage partner for my host Suneela's brother. Four of her brothers, her husband, mother, two children and myself set out early morning to visit the prospective bride. This was going to be an arranged marriage. We travelled by coach (a modern panel van) for many miles through jungle roads to Arugam Bay and Panama (see Appendix A) to the girl's home, where I observed marriage customs of the village, such as the prospective bride offering betel leaves²⁵ to the prospective groom, and the offering of a glass of water as an invitation to all the visitors to partake of a meal.

It was on this trip that I encountered military personnel. This was more than I expected, even though I had been stopped by the military many times as they guarded all entries to Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, and I was used to seeing military personnel with guns. They would look at my passport, and hand it back in a courteous manner. This time the situation was different, as I had to get off the van, while the military searched it. Then a soldier said "Miss, *bag eka denna, monvada thiyenne balanna* (Miss, can we see what is inside your bag?). This made me rather nervous, as I had a camera, and a thick notebook, which contained all my notes. The soldier with a gun pointed, wanted to see my identification papers as the others in the van had them. I told him that I was not a Sri Lankan citizen, therefore I did not have papers, but I had a passport to say I was an

²⁵ A leaf which is chewed by villagers, which is also offered as a sign of respect to elders.

Australian citizen. He asked *koheda yanne, ai ehe yanne?* (Where are you going, and why are you going there?). The soldier ushered me to a military post to see the sergeant, who politely asked for the passport, and flicked through the pages and returned the passport and thanked me, while explaining that it was routine checks they did as we were going through the jungles, where the Tamil Tigers²⁶ were hiding. In the meantime the soldier was looking intently at my camera, wanting to take pictures of all of us, and looking at us through the camera. The sergeant wanted him to hand back my bag, and I was relieved when he said we could proceed. This was quite an ordeal; however, this was not the last, as we had to go through this same procedure five times on our journey to, and four times on our way back from, Panama. I had read Ann Marie Hilsdon's (1995) *Madonnas and Martyrs*, which discussed a similar situation in the Philippines, but I was totally unprepared for this situation in Sri Lanka. I had avoided going into these territories before, as I had always travelled with my children and my husband.

Sometimes, women would stop me on the road and talk to me about themselves or their family. Women dropped into my village home and discussed their experiences and feelings with me on different issues. During my research, I was able to listen to people who volunteered information about their lives. These discussions proved to be a valuable source of data gathering. As Sisiliyawathi, who was a neighbour, says:

I work at the government hospital and my interest is in the health of this area. Last year we had a cholera outbreak. I helped the health nurse of the area. We went to all the homes, and advised the women on good health habits, and made sure they understood the importance of boiling water for drinking. My group went for training at the hospital, so now we can assist in an emergency such as this (Interview, 22nd July, 2000).

With broad descriptive questions in mind, I tried to discover what was important in the daily life of the village community. Within the community, clusters of social situations were found which pertained to venues where groups of people routinely congregated for various purposes and activities. Each of these venues formed part of the network in which men and women interacted. These venues included the *aramaya*, the boutique, the water well, people's homes, the field, the junction, the river, school and the pre-

²⁶ Tamil Tigers are a group from Jaffna (North of the country), who want a separate state called Eelam, comprising of the Northern and Eastern parts of Sri Lanka. This war has been going on since the early 1980s.

school. The river was a very popular place as women came not only for a bath, but also to do their washing, as I did, and for a good chat.

I met Sriyalatha on many occasions. She had sat for her GCE 'A' levels and was waiting for her results. She was very interested in my research, and asked many questions about it. She was also interested in starting a teaching and learning programme for women at the village.

Women are now interested in what the Buddha really said. Not only what we hear, we need to read the texts, and now that is possible. I may start a class for adults who want to learn the texts. I can ask for help from the bhikkhus, but this will be for women (Interview, 20th August, 2000).

When I asked 'What about the *bhikkhus* at the *aramaya* who teach there she replied "They can help".

It may be argued that many reforms in Sri Lanka did not affect the masses of women but only those of the educated elite. However, an ideology arose that supported the freeing of women from traditional constraints, and gave women a new freedom to go to *aramayas* or join women's groups, to do things the women themselves wanted to do (Jayawardene, 1995: 222). At the same time, however, it also allowed women to be exploited economically. However, the women in a village such as Athale made a difference to their life by becoming actively involved in Buddhism, using the Buddhist teachings of compassion and universal liberation to cope with changes in their lives.

*Buddhism is our life. We pay homage to Buddha in the mornings and evenings. We take *dane* for the bhikkhus at the aramaya. Before I start work, I say a few gathas. My business started in a small way, now I have built it up. I have a separate shop next to my home. I started by sewing baby clothes, then I sold them and bought material to sew children's clothes and now I sew mainly for adults. We should have a few more sewing machines, then I can teach other women (Nadeesha Interview, 16th July 2000).*

These women face the challenges of modernisation and globalisation, without changes in their cultural normal domestic chores, looking after children, cooking and also working in their home gardens. I also observed some of their daily religious practices,

such as lighting the oil lamp at dusk, offering food to the Buddha, and reciting the *gathas* (stanzas from Pali/Sinhala Buddhist texts).

The *bhikkhus* were concerned with the new problem of alcoholism that faced the village and I discovered that it was a major factor which kept men away from the temple. The women agreed that alcoholism was bad for the village. Sisiliyawathi, amidst sobs and tears, relates her story:

My husband came home drunk last night; my child and I were asleep. I heard him shouting, as I woke up. He was abusing our neighbour. I felt lajja (ashamed). I don't know what to do. My parents don't live in this village. He started drinking like this only this year. He doesn't like his job, since he has to go out of the village (Interview, 6th August, 2000).

The women were very sympathetic to this young woman's problem, so we spent time talking about this, discussing ways and means of help. Three older women who knew him well and who regarded him as a younger brother, thought it best to talk the problem over and confront him with the situation, and they decided to talk to him that very evening. A happy solution had been reached, as Muthu Menika, a relative explains:

He was very sorry to have caused problems with the neighbors, he couldn't remember what he said, but we wanted him to apologise to the neighbors and also to his wife. He will be looking for work closer to home and has promised not to get drunk like that again. He will join a group that the NGO representative has for alcoholics (Interview, 7th August, 2000).

Women of Athale certainly have learnt to use their power to confront and talk to a person about changing their behaviour. This was something new that I had never witnessed before. Older women are empowered and are able to help younger women, unlike the *bhikkhus*, who admitted feeling helpless when I asked what they were doing about alcoholism in the village.

With the entry of NGOs to the village better communication and interaction among the women of the village is available today. 'Future in our hands' (FIOH) is a branch of NGO, which encourages and supports women and men to become self-sufficient. As Kamalsiri and Seelawathi, the NGO representatives, explain:

As a result of information and training, the women of the village have become more confident as they use their knowledge, to save money. They also share their knowledge with other women as they meet weekly to discuss their plans for the following week. The women meet other groups from different areas to discuss how they can improve. This has given them more mobility, as they travel out of their village, and more confidence in themselves.

When asked what the main group does, Kamalsiri adds:

These groups join together to form a movement. The main aim of this movement is to do the work that is not possible for the smaller groups to do. The movement does what is necessary to improve the village, such as building a road, or digging a new well. Part of the money collected by the groups is deposited with the movement. They elect a committee, which is responsible for distributing the money where it's needed. The groups can put in submissions for various projects that would yield a good income, such as animal husbandry, goat farming, to establish a shop, to plant pepper etc. Once a month this committee will meet to plan how the money will be spent. They also have a stall where produce is brought and sold. The movement saves the money collected and is deposited.

What other help do you get and from whom?' Kamalsiri replies:

Various help is received from government and non-government organisations either in cash or expertise. The people are also introduced to various organizations, and individuals. Once the people have received the knowledge and training on how to successfully run the business, the NGOs move out to a different place. The people are given training in how to keep accounts, and how to plan and make submissions, also in childcare, caring for the environment. The NGOs representatives see that the people are able to carry out the work by themselves.

When asked what the foreign NGO expected, Seelawathi replies:

To dispel poverty: the executive has to give a plan at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year they expect this to have materialised. They find information about the village and the developments from the executive council.

One of the objects is to bring peace among all people. The Norwegian government has funded this work in Sri Lanka, since the 1980s. We organise concerts, and talks to help in this. They also invite speakers to talk about women's rights (to prevent women being assaulted, raped), and talk of gender equality and legal literacy. They are also given training in how to make compost for plants, the non-use of chemicals, and given training in how to harvest two crops of paddy rice a year.

We have to reveal if there is a difference in the quality of life, in the village after five years. Auditors are appointed by Norway and money is given for development depending on the auditors' report (Interview, 4th August, 2000).

At one time, the village *mudalali* (village businessmen) controlled the people, as they had to borrow money from him. Now the *samiti* (groups) give loans to individuals from the groups, which are managed by women. Individuals are not under the control of the *mudalali* as the women have autonomy. This has become a problem for the *mudalali*, who no longer has women to work on his land. The women said they have much more freedom than their mothers had, as they can pursue their interests. They commented on new ventures they experimented with, such as new businesses, paddy land farming, meditation at people's homes, discussions on topics that interest women, business propositions, managing their land, and growing what they see as useful for future generations. If new members want to join the groups, the others in the group feel it will be a setback for them as they have reached certain levels of development and saved money. When new people join, it slows the process, as the newcomers take time to get used to the group.

Changes in the Village

Since Independence for Sri Lanka in 1948, many changes have taken place in the village, including the building of a school in the area, and access to new roads and a bus service which runs from Badalkumbura to Buttala (see Appendix B) have provided new opportunities for women and men to seek employment outside the village. Education has given these women a new sense of freedom, as the education system conducted through the medium of Sinhala and the Pali languages was neglected with the arrival of the British in Sri Lanka. With independence, free education for all people up to university level was made available. In 1956, education became compulsory up to the

age of 14 years, and was made available to both girls and boys by a government decree. The Sinhala language was made the official language of the island, and the medium of administration and education from 1956. Educated women of this era became more erudite than their mothers, however, as before independence in poorer households, the girls were kept at home for household chores, while the boys were sent to school. This changed with compulsory education for all, and government subsidising of the poor and needy with uniforms and books. As Vimalalatha explains:

We have to educate our three children. This village can benefit if our children study. Life will improve; they are our hope, for tomorrow. The government gives each child material for two uniforms, and we get books the children need. We only have to provide them with pencils, pens and erasers. We will spend money on our children's education, as they are the future generation. The aramaya can't help us now (Interview, 3rd August 2000).

In self-help projects, apathy is giving way to motivation, which has helped these women gain more confidence in themselves. A good example is the research plot of land belonging to my hostess, Suneela, which has been developed from land that grew sugar cane (which destroyed the soil), to beautifully cultivated land with fruit trees, medicinal plants, and vegetables (see: Appendix I no 12). Shiva (in Reinharz, 1994: 115) questions the link between women and economic development, and extends this concern to the impact of development on nature. Her term 'maldevelopment' refers to the patriarchal misapplication of modern science, which has depleted the soils and forests of India with particular hardship for women. Similarly in Athale village, planting acres of sugar cane as a quick cash crop has reduced the fertility of the soil.

Through oral interaction, and campaigns for awareness (organised by the NGO representative), the women of Athale are becoming more empowered. Participatory community involvement has helped these women to spearhead each initiative and also to become participants. Women join other groups for discussions on their interest in issues such as women's rights, alcoholism, childcare, or other interests such as sewing, needlework, and cooking, as Leelawathi explains:

We meet once a month at a different village to discuss our interests. Sometimes we have women lawyers, doctors, childcare workers, nurses coming to speak to us. These are good for us, as we learn from these women about our

rights, women's health and then we come to our own groups and talk about what we have learnt (Interview, 30th July, 2000).

Despite the fact that few women are literate, they are able to gain much authority and experience by this method of group discussion. The women of the village have developed a growing awareness of their rights.

The NGO representative for the area disseminates information to the village women. The role of the agent of change in programmes intended to promote empowerment with women is an important issue. As Rowlands (in Afshar, 1998: 26) states:

The attitudes the NGOs bring to their work, and the form their work takes can have an immense impact, positively or negatively, on the people they work with. Attitudes are those necessary for working with women on developing self confidence, self esteem and a sense of themselves as able to act in a wider sphere, complete respect for each individual, humility and a willingness to learn, and a commitment to the empowerment process.

The population increase has also been aided by resettlement schemes. The local health nurse (a woman) works diligently at keeping the community in good health. I also met her husband, who serves as a health officer for another area. I listened to him as he explained his work, but had to very politely ask if I could get the information from his wife, as she worked in the Athale area, and my study was about Athale village.

H.B.H Samarasinghe the health nurse explains :

My aim is to uphold the Buddhist teachings and apply them to my work. I do this by sharing information on Buddhist culture. As Buddhists we have a responsibility to be healthy ourselves and look after our family, husband children and the elderly. In this way our society will be healthy and that is the expectation I have as a Buddhist.

My responsibility is directed specially towards mothers-to-be, young mothers, and children and undernourished children, and older people. I advise women on how to maintain a balanced diet, how to cook inexpensive nourishing meals, how to grow and use vegetables and greens grown in the garden. The women in the village are mostly vegetarian. They do not like to eat eggs or meat even when they are pregnant. A source of Iron is important in their diet, so we teach them to eat more legumes, and soya products. Mothers neglect themselves,

so we have to educate them on the importance of good health (Interview, 30th August, 2000).

The behaviour of mothers does not differ from that of the past, in that they continue to act as the main carer for the family, and neither have health habits changed. As older women informed me what they had to eat compared with today, I observed what the women's diet was, and the older women mentioned similar food they had. Both generations grew most of the vegetables, and did not eat any type of meat. However, the way information is transmitted now is also by way of radio and television.

A secondary school in the area has enabled village children to gain admission to a university that constitutes a significant opportunity for the village. However, although there are more educated youth in the village, they cannot attain the necessary employment (see Appendix E, table 4) they desire locally, and are enticed into the larger cities in search of work. Education is very important for Sri Lankans; they will even put themselves into debt to educate a child. Once they have an education, the children are not interested in working on the rice paddy farms, which has caused problems for the parents and the community, as the children leave the village.

The establishment of the first industrial park in Uva province brought many migrant workers from the villagers into this area. Where 50 years before, the economy of the village was based on paddy rice and *chena* (slash and burn) cultivation, it has now become dependent on cash crops. The educated daughters and sons of former farmers now run the village shops or are employed in small businesses and are not interested in working in the family fields. However, these young people visit the *aramaya* on *poya* days, and take *dane* to the *bhikkhus* as I witnessed it.

With their beginnings as a local oral tradition, the teachings of the Buddha are now available in pamphlets and cassettes. The oral tradition is really reinforced by the electronic media; radio and TV. Older people who could not read, can now listen to the radio broadcasts. Buddhist talks by eminent speakers are broadcast over the radio and television, and *bhikkhus* are invited to the *pansala* to give talks. However, the *bhikkhus* are asked by the women and men to explain various *sutras*. As Sadanamali comments:

*Those days we would not question the bhikkhu, or the men.
Today, if we see that it is not the way Buddha would have
done, we question them, as we know the Buddha treated*

all equally, so why should it not be the same for us. The men put restrictions on us (Interview, 15th July 2000).

It is important to understand the kinds of change, both material and cultural, that have affected villages such as Athale in recent times. Most changes are unintended consequences of liberal economic policies taking place (Economic Progress of Independent Sri Lanka, 1998: 3-5). Sri Lanka experienced dramatic changes in her social and economic environments from 1971-1976 and 1977-2000, and the latter period in particular saw many changes to development and has been called the 'mantra' for government decisions and international aid programs. In the modernisation process, women are 'developed' differently; not all change is progress, and not all 'modernity' enhances women's status. Women themselves as agents of change have harnessed the power of the development narrative (Edwards and Roces, 2000: 2). How have women engaged with development and modernity, to create new possibilities and expand their opportunities? Organizations such as the United Nations (UN) have proposed international legislation regarding women's rights, which monitors the countries. (DEVAW: Declaration on Violence Against Women (1993) in Edwards and Roces, 2002: 3).

Community

A characteristic of rural villages is the high level of involvement in community life. With the housing improvements, including running water and private toilets, the community contact has been reduced. However, the women of Athale ensure they continue to nurture community life by being active at the *aramaya*, and going down to the river for a bath, as this is an important place where women talk, laugh and have some fun.

The *aramaya* in this instance takes high priority and, of the women interviewed, almost all were involved in some form of support for the *aramaya*. Most women had their names on the roster for supplying *dane* (alms giving), food served to the *sangha* in residence at the *aramaya*. In return for this constant flow of material support to the *bhikkhus*, the laity believes they receive *pin* (merit). Some women help with the cleaning of the temple contributing many hours of unpaid work. This subordination of women through the power of religious specialists needs to be noted. Gilligan's

fundamental argument is that “women, perhaps because of their social roles as caregivers and nurturers, define themselves in the context of their relationships and evaluate themselves and others on the basis of their ability to care for those who rely on them” (Gilligan in Ozorak, 1996: 18).

Mothers also support their children’s activities at school, and help the teachers in many ways. They also support their husbands’ interests and activities by attending to domestic needs such as preparing for a *dane* by cooking, or by taking food to the field during harvesting. Women buy medicine for sick *bhikkhus*, and carry out the major responsibility of caring for the children and the aged in their homes and the community by cooking special meals for them, helping them with housework, bathing them, or taking them to the hospital or to the doctor. They contribute significantly to the quality of rural life by organising special events for Sinhala New Year and other Buddhist functions. In other words, the women of Athale also hold fast to the idealised and traditional view of women as nurturers. As Suneela, my host, explained:

It is expected of us women to be wives, mothers, in this community. We help each other to make life easier. It was not so long ago that my daughter attained adulthood. Almost the whole village came for the celebration. This is a way of informing the village community that my daughter is no longer a small child. My daughter knows that she must get married someday (Interview, 28th July, 2000).

These are the idealised characteristics of women as nurturers. Women believe that they free themselves through the practice of Buddhism.

Social structures and belief systems in combination have disempowered women. As Rowlands (in Afshar, 1998: 14) states in addition, “the feminist model of power would draw on the thinking of Foucault, but would incorporate a gender analysis of power relations that includes an understanding of how internalised oppression places internal barriers to women’s exercise of power, thereby contributing to the maintenance of inequality between men and women.”

Economic Downturn

The deteriorating economic situation in agriculture since 1970, which has resulted in farms being divided and redivided, led to reduced farm incomes for both men and women. The change from a rice-growing area to a quick cash crop area by growing sugar cane has had devastating effects on the land, and resulted in unemployment in many rural communities. However, the people of Athale would not return to agriculture which is not destructive, as it does not give the quick returns of cash crops. The latest cash crop is pepper (see Appendix I plate 6), which is grown in the village of Athale. In the village, the growers would get only about Rs.200 for a kilogram, whereas in Colombo, the capital, it is sold for over Rs.600 (A\$ 1.00=Rs. 55.00).

As a result of the economic downturn, villagers, including the women, have to go out of the village to find employment. A few of the younger women of the village applied through agencies to go out of the country and work as domestics and nannies in Dubai and elsewhere in the Middle East, and also in Hong Kong and Singapore. Many of these women were educated up to the General Certificate of Education (GCE) ordinary level, and some even to advanced level standards. It is not surprising at the present time that women postpone marriage in order to support their family, contrary to cultural traditions in which women were expected to marry young and produce children. A young woman I met was leaving the country to work in the Middle East.

I hope to work in a hospital. I always wanted to travel to another country. I have relatives working there, and they would find a job for me. My parents are not happy, but I need to work and collect money. I can't find work in this village. I can send money back to my parents (Nirosha, Interview, 4th August, 2000).

Some women find employment locally in the community fields, or in the market gardens. Women's wages in the area are usually lower than men's, and poverty is an issue for the whole family which in turn affects the village community, especially if there is no male breadwinner. Some older women tend to be isolated due to lack of a good transport system, which although improved in recent times at Punsisigama (I was told that the elections were drawing closer, and that is why the roadworks had begun) does not facilitate many essential services or extensive non-local social contact. There

has been no maintenance of the local roads, and no new roads have been made since the early 1980s in Athale.

Walking, that is the best. I still walk these roads, and I visit the Weheragoda temple once a day. As long as my two feet take me, I will walk (Karunawathi, Interview, 24th July, 2000).

Unpaid household labour, dependence on male earnings (older women), changes to land tenure arrangements (as the son was given the house and land) have found some women isolated from their communities and this isolation has disempowered them. Some older women of the village, however, lived with their children and cared for the grand children (more unpaid labour) while the younger women went out to work. This is a change in the village, as earlier older women and men would spend more time at the *aramaya* and take *sil* often. Although the situation of women working out of the home and village is contradictory to established village culture, they are compelled to go out to work as men are unable to find satisfactory jobs to support the family. This is a change that has now become common in the village. At first, I was rather surprised to see young women travelling in an open truck; later, I discovered that these young women went out of the village in the early morning to work in a field some miles away from the village, and returned home in the evenings.

I spent some time with older women of the community who could remember the colonial and the post-colonial rule, and who have observed the changes that have taken place in Athale over many years. We had many laughs together over some of the stories they had to tell (see, Appendix J):

I wake up at 4 a.m every day. After paying homage to the Buddha, I cook the breakfast for all the men. I cook rice, one vegetable and a pol sambol. Once the men leave I feed the children and clean the house, feed the chickens and then while the older children look after the younger ones, I go to help in the chena. I come home to cook lunch for the men and the children. I take the lunch to the men. After that I weed, or gather the paddy, then came home in time to cook dinner. And so it goes on (Interview, 28th July, 2000).

In my time spent at the *pansala*, I met a number of older women devotees from the village. *Sudu Nona* and *Kalu Menika* sang praises to the Buddha with this *kaviya* (verse). I introduce to the reader two women of Athale, who speak about their village

life and various changes that have been brought to their Buddhist practices. I was reminded of the verses of the *Therigatha*, which the *bhikkhunis* of old sang about their lives. I was impressed by the ceaseless creative energy these women bring to their homes, their market gardens, to the rice fields and to the temple. In their stories, the mundane and the extraordinary challenges of daily life are apparent. The way in which these women empowered themselves, the strategies they used, and their assertiveness, surprised me at times, and encouraged me to share their life experiences with others. By weaving together the threads of gender, culture and history, this study aims in part to restore some balance, complexity and depth to the struggles of the Athale women.

*Life has been a constant struggle for us, but
now, we are getting closer and closer to our death.
It is only good deeds that give us comfort, now as we draw
closer to Nibbana.
He became a Buddha and gave up his family
He gave up his royal life
My burden laid, my task done
I am now enlightened
(Sudu nona and Kalu Menike, Interview, 23rd July, 2000).*

Several of the older women volunteered storytelling (see Appendix J 2) as a way to communicate their ideas of how life has changed since early times, the impact of Buddhism on their lives, and the changes taking place in the village. I need to share with the reader a very important story about life at Athale. This was an arranged marriage which took place nearly sixty years ago. It also highlights the changes that have taken place at Athale. As told by J.M Sudu Hamy:

I was 14 years old. One day my mother said a man was coming to see me. I said I don't want to see a man, I want to play with my friend. My mother made me wash and change. I saw this Bullock cart stop in front of our hut. A young man and his parents came, they had four boxes of sweet meats, I wanted to run, but I couldn't. My feet felt heavy. I was scared. My mother said "You will go with this family and live with them for some time. You can come back if you don't like it there. I was sad as I had to leave my brother and four sisters. We had great times playing, I did not go to school as I was the oldest. I looked after my two younger brothers as my mother had to work in the fields. She cooked lunch for all the men that worked the field. We did not have much but we were happy. Today things are different. The more people have the more they want. It has become a greedy society.

We went to the Weheragoda temple. We only bought salt from the shop. Actually we bartered for the things we wanted. We lived in this jungle; I grew corn and other vegetables. The Elephants used to walk around. We weren't afraid. One day I was cooking outside when the big Elephant came from the back, I frightened it away with the fire stick.

The Political Awareness of Women

Old and new generations of feminists are working for the global realisation of women's rights to own land, buildings and homes especially in some Asian and African countries where tradition denies property rights from women. Land is an essential resource and land ownership entails the ability to control people's lives, therefore, providing women with property rights will enable them to have control on their lives (Hosken, 1997: 1).

Carr, Chen and Jhabvala (1996:1) state that an underlying cause of poverty, both for men and women in South Asia is that of traditional structures, notably caste, class as well as religious or ethnic discrimination and unequal land distribution. In Athale the women were literally "talked out of their property"²⁷ as Sudu Kumari said:

Yes, we had a very difficult time. We were not allowed to do slash and burn agriculture on the land we had and the government took over the land we lived on. The government said it would be better for us and our children if we went to live on the land the government was giving us. We did not want to move, but we had to. We had to move to my mother's village. Life became very hard. My husband had to go and work for the mudalali. There was no water for us to grow food. We lost the land we had for generations (Interview, 3rd August, 2000).

A revolt by educated young people in the south of Sri Lanka erupted in the 1970s, as they were frustrated by not being able to find work after obtaining a university degree. This was of great concern to all the people in Sri Lanka. The young people of Athale village joined the young people of the South, as did many young people from all over

²⁷ The overall land policy of the British entailed alienation of land on a large scale from its original (multiple) owners in order to facilitate the economic exploitation of land in the form of plantations (Waste Land Act, ordinance no.12: 1840 in Risseuw, 1988: 29).

the country. The uprising mainly consisted of rural youth. Young people were either taken by force or they left the village without their parents' consent.

We organised a protest against children disappearing from the village. These were bad times for the village. It was our sons and our daughters that went missing. We were desperate, so the Mothers, and some fathers pelapaliye giya (demonstrated on the streets). It was only then, the government took notice of us, and had it investigated (Sobanalatha, Interview, 26th August, 2000).

This is similar to what is happening in the North of the country in the Jaffna Peninsular, where the young persons are taken from their homes unwillingly or are encouraged by peers to join the rebel group or the army.

The public display of honour and esteem has become an important phenomenon in social life. It is given much publicity by all the media, for example, an article which appeared in the Daily News, 16th August, 2000 read: "Religious Ceremony to Invoke Blessings on War Heroes". A ceremony was held at the Rajamaha Viharaya where the Venerable *Nayake Thera* delivered an *Anusassana* (message) at a special religious ceremony to invoke blessings on war heroes in action and also to transfer merits on fallen war heroes in the ongoing war. While only a few *bhikkhus* support the ongoing war, the majority of *bhikkhus* want an end to the war.

Piyadassi *thera* (1991: 77) calls for compassion towards all living beings and denounces three wrong actions: killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. These deeds are directly against the first three of the five basic *pancasila* (precepts) of Buddhist ethics. The *gramasevaka* of the village says:

The gun culture and war situation experienced for the last two decades should be ended. The wholehearted co-operation of every citizen, irrespective of caste, creed and party politics, would be indispensable to achieve these noble objects (Interview, 30th August, 2000).

According to the report of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (1998:37) the unemployment of women increased from 10.5% in 1959 to 19.9% in 1975 and 17.8% in 1981. Of the employment offered in the free trade zone, 78.9% is taken up by women, chiefly between the ages of 18-25 years, while almost half the migrant workers to the Middle East are females, of whom the vast majority find employment in domestic service.

These developments increased the number of women employed in the manufacturing industries, and by the end of the 20th century, it was the women's earnings in the Middle East that brought in the highest foreign exchange to the country. However, research has shown how heavily women were represented in the categories of ill-paid and exploitative work relations (Connally, 1985: 77).

It is sad that children are leaving their village to find work. Once they leave the village and live in big cities, it is difficult for them to come and live in the village. They find partners from different parts of the country. They get used to a different way of living. We don't get to see our grand children (Dingiri Menike, Interview, 5th September, 2000).

Unemployment figures for 1996 by province are listed in (Appendix E table 4 for Uva province). Female unemployment was 12.2 per cent. Unemployment rate among females had declined from 22 per cent in 1993 to 16.3 percent in the second quarter of 1997. The job preference of the unemployed showed that in 1996, only 0.6 per cent of the unemployed desired agriculture-based occupations. About one third preferred 'white collar' jobs (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 1998: 38).

Women were not represented in government planning, from the post-Independence period until the late 1960s in Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike's parliament. Jayawardena (1986: 135-6) states, "Sri Lanka is thus a curious example of a society, in which women were not subject to harsh and overt forms of oppression, and therefore did not develop a movement for women's emancipation". It is from this background that Sri Lanka produced a woman prime minister, as well as women in the various professions, without disturbing the general pattern of subordination.

Land reform programs with European influence continued to be modelled on the notion of a unitary male-headed household, with titles being granted only to men, except in households without adult men, where women (usually widows) were clearly the household heads. This bias was replicated in resettlement schemes despite Sri Lankan customary inheritance systems, which were bilateral or matrilineal (Agarwal, 1994: 8-9). With the momentum created by the 'International Women's Year' in 1975, and under pressure from lobbying by liberated feminists, women finally set up the Women's Bureau in 1978 (Risseuw, 1988: 206). In spite of increased visibility on a policy level since the 1980s, the process of women's marginalisation, which began in the 19th

century has not been halted. Women in the subsistence sector and those engaged in income-generating home-based activities, are still regularly excluded from official statistics, or are counted as unpaid family helpers (Jayawardena, and Jayaweera, 1985: 127). The increased exploitation of the country's economy by local and foreign capital has made some women workers aware of the oppression to which they are subjected and due to this, women's movements are now active in Sri Lanka and are aiming to make all women conscious of their subordination within family structures. Agarwal (1994:503) states there is more interaction between women's groups who have forged links with other Asian women's groups. Kamalsiri, the NGO representative, had great concern for women, and their land rights and education.

Indigenous people are specially threatened by eviction from their land for projects such as dams. Our major concern is land rights for small and landless villages, where access to clean water and land is very important (Kamalsiri, Interview 30th August, 2000).

A number of women's organisations have been working for peace and in a society torn by ethnic strife. *Kantha Handa* (voice of women), *Kantha Shakti* (Strength of Women), Sri Lanka Muslim Women's congress, Women's Education and Research Center, *Surya* Women's Development Centre, which works for the empowerment of women, are but a few of these organisations.

Women have to join together, and work what we care about. Our land, our children our families, our village. We have to save money in our samiti and buy land when we can. We have to work together to make a difference in our village (Podi Menike, Interview, 30th August, 2000).

Podi Menike, in her own way, attempted to re-evaluate existing theories. When does covert resistance become overt, and to what effect? The theory of "subaltern consciousness", and Gramsci's theories have raised questions on the concept of "common sense". The "philosophy of non-philosophers" is relatively original as Risseuw (1988: 344) emphasizes the "deep felt need to understand more fully how people are currently coping with the oppression they face under the guise of development".

Marriage and Land

Agarwal (1994: 126) claims that “ethnic and religious clustering superimposed on ecological variations...” produced some notable regional patterns of inheritance, marriage, residence, land use and the gender division of agricultural labour. Women lost power on two counts: first, by not owning land and secondly by having only minimal education. Despite these differences among the Sinhalese and under traditional Sinhala laws of inheritance, an important distinction was attached to whether a woman married in *binna* (uxorilocal form of marriage) or *diga* (virilocal form of marriage). In a *binna* marriage the husband came to live with his wife and in-laws and jointly managed the land his wife inherited. The children took the mother’s ancestral name. Under *diga* marriage, the woman moved out to live with her husband, and the children took their father’s name. The woman continued to use her family name. Kandyan men and women commonly married and divorced several times during a lifetime: “...for if they disagree and dislike [sic] one the other, they part without disgrace...” (Knox, in Agarwal, 1994: 126). Divorce involved no formalities. This simple matrimonial structure was changed by the British, according to their own social history and prejudices regarding appropriate marriage practices and their need to establish control over land for economic gain. The local elite did not oppose it for their own advantage. “Power was not only ‘held’ by the state and anti-state, but was more widespread: groups of community organizers also ‘had’ power and it seemed to ‘be in’ specific incidents and situations” (Hilsdon, 1995: 6).

Agarwal (1994: 180) argues that British intervention in land matters took a number of forms, such as direct appropriation of land by the state, encouraging appropriation by Europeans and the local elite for establishing plantations, changes in inheritance laws and changes in laws governing marriage and divorce. This affected rural women, as they forfeited land that had been in the family for generations and in terms of marriage prospects as they did not own land. (land was given to a daughter as a dowry²⁸, when

²⁸ Dowry was a specific form of inheritance transfer, which endowed women, with significant amounts of property, including land, strengthening their fall back position and bargaining power (Agarwal, 1994: 481-2).

marriages were arranged). British interventions were impelled by one central concern: the desire to establish control over land for the extraction of maximum economic benefit.

Since Independence, women still inherit land as daughters, but less land than their brothers. If the husband of the daughter decides to live with the wife's family, the latter acquires one extra person to work in the fields. The chances of inheritance are greater for *diga* married daughters if they remain in the village than if they leave it. Tambiah's (1965) survey indicates that *binna* married sisters were more likely to receive the same shares as their brothers, and *diga* married sisters to inherit less. This suggests that as long as a woman remained in her village after marriage, she retained her rights to own land (Agarwal, 1994: 188). A woman married in *diga* received the whole of the husband's estate if he died intestate, even if his brothers and other kin were alive. Traditionally, among all major communities, this remained the same.

Women are encouraged to fulfill their share requirements for the *samiti*, so that they could take loans. The biggest problem in Athale is the male ownership of land, giving men the authority in decision making. The system of distributing the family land among male children and the handing over of cultivation rights from father to son is prevalent within this structure, while women are deprived of owning land. Land ownership is very important for the women of Athale because it is the most important means of empowerment. This is very close to their hearts and they will strive to buy land whenever they can.

Due to low interest terms, our local samiti was able to get a lease on land to grow maize, chillies and other vegetables. All of us women work on this land, it is community land and we enjoy working in it. We take it in turns to work the land. As it is small we can manage it (Sudu Nona, Interview, 29th July, 2000).

Except for two women who said they did not belong to any *samiti*, others felt that joining a *samitiya* changed their lives (see Appendix G). It had given them much self-confidence, as Gunawathi claims:

By joining the samitiya I have gained much self confidence. I am able to give a talk about my interest in health issues. I helped the Health officer of the area when

there was an outbreak of cholera. I went to all the homes in the area and asked the occupants to boil water, and strain it before drinking. It gives me an opportunity to share information on healthy eating habits, good nutrition and family planning. We are pleased to help the community in some way, while we get the benefits too (Interview, 26th July, 2000).

Those women who belonged to a *samiti* understood the benefits they derived. They shared information and they trained in the areas that were of help to them. They made use of the opportunities to develop talents they had. These women said they gained self-esteem. Some had started their own businesses with the confidence they had developed. Out of the 120 women interviewed, 78 women had borrowed money from moneylenders in the past. As T.B. Danumathi explained:

Before we had samiti, we had nothing like the banking societies. If we needed money, we had to go to pawn brokers or moneylenders or to the mudalali, who charged higher interest rates. We had to give them some collateral. Now we can access credit. The interest charged for the majority of the loans is 3 per cent per month. Only 5 women have borrowed from pawnbrokers, since we started the samiti (Interview, 7th August, 2000).

Many young families shared their home and work tasks. Men would help in the household chores by bringing in water from the well, chopping firewood, feeding the children and helping them with their homework. The women helped in the fields, after seeing the children off to school and returned home before the children got back from school, and started working on the home garden and caring for the animals. Thirty of the men helped with cooking the night meal. Some women said they did not get any help from their husbands. These women were expected to do the work at home as well as helping in the field, collecting firewood, and looking after the children's needs. These are struggles they faced. Some of the husbands had become alcoholics, thereby disrupting family life; the women were (*lajja*) ashamed of their husband's behaviour. As Priyadarshani explains:

I have to work very hard to keep my family together. My husband does not help me with housework. He says he works long hours in the field. He can go anywhere he wants, at any time, to drink. I have to stay and look after the children. Well, after going to samiti I decided to go once a week for the meeting. So now he stays home on that

day. He has also shown an interest in the samiti and wants to join one and asks me about the work we do. (Interview, 6th August, 2000).

The position that Buddhism has advanced the status of women is supported by the importance given to women in the fourfold society of early Buddhism. Buddhism also attempted to protect women from exploitation in marriage by stressing that a husband has duties to his wife discussed in the *sigalovada Sutta*. The women in the village felt that they were more liberated than their mothers. While their mothers did not have the freedom to go out of the village by themselves, now women go to work and to the *aramaya* for Buddha *puja*, *dane* and they are active members in the *samiti* and go outside the village for *samiti* some times.

At the samiti we decided that each day we would put aside a cup of rice, and each week you would bring it to the meeting and that amount of rice would be collected at the weekly meeting and sold cheaper than the market price. The money collected that week would be saved for that group. Bring and buy: each person brings a homegrown vegetable/fruit, or garment they have sewn, or made themselves. It could be sweets or even a craft. This is auctioned and the money collected will be for the group (Interview, July 17th 2000).

The women agreed that they do the cooking for the *dane*, while the men delivered it to the temple. Thirty of the women said that the men organised the rituals, while the women helped. In the majority of the families, both husbands and wives were involved in organising rituals and merit-making activities. Ten participants were quite adamant in saying the men organised the rituals and merit-making activities, but the women prepared the food.

A glance at Buddhist history reveals that men have dominated the Buddhist tradition despite theoretical equality. "In the guise of religiosity, women have been deprived of equal rights" (Afshar, 1998: 7). It is not empowerment unless women do things of their own free will. At the village *aramaya*, it was the women who took an active role and supported the *aramaya*. Until the *samiti* came to the village, women had no significant role in Buddhist activity.

Now we organise rituals and prepare the dane and most of the time we take the dane to the aramaya. However, what

is important is, that whatever is practised by men can be practised by us, and whatever can be achieved by men is achieved by us women in the path to liberation (Nandamali, Interview, 22nd July, 2000).

As literacy skills are provided by the *samiti*, women are quick to make use of this provision. They learn to read and write and help each other to read and write then teach others as well; they become empowered and are able to help with their children's homework. My host Suneela was able to help a friend fill out the necessary forms needed to enrol her child in school. Women have the confidence to ask for help when they become a family unit in the *samitis*. Maggi nona explains:

At first, I didn't join a samiti, as I didn't know how to read or write well. Since I enjoy working in the fields, and I have knowledge of it, I joined this group, which is involved in tree planting. It has not only helped me, it has helped my whole family, because I can earn some extra cash which helps the family and I'm also learning to read and write (Interview, 1st August, 2000).

Before joining a *samiti*, women had little chance to speak in public forums or to share their views and problems with a larger body of people who share the same interests. At the meeting I attended at Badalkumbura, there were over 50 women present. Women write reports on the activities of their groups, present them and discuss progress on group activities, savings and other initiatives. Through participation in the *samiti*, women learned to conduct meetings and have gained public speaking skills. They are more confident now.

I was very shy, and wouldn't even talk to other women. Now I can carry on a conversation even with the director. The Minister for rural development came to this area a couple of weeks ago, and I shared our views with him. My mother would never have believed I could do it (Helena nona, Interview, 27th July, 2000).

The women agreed that they receive prestige and public recognition when they fulfill obligations well. Twenty participants said both men and women get prestige and recognition if they prove to be honest and hard working. Sixty of the women interviewed agreed that women get recognition for the work they do from the *bhikkhus* at the *aramaya* and the people of the village. This means that the women themselves are keeping an eye on each other. "There is also 'power from within,' spiritual strength and

uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes us truly human” (Afshar, 1998:14). This power can be what enables the individual to hold to a position or activity in the face of overwhelming opposition.

One of the major reasons for any land reform programme is to increase the economic assets of the poor. However, in most cases ownership of the rights to land was bestowed by the government on the male head of the household, regardless of the traditional inheritance rights of women. This was seen in the Mahaweli scheme. Farmers were given one hectare of irrigable land and 0.2 hectare of land (not irrigated) for a homestead and garden plot. In the old village structure, joint or individual ownership of land by women was never a problem (Heyzer, 1986: 20).

Conclusion

This chapter has described the methodological considerations of the research, the research design, selection of the village and methods used in the research, as well as a general background, geographical and social context. I did not go to Athale to test a hypothesis. I went with an open mind and chose to learn about the everyday experiences of Athale women. My hope was to be able to identify the changes in Buddhism and changes in women's lives.

The women of Athale have been empowered by Buddhism. Women have learnt to meditate and they help each other through their *samiti*, and form good friendships. The women of Athale are encouraged to develop their potential and they create work for themselves in difficult times. Some women do sewing in the village, or cook food which they sell to shops. Some of the women's husbands had to find work out of Athale, which has caused difficulties for younger women with children, as they have to work in the fields as well as home. It has created problems for the older women, as they have to work in the fields as well. Theories of power, based on consensus, seem to offer the clearest framework for understanding the almost invisible power process. Women lost their access to land and labour in an unnoticed process, which Gramsci calls 'hegemonic control'. Similarly, women's decision-making power within their families as well as in

society was lost to them in the daily interaction between men and women. The women at Athale have started reclaiming some of the powers that was lost to their grandmothers and mothers.

This chapter examined how the women of Athale live their daily lives by analysing their struggles of every day living. The women speak for themselves. The teachings of the Buddha were discussed and the changes brought to the practice of Buddhism have been reviewed. Women's lives have changed, due to the *samitis* they have joined for their interests. Most of the women enjoy participating in these *samitis* and are gaining confidence in themselves and being empowered, as they are able to get small loans. While these women are very much integrated in agricultural development, through their productive roles in dry land farming and rice paddy farming, they are able to be themselves, mostly, in their own plot of land. It is here they make their own decisions, as to what they plant and what fertilizers they use. Some of the women work in other women's land as paid labourers. Women make a great contribution to agriculture.

The ongoing war in Sri Lanka has affected the village in many ways. The village children join the army as a means of avoiding poverty. Marriage customs and land holdings by women changed with the British and although women have been able to own land since Independence, it is less than the men. Since the land has been divided and sold, women have added pressures in finding work. With all the problems in daily living, it is comfort in Buddhism that is helping the women of Athale, empowering them, and giving them the means to deal with their struggles in their daily life.

The main issues discussed were the women's involvement in the community, and methodology. The women spent much time at the aramaya, and were more involved in their Buddhist practices. In the methodologies followed for this research I found that the majority of the women interviewed in the village had some formal education, the younger women value education, and they want the best education possible for their children. During British rule, older rural women were disadvantaged in education, as they lived in areas where there were no tea or coffee plantations. No schools were built in these areas at that time and there were no transport facilities available.

Women have become more active in the community since various NGOs entered the village, and have taken on the responsibility to make a difference to the community in which they live. Gender inequalities cannot be fought in isolation from other fronts such as democratic rights, development policies and environmental sustainability. By joining women's groups village women have made attempts to forge links with other progressive groups to overcome their disadvantages. Women have been working incessantly for peace since the start of the ethnic strife, as it is their children who are being killed in the war.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A BUDDHIST WOMAN IN ATHALE

INTRODUCTION

As from a heap of flowers, many a garland is made, so by one born as a human being many a good deed should be done (Piyadassi, 1991: 333).

This chapter is about the women of Athale, and their practice of Buddhism. The women have a routine based on the teachings of the Buddha and this aspect informs the whole of their lives. This means, first and foremost, to live in peace with each other and treat each other with respect, with equal consideration for all. Chapter 1 elucidated the ways in which Buddhist teachings have brought changes. Although in the past women were generally excluded from participation in Buddhist practices, today women are the key participants in Buddhist activities, in Athale. Has Buddhism since Independence been a force that has empowered or dis-empowered women in the village of Athale? By exploring the women's daily lives, and the ways in which they practise Buddhism, I will demonstrate there are changes taking place, although moving only one step at a time. How important is Buddhism in the everyday lives of rural women, and what impact have changes in Buddhism and modern life since Independence had upon rural women in Sri Lanka? These are the key questions to be examined in this chapter.

Having in the previous chapters discussed Buddhism in Sri Lanka, the changes taking place, and the research process, I will now attempt to develop theoretical analysis by using the voices of the women of Athale to demonstrate implications for issues of gender and power. Sanday (in Reinharz, 1981:114) asserts that humans develop belief systems to give order and meaning to their world, and that these belief systems subsequently serve and shape that world, or influence its material structure. A young woman I met many times at the *aramaya* was Sudu Kumari:

The Buddha brings calmness. I like coming to the aramaya in the afternoons, so that I can worship the Buddha and concentrate looking at the Buddha statue. I gain an inner

strength, and confidence by this (Interview, 4th August, 2000).

To Sudu Kumari, this was her way of coping with struggles of everyday living. She managed to get away from her home and work environment to be comforted and strengthened by meditating on the Buddha. An older woman I met at the *aramaya* was Muthu Menika:

I bring dāne to the bhikkhus three times a week and spend the time at the aramaya, by listening to the bhikkhus talk about the Buddha qualities. I then meditate on those qualities, which helps me learn more and it comforts me (Interview, 4th August, 2000).

To Muthu Menika, it was important to listen to *bana* preaching by the *bhikkhus* and then meditate, which gave her comfort and knowledge.

Women act as cultural transmitters of religion and women empower themselves through religion. “There are rewards for religious faith, such as comfort, security, and a sense of belonging” (Ozorak, 1996: 17). How far is this true in the village of Athale? Has Buddhism given these women a sense of confidence in themselves, and offered a new conception of empowerment, which explicitly includes development of self. Afshar (1998: 2) adds, “women must have confidence in what they do, and must have access to resources. They must perceive that they can make choices”. Empowerment is defined as a process in which women come to believe in their ability “to construct, and take responsibility for their identity, their politics and their choices” (Rowland, Serdar, and Schwartz-Shea, 1997: 215). Are these dynamics of change seen in the lives of the women of Athale? These are some aspects I will be discussing in this chapter.

What does it mean to be a Buddhist woman and how has Buddhism changed your life? Professor Randeniya explains:

Sri Lanka has been a Buddhist country for 2500 years, not only because the majority of people profess Buddhism, but also because Buddhist values are largely practised both by the people and rulers. Buddhism teaches that you make your own destiny. In orthodox Buddhism more emphasis is on practice than ritual. In popular Buddhism, ritual is emphasised. The position of women has been discussed with much interest in recent times. The Buddha was concerned with individual emancipation. Being born as a

man or woman does not hinder or retard the progress on the Buddha's path (Interview, 24th August, 2000).

Some Buddhists in Sri Lanka claim that Theravada Buddhism represents a “pure form of Buddhism.” How do women fare in this system? Professor Randeniya continues:

The world-view is such that the woman is not looked on very favourably. In western society there has been a re-thinking of the position given to women in all aspects. The Athale women have had to face obstacles to reach their desired goals, and have had fewer opportunities. The 'Agada Sutta' refers to "beings", not men or women. Due to moral deterioration, the difference between men and women arose, making women lesser beings. Before, they were equal, and the dhamma had no gender. Anyone could practise the Buddha's path; gender has no relevance. Buddhist practice has no form for ritual or a priestly class. Usually, simple forms of worship such as chanting, symbolic offerings are sufficient (Interview, 29th August, 2000).

Both laymen and women have become *arahats* in the past. Therefore, the door to the highest goal is not barred to women. However, studies indicate that women are subordinated as Seneviratne and Currie discussed. “It is the cultural conditioning of both men and women that contributes to women's subordinate position in society” (Seneviratne and Currie, 1994: 594). Women fit into the Sinhala tradition of Buddhism as Dingiri *amme* of Athale said:

Our Buddhism advocates the observance of eight or ten precepts for us older women. In addition to this, we must live a simple life, which only caters to the needs and not to greed. We live a life where wants are few. This is the reason we come to the aramaya and spend most of our time observing sil, and listening to bana (Interview, 22nd August, 2000).

The Athale women said Sri Lanka has had much influence from India since they have been given the greatest gift that of Buddhism. Anula Maniyo comments:

We were also subject to other forms of practices that were in India at that time. Over the years Sri Lanka also adopted various practices that were not really Buddhist, but Hindu, Muslim and Christian. Sinhalese kings brought wives from India who practised Hinduism, which continued on arrival to Sri Lanka. The kings built a kovil (Hindu temple) for them and Sri Lankans have adopted

some of these practices, we have also had Mahayana influences. In Theravada Buddhism, there were no rituals, now we have adopted these into our Buddhism. Mostly the illiterate practise these rituals in a popular form of Buddhism (Interview, 15th August, 2000).

Can Buddhist conceptions of non-violence challenge Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and incorporate a greater amount of tolerance? The ongoing war between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil tigers has certainly been brought to the village of Athale. Many young men joined the army, some losing their lives. Shanthilatha responds:

We are tired of our young brothers going to war and dying - for what? The government pays for their funeral and gives money to our parents. How can you pay enough for a young life lost? We are very saddened by what is going on in the country. We need peace. Our religion, Buddhism, talks of non-violence, and tolerance, but it is not seen in the country today. Women organised a protest about the war, we sent letters, but we did not hear from anyone (Interview, 24th August, 2000).

If all human rights were safeguarded and people followed the precept “not to kill” or damage property, if one could have tolerance of other religions and their ideas, and if one lived unselfishly, and did not destroy human life or the belongings of others, then we could have a great society. Professor Randeniya comments:

If the leaders and the people follow the precepts, we cannot but have righteous rule. It is the thannaha (greed) that prevents it. If all people value life and practised the precepts, maintain high moral standards we would have an ideal society. All rulers and the ruled should observe the precepts and the leaders of the country should not expose their people to danger. They are not following the precepts (Interview, 21st August, 2000).

In the Buddhist way of living, care should be taken especially to avoid the violation of the basic moral principles summed up in the five precepts. Life in the modern world has become trying and problematic, under the weight of present day living. In the Anguttara Nikaya the Buddha preached a sutta, which is relevant to present day problems. Bhikkhuni Anoja describes right living:

Atthisukha means pleasure of having material wealth, man/woman should not only have a righteous means of living, but also avoid blameworthy trades and should not

deceive or exploit others, in carrying out one's occupation. Exerting oneself with great perseverance, one should earn one's living, and such hard earned wealth is called dhammika dhammaladdha (righteous wealth). One could have great wealth but if one does not experience a sense of contentment, one cannot really enjoy atthisukha. The amassing of wealth is like trying to fill a bottomless vessel (Interview, 18th August, 2000).

Bhogasukha is pleasure of enjoying material wealth, and it has only contributory value. The proper enjoyment of wealth is an art, which is worth carefully cultivating. Another aspect of the joy of wealth is the art of sharing.

Bhikkhuni Anoja continues:

Buddhism deplores both extravagance and miserly hoarding. Without being an adinnapubbaka (never giver) or a miser, if one learns to share one's riches with the less fortunate, one will have the noble experience of being happy at the joy of another. One must maintain a healthy balanced standard of living according to one's means. If, in the enjoyment of wealth, one overindulges, one will be faced with the situation of cutting one's neck with one's own tongue (Interview, 18th August, 2000).

If people truly understand the significance of the four kinds of happiness elucidated in the *sutta*, and translate them into action, life will be much more pleasant and happy even in this modern age.

The Impact of Teachings of Buddha on Everyday Life of the Women of Athale

Buddhism is our very life in this village. We try to live according to the teachings and we practise the precepts. The aramaya bhikkus are looked after very well by the people of the village. The bhikkhus also support the people by their availability to listen to anyone. Since the war, we have lost quite a few young boys from the village; the bhikkhus were there to offer comfort to parents and chant pirit (Gramasevika, 12th August, 2000).

The Buddha's teachings were explained as the Four Noble Truths, which have been discussed in Chapter 1. It is believed that actions practised in accordance with this manner will bring about harmony in their lives, while actions which conflict with the teachings will result in suffering. All the women who were interviewed said the Buddhas' teaching is for people to live at peace with one another and to respect and treat all equally. Eighty went further to explain the four noble truths: i.e. how things really are when seen correctly, and the suffering that arises when things are not seen correctly. Seventy two of the women interviewed understood that each individual had to make the appropriate effort to break away from suffering, and follow the Buddha's instruction, on how to achieve this through self-realisation and self-awakening, by meditation. Fifteen of the women could not explain the teachings of the Buddha, but understood what Buddhism meant to them in practice. Danumathi explains:

Every morning I get my children together, and we pay homage to the Buddha, then I light the small kerosene lamp and leave it under the Buddha statue. I also leave some food in a container before we partake of our food (Interview, 30th July, 2000).

Karunatilake adds that the:

Realization of the *dhamma* [for the common person] has been through practice rather than through a process of meditative intellectualization. Such an attitude gave rise to a scheme of complex practices, rites and rituals, drawing inspiration from the extraordinary virtues of the Buddha, *Jataka* tales and related literature and other ancillary traditions (in Trainor, 1997: 153).

The most important religious ideal for Sri Lankan Buddhists is the conscious performance of morally good actions. All the Athale women stated that for their part they related everything in their lives to Buddhism and to the Buddha qualities, attempting to live according to the Buddhist teachings; because Buddhism teaches them to respect all beings, and they treat each other with respect.

Although the participants said they treated everyone equally, I did notice discrimination in the village. If people were very poor and from a different caste they were not treated as equals socially. For instance, a homeowner would stand outside her house and converse with the woman rather than invite her into her home. Within the dominant *goyigama* caste, where most are farmers, prestige is based on ownership of land.

Obeyesekere (1967: 15-17) adds, "It is not only land that is at stake but the control of paddy land, which is an idiom for social standing. Power, prestige and authority are perceived by the Sinhalese people as signifying dominance." As land-ownership is now in the hands of men, women have lost power, prestige and authority in rural Sri Lanka.

In regard to caste, Buddha's teaching states: "...all human beings, wherever they are, whether they be rich or poor, literate or illiterate, ugly or beautiful, dark or fair, they all belong to the human society" (Piyadasi, 1991: 305). Although caste is not condemned, it is de-emphasised in Buddhist society. Traditions of Hinduism tend to stress the differences between men and women, while the traditions of Buddhism stress the accent on their similarity. Yet, the wielding of power by a certain group of persons is seen most strongly in the Buddhist *sangha*, while the Buddha, who preached equality to all in society, wanted all people to live in peace and harmony. The caste system is clearly in place, especially regarding the *bhikkhus* and marriage in the village society. The majority of the *bhikkhus* I interviewed at the village *aramaya*, belonged to the Ramanna *nikaya*, were of the *goyigama* caste, while the three *bhikkhus* were of another caste. They claimed they did not have any prejudice, and had no time for caste distinctions.

Caste was a topic that came up quite often in the village. While it was agreed that all people should be treated equally, 35 of the older interviewees believed it was best if marriage remained within those of the same caste to prevent problems later on in life. It was evident that, while every effort was made to follow the Buddhist teachings, these villagers, too, were enmeshed in the societal values of caste discrimination. However, the younger women agreed that if the partner was a good person, they would not interfere with their child's selection of that partner. They would not abandon their child. The majority of women believed they should not have caste differences in the village and should live peacefully with all people.

...Now we don't talk of caste. The Buddha did not want the caste structure. So why should we? Anyone in the village is accepted and we have to teach our children to do the same (Kusumalatha, Interview, 27th July, 2000).

Jayawardena (1986: 113) reports that the influence of Buddhism was instrumental in reducing the rigours of the caste system. The caste system is a way for men to dominate women. Men would talk highly of their own caste. A key question asked of the women was how they explained the conflict in the country to their children in relation to the

teachings of Buddhism (see: Appendix G). All the participants agreed that war is not the right way for a Buddhist country. In spite of the conflict, these were good times to teach children the Buddhist ways of living in peace and respecting each other.

One couldn't conquer anger with anger. It has to be with love and respect. We must learn to live in peace with one another. War is not good for the country; we have to practise loving kindness, and ask the gods to stop this war. War is useless; we are all from one country (Kalu Menike, Interview, 25th July, 2000).

These women understand that to live in a Buddhist country must mean something different from the rest of the world. They know that a democratic society stands for peace and unity and not for war and disunity. In this atmosphere of tension and strife, minds should be turned to the Buddha's message. How else could they peacefully exist in Sri Lanka? "Although the world has progressed much in the invention of weapons men/women still have not gained full control of their minds" (Piyadassi, 1991: 42). The United Nations Organisation unwittingly echoes the words of the Buddha when it points out that all quarrels, conflicts and wars have their origin in the minds of men and women, and it is here that they have to be curtailed. Sita *devi* responds:

...We have to start by teaching our children to respect each other, and train our minds to the Buddha's message of maitriya, and Buddha's compassion and live according to the teaching (Interview, 25th July, 2000).

The women of Athale believe that it would be beneficial to both old and young women in the village if women were to teach meditation (see: Appendix G). The women hope that some *dasa sil matas* who have left for Anuradhapura (see: Appendix A) will come back to live in their village. Ten women out of the 120 interviewed said that while it was good for women to teach meditation, the temple *bhikkhus* were trained in this and had more experience, so they could teach better. The other women agreed, that the *bhikkhus* could teach, but felt the *dasa sil matas* would be more helpful for the younger women and girls. All the women agreed that *dasa sil matas* would be able to serve the community well. With a desire to gain knowledge, the village women claim that it is good to learn the practice of meditation. Those who already meditated realise the benefits in terms of the calming effects on the mind. Because of this realisation, they are keen to promote meditation among the wider community.

The majority of the women meditate as often as possible, with most of the interviewees obtaining *sil* on *poya* days. Some obtained information pamphlets on meditation from the *aramaya bhikkhu* and learned to meditate. The *bhikkhu* made audio tapes for the women who wanted to learn meditation. The women claim it has a calming effect on their minds and brings them peace of mind. Most of the women would like to spend more time on meditation, but looking after children and cooking, cleaning and working in the fields takes up most of their time. Chandrawathi shares her views:

Women can talk to women easily and they are not shy to ask questions. If they are good teachers of meditation, more women and men will learn, and they will teach it to others (Interview, 25th July 2000).

Buddhism puts forward a methodical plan for the elimination of stress. The first step is the observance of the five precepts. The best and most effective way to overcome stress is by the practice of meditation. One should cultivate positive emotions, such as *metta*, (loving kindness), *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (sympathetic joy), and *upekkha* (equanimity). In other words, the women see the practice of Buddhism as a way of improving their mental attitude, thus enabling them to handle their day-to-day problems. A few of the younger women said that they meditate when they can, as life is too busy with all the work they have to do. Three young women said it is a habit that they have learnt, and they meditate for ten minutes every morning and night. Chathralatha continues:

My mother taught me to meditate, so I got into the habit of doing it everyday. I feel I gain a sense of peace in my mind so now I encourage my children to do it as well (Interview, 18th July, 2000).

The majority of the women discussed their aspirations towards meditation and the impediments that hindered them. Their days are spent in the fields working hard. In the afternoon, they go home in time to start cooking the dinner and attend to their children's needs. However, these women made time for themselves to participate in the *samiti* meetings once a week. They made the time to do what they were interested in, thereby empowering themselves.

Feminist understanding of empowerment should be a dynamic one, which conceptualizes power as a process rather than a particular set of results. It should be as women change the way their lives are led and redesign

their relationship both with each other and with men (Rowlands in Afshar, 1998: 4).

A change that had come about in spite of the onerous tasks undertaken by the women was the effort to spend time with the *dasa sil matas* before they left the village. The *dasa sil matas* had spent many hours meditating and teaching women and men meditation. This also gave women an equal opportunity to develop their minds. “Men and women should be able to develop virtues conducive to noble living, such as loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity” (Piyadassi, 1991:239).

Changes

Changes have necessitated an appraisal of life in rural areas and the role rural women play within their communities. This study concentrates on the role of women as a significant force in the village, focusing particularly on their participation in religious and community life and the transformation it has brought to their lives. Neighbours help each other in times of need. The community shares childcare, and village life is organised around the reciprocal relationships and voluntary labour of women. This is evident when children address older women as *nanda* (aunty) and elderly women as *archi* (grandmother), and women address each other as either *akka* (older sister) or as *nangi* (younger sister).

An important change that has changed the lives of the women at Athale is the education available for their children. Before independence, the majority of the female population received no education at all. Fairly quick progress in female education was made. According to Jayawardene (1986: 122-124) higher educational opportunities for women, meant that Sri Lankan women were able to enter the Medical College, Women’s Teachers Training College, instructing in Sinhala, which meant that these teacher’s went to the rural areas, to teach rural children. Since the NGOs came into the village in 1985 (sponsored by Norway) adult education has been encouraged for men and women.

A neighbour or grandparents usually helps with minding children, walking them to school or pre-school. There is a sense of belonging in the village. I saw six 5-year-olds

who were taken to pre-school (see: Appendix I plate 13.2) at 9:00am by Vasantha, and returned to their homes by 12.30 in the afternoon. Rowles (1990:106) describes the village “as a setting where one is known and knows others, where friendliness is the norm and where relationships are interpersonal and egalitarian rather than instrumental and hierarchical”. Individuals perceive rural communities as being able to provide a supportive role unavailable in big cities. Furthermore, rural environments are perceived as places where social involvement can result in a sense of identity and belonging, which are seen as more difficult to obtain in highly populated urban settings.

Mothers and fathers support their children in pursuing their interests, and the women are able to pass on the Buddhist teachings and traditions to their children. Respect for elders, *dasa sil matas*, for *bhikkhus* and parents were instilled in the children. The girls and boys, dressed in their white school attire (see: Appendix I plate 6) were ready for morning *pirit* before the school sessions started. The male principal of the school, P.N.Diyasena, states:

The first thing in the morning, before any school activity, religious observances are held: pansil, an offering of flowers and a short Maithri bavana (meditation) is conducted. In years 6-11, two periods of Buddhism are taught, and in years 1-5, life skills are taught and respect for parents.²⁹ At the end of the school day the precepts are remembered, and the children are taught to bow in respect to the teacher before leaving the classroom. On Poson Poya day all the children observe sil. The teacher prepares the programme for the day. Bhikkhus/dasa sil matas recite bana. Before the poya day celebrations all the children take part in a shramadana activity. They clean the aramaya yard, weed and sweep around the area (Interview, 2nd August, 2000).

The principal of the school is certainly an authoritative figure in the village. He has power and authority because education is respected in the village and people want their children to have a good education. According to the women, he is a person known to all in the village, and therefore has a high status and is very well respected.

²⁹ Children are taught from their young days to respect parents, grand parents, elders and teachers according to traditional customs, such as kneeling in front of them with head bowed low when leaving home or school.

In April 1994 Azam Nuri told reporters:

Women must arm themselves with knowledge. They must seek to learn at any age under any condition be it at work or at home...they must study. Our religion recognizes no limit whatsoever for learning and the acquisition of knowledge. Once humanity is armed with knowledge it can remove all the problems (in Afshar, 1998: 123).

In the *samitis*, women are encouraged to study in a field they are interested in. This has encouraged women to read about agriculture, Sinhala literature, or the Buddhist teachings, as the women are interested to read and hear the Buddha's message.

Buddhist Practices

As part of this research, women of Athale were asked in what ways Buddhism influenced their occupation or their daily routine (See Appendix G 1.1). Out of 120 participants, 58 said they listened to the *bana* preaching on the radio at morning or night, while a few listened to *bana* both morning and night. The women are sad that many of their children have lost their lives due to the war going on in the country.

Kalu Menike answered, while pointing to a grave of a son in the village.

I try to forget my sadness of losing my child to the war by listening to bana morning and night. It gives me comfort. Losing a child is very sad; it is our children that are fighting this war. They don't even know whom they are fighting against, as it is in the same country. We are a Buddhist country; we should be promoting non violence (Interview, 22nd July, 2000).

Rituals such as *Bodhi Puja*, deity worship at Kataragama, and the Hindu influence of *Bhakti*, have been incorporated into Athale women's practice of Buddhism. It is traditional to light a lamp, either in the morning or evening, or both, and also offer flowers to obtain merit for themselves and to honour dead relatives. An invitation to friends and neighbours to perform *Bodhi puja* was a way of sharing this good deed with others, so that they could obtain merit, too.

Most of the women observed *Pansil* on *poya* days and offered *dane* to the *bhikkhus* and others. What is the teaching? What is the practice? Richard Gombrich sums up:

For Buddhists, religion is purely a matter of understanding and practising the dhamma. They conceive salvation or liberation, to use a more Indian term as the total eradication of greed, hatred and delusion. To attain, it is open to any human being, and it is ultimately the only thing worth attaining, for it is the only happiness which is not transient. A person who has attained it will live on so long as his [sic] body keeps going, but thereafter not be reborn. Thus he will never have to suffer or die again. For Buddhists, religion is what is relevant to this quest for salvation (Gombrich, 1988:24).

Could this be the same Buddhism that was brought to Sri Lanka many thousands of years ago? Did the villagers of that ancient time practise Buddhism in the same way as the villagers do in 2002? Buddhism has always co-existed with other religious beliefs and practices. So long as the main aim is not lost, it is an error to think of a pure Buddhism, as some Sri Lankans do. Buddhist practice has become 'mixed' with other religious practices, such as Hinduism and Christianity. A Hindu temple and a Buddhist temple exist side by side at Kataragama (see: Appendix A) and vows are made by pilgrims. Buddhists have no objection to the existence of Hindu gods. For Buddhists, the Hindu gods do not have the liberating insight that the Buddha did. Yet this does not stop them requesting favours, or even making offerings at the *Kovil* (Hindu temple) after paying homage to the Buddha at the Buddhist temple at Kataragama.

My family joined other families on a pilgrimage to Kataragama last year. My mother also joined us. We had a very happy time, as we bathed in the menik ganga, before going to the Kiri vehera. After that we made vows at Kataragama devale, for my husband to find a job, and for good health for my mother, as she had been sick for many months. My mother has not been sick since then, my husband got a job in the village (Karunawathi, Interview, 27th July, 2000).

Of the 120 women interviewed, 102 women said that they offer flowers to the Buddha either in the morning or in the evening. Their devotional approach to the *dhamma* has its roots in lay Buddhist practice or rituals from early times. They say the flowers (usually white frangipani, with other flowers also available) are respectfully placed on the altar before a statue of the Buddha, or in a *dagaba*. A flower is offered without leaf or stalk, and each bloom is laid down to face the image (this is merely the kind of good manners

one shows to any superior, to whom one does not present one's feet or back). Next, the devotee clasps his or her hands in the gesture of worship, palms together and recites various stanzas and formulas, such as *vanna-gandha-gunopetam etam kusuma santatim pujayami munindassa siripada saroruhe* - 'These flowers, which have colour and scent, I offer at the blessed lotus feet of the lord of sages'. *Pujemi Buddham kusumen anena punnena metena ca hotu mokkham. Puppham milayati yatha idam me kayo tatha yati vinasabhavam* - 'I make offering to the Buddha with this flower, and by this merit may there be release. Just as this flower fades, so my body goes towards destruction.' (Translated by Gombrich, 1991:135-6). For Buddhists, such an offering is an expression of the Buddhist virtue of *dane* (generosity), and "it calls to attention the transience of the physical body, the ritual produces sensory experience, at the same time communicating that sensory experience is transient and unworthy of attachment" (Trainor, 1997: 155). It is also a demonstration of great love for the teacher who shows the path to freedom from suffering.

Some participants light a lamp (*pahan puja*), a little clay dish containing a wick of twisted cloth in coconut oil (see Appendix F). This is symbolic of the Buddha being the dispeller of darkness and ignorance. This is the theoretical basis for the ritual. For the majority of people, this ritual is usually a response to the desire to acquire merit or to avert evil influence (Gombrich, 1991: 137). The lighting of lamps had been a popular ritual even in pre-Buddhist times. The offering of lighted lamps is one of the main aspects of worship at the *bodhi tree* where the Buddha attained enlightenment; another site for this offering is at the *dagaba*. The ritual of light offering has become so popular and elaborate that at the annual *wesak* festival commemorating the birth, enlightenment and death *parinibbana* of the Buddha, flashing electric globes are used to decorate *pandals* (*thorana*). A *Jataka* story is depicted on the *pandal* and homes are decorated with *Wesak kudu* (lighted lanterns). This important ritual of light offering was practised by ancient Sri Lankan kings. Dutugemunu is reported to have lit one thousand lamps burning perpetually in twelve sacred places in Anuradhapura (Gombrich, 1991: 157).

The offering of food and drink to the Buddha statue is still another aspect of ritual worship influenced by Hinduism. Eight of the participants offered *Buddha puja* consisting of rice and curry to the Buddha image before noon. It is prepared with special care and not tasted before being offered. I witnessed this ritual at the village *aramaya* by those who brought the *dane* for the *bhikkhus*. People never consume this food, which is

either given to dogs or thrown away. The following stanza is chanted: *Adhivasetu no bhojanam parikappitam. Anukampam upadaya patiganhatum uttaman* - 'May the lord accept the food we have prepared; taking compassion on us may he receive the best' (translated by Gombrich, 1991: 141). At the Temple of the Tooth, in Kandy (*Dalada Maligawa*), these rituals are performed regularly, accompanied by the beating of drums. Four of the women participated in the evening *Buddha puja*, known as the *gilampasa*, which is an offering of medicaments and beverages.

The first time I went to the Temple of the Tooth was with my husband, and his family. I still remember the excitement I felt stepping into the temple, with the beating of drums and hearing the blowing of the conch shells. It was a great experience to worship the Buddha, and offer the flowers with so many other people there (Anulawathi, Interview, 18th July, 2000).

The women need to use some tangible form of worship to pay respect to the Buddha. Whatever the purpose of the ritual, the outcome is in the hope of an answer to prayer. At a higher level of invocation is the prayer for the transference of powers of merit to all beings, including gods and spirits, by reciting appropriate stanzas such as '...May this merit bring about the extinction of defilements in me'. Good deeds for the gaining of merit (offerings made in the name of the Buddha) provide a basis for achieving *nirvana* (release from the cycle of *samsara*). *Pin* (merit) earned by the performance of a wholesome act is regarded as a sure way of obtaining a better life in the future. It also has the effect of countering and hindering previously inherited *kamma* (Kariyawasam, 1995: 4).

The women said *bodhi puja* helped release some of their worries and difficulties, and the struggles that they go through. They believed it also helped ward off sickness and evil. As the *bodhi* tree protected the Buddha by giving him shade, they respect the tree and offer *puja* there. Some women said they washed the tree with milk as a mark of respect (this is a Hindu influence). 10 participants said this was a way of asking the gods to watch over a war-divided country; it is believed that bad karma can be overcome by participating in *bodhi puja*.

Sinhala Buddhists prefer to worship the Buddha under a *bo*³⁰ tree. It is under this tree that the Buddha attained enlightenment. The act of worship is an act of honouring the Buddha. The *bo* tree is itself revered in detail through the recital of stanzas. The offerings carried by male and female devotees are deposited on the flower stands placed in four directions around the tree. Oil lamps are lit and incense is burnt in the presence of the *bodhi* tree and a *dane* is offered (Gombrich, 1991: 127). Although the Buddha discouraged imagery and likenesses, the human need for representation has resulted in stone, painted metal and other images before which the people worship.

When the women were asked to comment on how the values and attitudes of people reflected on the Buddhist teachings in relation to the birth of a child, illness, pilgrimages to Sri Pada, and at harvest time, all those interviewed stated that they follow Buddha's teachings and try to live accordingly. The women claim that Buddhism is their way of life, that it teaches them to respect all beings, and has given them high values.

At the birth of a child, many observed at least two or even more of the traditional customs, such as participating in *seth pirit*, tying *pirit* thread on the wrist (the *Angulimala paritta* is used specially for childbirth), offering *bodhi puja*, making vows, giving *dane*, and wearing amulets. In times of illness, many followed the basic human interaction of helping the family by cooking food, and visiting them in hospital. The women practised rituals such as Buddha *puja*, *pirit*, wearing amulets, making vows, and offering *dane*. A few conducted a *tovil* ceremony for the relief of pain in the patient. A single interviewee had made a pilgrimage to Kataragama, where vows were made to Pattini, a Hindu goddess. Making a vow at Kataragama to the goddess Pattini was an unusual aspect. Kataragama is not easily accessible from the village. However, recently Pattini has become the most important goddess in modern Sri Lanka, and Kataragama has become a popular pilgrimage place for people of all religions. Vishnu and Kataragama gods are the most important deities in the Hindu tradition. Tamils originally brought Pattini into prominence, and the Sinhalese now accept her too. Pattini still has shrines all over the country. A goddess from South India, and the only lady in the pantheon, she is supposed to be very powerful at curing disease (Gombrich, 1991: 211).

³⁰ People address the *bo* tree, as *bodhi* tree.

According to the *dhamma*, the mind and body are closely linked; the mental condition affects the body's health and well being. *Seth pirit* recommended by the Buddha is said to offer protection from harmful planetary influences. The chanting provides mental wellbeing to those who listen, and helps them recover. The vibratory sounds produced by *pirit* are soothing to the nerves and produce a state of peacefulness (Gombrich, 1991: 238). They bring harmony to the system. At the *pirit* ceremony, a thread starting with the *bhikkhus* is unravelled from one person to another to link the participants. A bottle of *pirit pan* (water) is placed under the table where the *pirit* text lies. During the recitation, and at the end of the ceremony, a *bhikkhu* sprinkles this water over everyone present. People cut lengths of the thread to tie on the wrist to safeguard them from harm (Rahula, 1993: 276-7). The village women see the *vedamahatmaya* (naturopath) for women's ailments; sometimes he ties medicinal portions on their wrists.

While waiting for the village *vedamahatmaya* to arrive, I spoke to his daughter, who was busy drying leaves in the sun and separating them. She explained that she treats patients when her father is out of the village, because she enjoys doing the work. She identified all the herbs and oils and named their uses.

The *vedamahatmaya* explains his Buddhist practices:

I have to go very early in the morning to collect herbs and medicinal plants and roots before the sun comes up. I recite gathas before going to the forest to collect all the herbs and medicinal leaves. I chant special gathas while plucking leaves, flowers or bark of trees and roots. I think of the Buddha qualities, and remember the precepts and think of the Buddha. Our Buddha practised using herbs and medicinal plants. I also plant new herbs and medicinal plants that I collect from other areas. We must not denude the area of collection. I learnt this practice from my father. These are very old medicinal formulae that have come down through generations. I bring them home and they are stacked after drying them for a few days. I treat people for snakebites, stomach upsets, or mental fatigue. Or even heal broken bones, using my oils. Now I have taught my daughter to carry on this work (Interview, 2nd August, 2000).

It was very interesting to hear that he was teaching his daughter the trade. Although he had two sons, he wanted to teach his daughter, as she had an inclination to learn about the herbal plants, and she had a natural affinity with the forest. Even as a young child,

she followed him and asked questions about the trees, plants and animals. These are the changes that are happening in the village. Hartsock has discussed power which is generative, such as “the power some people have of stimulating activity in others and raising their morale, in a kind of leadership that comes from the wish to see a group or individuals achieve what they are capable of” (in Afshar, 1998: 13). The village *vedamahatmaya* offered that kind of power to his daughter. His wife was preparing for the daily Buddha *pūja*, which could be conducted either at the temple or at home before an image of the Buddha. Typical offerings made before a *Budupilimaya* (Buddha image) are flowers, incense, lights, and food.

In rituals of a magicosocial nature, such as *bali*, *tovil* (ceremonial sacrifice) and sorcery, the person who performs the ceremony is required to be in a state of purity. Belief in dead ancestors can be expressed by means of ceremonial observances. They believe ancestors look after the welfare of the family members, provided they are kept satisfied by the offering of alms and merit. Relatives give alms to the *bhikkhus* in their memory. During Buddha’s time, if anyone became ill, someone would recite *dhamma sutras* and this was known as *pirit* chanting. The women believed that *pirit* helps ward off evil caused by known or unknown powers. Preparing for *pirit* ceremonies and almsgivings can keep the family busy.

One participant said she would have a *tovil* ceremony (also known as *bali*) to cure an illness. It is rather rare in this part of the country to have such a ceremony. It is more in keeping in the low country areas in honour of the goddess Pattini. In this area, *bali* ceremonies feature an image of the planetary deity (the dais could be made of flowers, drawn or painted or moulded). Illness is usually attributed to black magic and the person to be possessed by the *yaka* (demon). Two *kapuralas* assume the persona of the demon and dance wildly to drive the evil away. The object of an exorcism is to free the patient from the evil influence which has befallen the person. Gombrich (1991: 232-233) declares, that an offering to the *yaka* called *pulutu* (burnt) consists of five kinds of parched grains and meat, which are burnt, wrapped in a leaf and left at a tri-cornered junction. The *yaka* is presumed to have gone out of the possessed person for the food and unable to find his way back.

Pilgrimages are also undertaken as a plea for help. All the participants said they have undertaken pilgrimages many times. 20 of the women said they go at least twice a year

to different places. Before starting on the journey, the pilgrims pay homage to the Buddha at the local *aramaya* offering flowers and lighting a lamp and asking for protection while travelling. On the journey, they sing songs of Buddha veneration. At the *Kiri vehera* at Kataragama, and the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, they make vows, believing the gods will comply with their requests, or make offerings for the success of vows made previously.

A pilgrimage to Sri Pada (Adams Peak) is very special, as it is a mountain supposed to have been visited by the Buddha. Pilgrims perform the usual rituals at the *aramaya*, and their homes are left clean and sprinkled with saffron water.³¹ 20 of the interviewees said they would read the *Thun pana suddaya* before leaving. 60 of the pilgrims tied *pirit* thread on their wrists as a protection, and 10 carried gifts to offer at the summit.

According to the *Mahavamsa* tradition (described in Chapter 1) the Buddha paid three visits to Sri Lanka. “His first was to Mahiyangana, his second to Nagadipa, his third visit to Kelaniya and on his return journey he left the imprint of his foot on Sri Pada” (Gombrich, 1991: 128). The *vandanava* (pilgrimage) or a merit journey is probably the longest journey a villager undertakes. It is usually undertaken in large groups. Thousands of pilgrims, all wearing white, ascend Sri Pada during the pilgrim season (which starts four months prior to *wesak*), chanting *ape budun api vandinna, saman deyyo pihita venta* - ‘We praise our Buddha; god Saman, help us’. Saman is the god of Sri Pada, which is a 3,000-foot climb up steep stone steps. At the summit is the footprint of the Buddha. Pilgrims climb by night and descend in the morning after watching a beautiful sunrise. The pilgrimage does not deter the aged or the pregnant woman. Most women of Athale have climbed it several times in their lifetime. As Ran Menika recalls:

Now, I’m 74 years old. I climbed Sri Pada last year with my three daughters and their husbands. I hope I can go this year. To worship the Buddha at the summit with thousands of others is very beautiful. My husband died at the beginning of last year, and this was the first time I went to Sri pada without him. I remembered the first time I went with him after we married (Interview, 4th August, 2000).

³¹ Saffron water is sprinkled in most homes as a precautionary measure against disease.

In the village, a man and woman living together in the same house constituted the simplest form of marriage. However, this changed with colonialism; these days, registering the marriage with a registrar of marriages legalises all marriages. According to traditional methods of selection, marriages are arranged by a close relative, a friend or a *magul kapuva* (marriage broker). If the parents and the partners agree that a marriage is propitious, the *kendraya*³² (horoscopes), are exchanged. An older resident, Kumari Hami, tells her story:

I was only 14 years old when I went with my husband. We went to the Kaccheri (Office of Registrar of Marriages) dressed in traditional clothes; we didn't have photographs. Afterwards we went to his hut in the middle of the jungle where the elephants roamed. We did slash and burn (chena) agriculture, and grew corn, mung beans, maize and other greens. I used to sing and beat on my cooking pots to frighten the elephants away. We said our gathas to ward off any other animals. They come very close to the huts. Life has changed now. It is so easy for these young people. I had to grind maize everyday and make breakfast with the flour. I even made my own coconut oil. We didn't have any shops. Today, you can buy anything at the shops. It was a hard life we had (Interview, 30th July 200).

The majority of the participants chanted *pirit* and adhered to the Sinhala *sirith* (customs). Four of the participants did not think that a partner of another religion would make a successful marriage. The majority of the women agreed that they would not arrange a marriage for their children with a non-Buddhist. Some of the interviewees had simple marriage ceremonies at home, with the registrar of marriages being present.

The women of Athale did not consider a Buddhist ceremony as being important to marriage, unlike in other religions. However, they invite *dasa sil matas* and *bhikkhus* prior to the wedding for a *dane* and *pirit* ceremony. *Bhikkhus* do not officiate in marriage ceremonies. Normally, it is an elderly male relative versed in the ceremony who performs the marriage by reciting devotional verses to evoke blessing on the couple. The more affluent people of the village have a *poruwa* (dais) beautifully decorated with garlands of flowers; a mat is overspread with a white cloth (this is symbolic, as at death, a white cloth is draped over the coffin), while the *bhikkhus* recite

³²Horoscopes are generally read by an astrologer and are based on the planetary system. Signs of the zodiac are always matched in arranging weddings. The horoscope indicates the outlook for material prosperity. *Bhikkhus* always need a suitable horoscope to become a *bhikkhu* (Gombrich, 1991: 171-175).

discourses of the Buddha, especially the *mangala sutta*. At the conclusion, the *bhikkhus* are presented with this cloth to make their robes. Rice, silver and copper coins are spread on the mat. At the four corners of the *Poruwa* stand 4 fresh clay pots filled with sprays of coconut flowers; near the *poruwa* a husked coconut and betel leaves are placed on a tray (Wijesekera, 1990: 186). The couple stand within the *poruwa*; an uncle of the bride ties the thumbs of the couple together with thread and sprinkles water over them. A bevy of pre-pubescent young girls sing *jaya mangala gathas*.³³ 10 of the interviewees had a marriage ceremony in their homes, while the majority went to the registra's office, and then had the relatives and friends for lunch.

The ideal type of the Jayamangala *gatha* is the Buddha's victory over *mara* (death) and his daughters. It also represents sex and passion; the triumph over ascetic renunciation and the power it generates over values of sex and procreation. Infertile girls dressed in sterile white are a symbolic proceeding that from the standpoint of the traditional culture annuls the sexual and procreative aspect of marriage (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 265).

The new couple distributes the betel leaves to the parents, aunts and uncles. As the couple step down from the *poruwa*, the coconut is split open. The couple then signs the official marriage register and lights the traditional oil lamp³⁴ together. The majority of Sinhalese people follow these simple traditions.

The women of Athale explained how Buddhism has taught them to make their own destiny. They are not waiting for something to happen but rather seeking to make it happen, as Kusumalatha said:

I remember the Buddha qualities, practise meditation, and I also use the knowledge that I gained through education, and the experience of the samiti, to find work. I do not wait for someone to give it to me, I find the work, I am able to look after my family well, I work hard, and the benefits are seen. This is what Buddhism teaches me (Interview, 30th July, 2000)

³³ A Pali blessing which was composed between 1200 and 1500 BCE was sung at important ceremonies. In these rituals, the context is that malevolent forces are banished, demons expelled and misfortunes eliminated (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 265).

³⁴ An oil lamp is lit as the first act of a married couple as man and wife, as light dispels darkness, and this represents the start of a new beginning.

The Buddhist attitude to wealth was that what was earned should be safeguarded and used wisely, and wealth should be used without polluting the environment. For example, when a bee takes pollen from a flower it manufactures something useful without polluting the environment, as opposed to cutting down trees which would result in soil erosion. The women believed that the Buddha's attitude towards working in the fields was that women went to the fields and took part in the day-to-day activities of cultivation, working side-by-side with men. The women of Athale believed that the Buddha was opposed to consumerism.

Working in my plot of land has made me aware of the Buddha's teaching, to use knowledge wisely. I have grown everything I need. I hardly buy any vegetables even during the dry season. I have learnt to dry vegetables, to be used later. I'm teaching these methods to my children (Suneela, Interview, 2nd August, 2000).

The Buddha discussed relationships with neighbours, when he advised Visaka on the day of her wedding. Piyadassi (1991: 330) says, "do not bring fire from outside" (do not bring gossip from outside) to your home and imitate others; "do not give out fire" (do not gossip about your home); and advises her to share food with people who don't have much food especially on festival days.

My mother always cooks just a little extra, and gives it to her neighbour who lost her husband sometime ago. My mother does this for a few of the older people who live in our area. They are very grateful to her, and say, "pin stithda wewa may duwata" (may you accumulate good merit daughter.) (Indramali, Interview, 7th July, 2000).

It is believed that Buddhist women should have a simple way of life, talking gently and not using harsh language, and utilising natural resources without wasting them. The *Jarooda pana jataka* discusses this (Piyadassi, 1991: 330).

I try to live according to this teaching as I remember my mother always spoke very gently to us and even to our dog. I always hear her the way she asked us to do something in the home, or asked if the dog wanted to go outside. She spoke so softly, with much love and kindness in her heart. My mother always saved water by washing utensils in a basin and using the water for the plants (Sarojini, Interview, 3rd August, 2000).

All the women agreed that women play an important role in maintaining the Buddhist folk tradition (see Appendix G) since they spent more time with the children and the children learnt by watching them. However, 30 participants believed that both parents have an important role in teaching their children the Buddhist traditions. Women were educators, not only to their children, but also to other children in the area.

What effects do the teachings of the Buddha have on the agricultural productivity of the land? Agriculture has assumed a religious aspect; as prayer and rituals are offered for a good harvest. *Pirit* water is sprinkled on the land before sowing the seed in the hope of obtaining a good harvest. 118 of the women said that the best way was not to use harmful chemicals in fertilisers, but to use natural mulch and cow manure, as this would give higher yields. The majority of the women did not believe that sprinkling *pirit* water gave them better yields, but it was a belief in a custom and they acknowledged it. Using the land wisely was following the advice of the Buddha.

More rituals take place at harvest time. Even prior to sowing the seed, 20 of the women ‘blessed’ the field with a sap-producing branch. Before gathering the harvest, 54 of the women sprinkled *pirit* water. The first part of the harvest was for the gods and for the *bhikkhus* at the *aramaya*. They also shared the harvest with their parents and the poor of the village. 10 of the interviewees said they made vows to obtain a good yield. After the harvest was gathered they gave *dane* to everyone at the village. D. M. Karunawathi relates her story:

Before we had samiti, I would not have been able to get a loan for cultivating paddy land. In this area of the dry zone we need to get access to irrigated paddy land. Since rice has commercial value, this brings a good income from the sale of paddy. As I was able to save money in the samiti, I was able to get a loan, to lease paddy land. My youngest son has become a bhikkhu at the aramaya. So we have to support the bhikkhus (Interview, 27th July, 2000).

Does the ordination of a son bring merit to the mother? 25 women said it would give merit to both parents. This discussion arose because of the war raging in the country, and the fact that a few of the sons had joined the armed forces. The women were divided in their ideas about sons joining the forces. Since sons gave their lives to serving the country, it was compared to sons becoming *bhikkhus* at the *aramaya*. Some

of the women had lost their sons to the war. Although they were saddened, they felt they would gain merit because they had sacrificed their sons in a good cause. “The Buddhist concepts of *metta* and *karuna* (love and compassion) have no compromising limitations. The Buddhist view of life is such that no living being is considered as outside the circle of *metta* and *karuna*” (Piyadassi, 1991: 426).

The ordained son would be able to get an education because he studied in a *Pirivena*. At present, *bhikkhunis* and *dasa sil matas* study privately or they enter a university after their A-level examinations. A new university has been opened at Sri Jayawardhanapura for Pali and Buddhist studies, and both *dasa sil matas* and *bhikkhunis* are admitted to the university if they qualify at the entrance examination. The women agreed that the ordination of a son would give them recognition in society, and they would also receive merit. They clarified this further by explaining that they will be more involved at the temple if they have a son who is a *bhikkhu*, because they would be organising *danes*, *pirit* and other Buddhist rituals. The community will begin to further respect and regard the mother as an example and will bring much merit. All the women agreed that it would also bring great joy to both parents.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the teachings of Buddhism and the rituals of Buddhism as practised by the women of Athale are discussed. By exploring these women’s lives, I demonstrated the changes taking place in the village. The women speak for themselves about changes in the village. Through interviews and observation, I was able to build up a picture of the impact of Buddhism on women’s lives and of the ways in which their lives had changed.

It was the women of Athale who were involved at the *aramaya* and made sure that the *dane* was taken to the *bhikkhus*. They started the day by paying homage to the Buddha, thus setting an example to the children. The simple routines followed by these women had great power. The women felt that they had a talent to teach meditation, and were able to communicate to the young. Although the women worked as hard as the men, they made time to meditate. It is in the practice of the ritual that they identified themselves as Buddhists. The older women agreed that life was more comfortable for them now than earlier times. What does it mean for the Athale women to be Buddhist?

The women are very sincere that all their ritualistic practices are Buddhist. To them there is no conflict in turning to benevolent deities as long as they feel they are truly Buddhist. They are very confident that the practice of Sinhala Buddhism has helped them achieve their goals. As the women of Athale would say for their children “we want a world where inequality based on class gender and race is absent from every country; and from relationships among countries” (Datta and Kornberg, 2002: 4).

CHAPTER 4

SRI LANKAN *SIL ATTHO*, “PIOUS WOMEN”

Introduction

May all beings be well and happy! May no harm come to them! May their upward path be smooth, sure and steady! (Piyadassi, 1991: 426).

In this chapter, an overview of renunciant women in relation to Buddhism and the revival of the *bhikkhuni/dasa sil mata/sil attho* is explained and their impact on Buddhism on their lives is analysed. The stories of alms women (renunciant women) from early times and stories from the new *bhikkhunis* and *dasa sil matas* interviewed in Sri Lanka are compared. I offer the opinions of contemporary *dasa sil matas* and *bhikkhunis* about their tradition and discuss their attitudes towards Buddhism in Sri Lanka. I have linked ancient and contemporary practices and given reasons for any changes seen and the re-emergence of female renunciants discussed. For the historical overview of renunciation in Sri Lanka, see: Appendix K as this chapter is not the place for it.

Bartholomeusz (1994) has examined the tradition of the elite and well known female renunciants in Sri Lanka. The study focuses on those who have revived and reinvented an ancient Buddhist vocation for women. There were no officially ordained *bhikkhunis* until 1996, although there were women ‘*upasikas*’ (pious lay women) *sil attho / dasa sil matas*. Bartholomeusz fails to discuss whether renunciation provides more freedom to *bhikkhunis* or *dasa sil matas*, nor does she discuss the implications of the ‘liminal’ status of female lay renunciants, or the status of women in Sri Lanka generally. Bartholomeusz describes the relationship between gender stereotypes of women in Sri Lankan society, Buddhist scriptures, and roles of the lay renunciant women. She also deals with obstacles created by the male *sangha* for renunciant women.

The transformations the *sangha* of Buddhist renunciants has undergone in Sri Lanka, is a fascinating story of transformation, innovation and female resilience, responding to the political and social pressures of the times. The Buddhist revival at the end of the twentieth century, the institution of *aramayas* for renunciants, female renunciation and the attempts to revive the lost order of *bhikkhuni* by foreign nationals is presented in this

chapter. These were not *bhikkhunis* or the female counterparts of ordained *bhikkhus*, but laywomen who decided to follow a life of renunciation either as individuals or in small groups and established their own way of ordination and their dress and rules of conduct. Most of them accept the fact, which is rigidly held by *bhikkhus*, that the Theravada *bhikkhunis* will not be established in Sri Lanka. However, they do not consider this to be an obstacle to fulfilling their roles as female renunciants. In fact, they believe their present situation frees them from the control of *bhikkhus* and gives them independence, autonomy and a sense of power. It is a very creative and innovative form of renunciation, worked out within the Buddhist framework. This is a good example of women empowering themselves by staying outside the formal system of male control. Lucinda Peach (1999) focuses on the tradition of female renunciation and how it was used for the promotion of Buddhism as an antiwestern and anticolonialist strategy by nationalistic Ceylonese. The disestablishment of Buddhism created a less close relationship between the *sangha* and the state. Ranjini Obeyesekere (1995) argues that the Buddhist doctrinal canons indicate that the *bhikkhunis* were considered an intrinsic part of the *sangha* in the early years of Buddhism.

Kathryn Blackstone (1998) investigates the *therigatha* as an exploration of Buddhism's early women renunciants, in *Women in the Footsteps of the Buddha*. The unique testimony of the 'religious experiences' and aspirations of the community of women renunciants (almswomen) the *bhikkhuni-sangha* has been brought to light. The text focuses on liberation (*nirvana*) as the religious goal of early Buddhism, where renunciation is considered superior to secular life as in other Buddhist texts. Blackstone applies Clifford Geertz's theory of symbolism to the text, which has helped her examine the reasons behind the choice made by the ancient almswomen to pursue a life of religious vocation. The text relates to the experiences of a group of renunciants, who engaged in an alternate lifestyle that 'liberated' them to some extent from the gender expectations of their social world. I have drawn parallels to some of the stories that were shared by the *bhikkhuni* and *dasa sil matas* who were interviewed for this research.

Protestant Buddhism and Sil Attho/ Dasa Sil Matas

It is important to understand Protestant Buddhism (as explained in chapter 1) in the context of the *dasa sil mata/sil maniyo* of the time. These *sil maniyo/dasa sil matas* were starting to deviate from the norm and were therefore a threat to the established social order. The Buddhist education these *upasika/ sil attho /dasa sil matas* received gave them the opportunity and confidence to question the authority of the *bhikkhu sangha*.

Men's fear of losing control is an obstacle to women's empowerment. If power is "power over", then it is easy to see why it is that the notion of women becoming empowered could be seen as inherently threatening: the assumption will be that there will be some kind of reversal of relationships (Afshar, 1998: 13).

The Buddhist education the women received encouraged them to model themselves on the old order of *bhikkhunis*, but not become the *bhikkhunis* of the past. They challenged the expected norms of society at that time. This was a power of a different kind that was not seen in Sri Lanka before. These were educated women, who could read English books, and make up their minds as to what they wanted to do with their lives.

Some *dasa sil matas* have defied conservative *bhikkhus* by establishing themselves in the pattern of the ancient *bhikkhuni*. Self-appointed renunciants are a new phenomenon. The women's struggle for liberation has been going on for centuries in different ways. I have given reasons for renunciation by examining the work of specialists in this area, such as Horner (1989), Bartholomeusz (1994), Salgado (1996), Blackstone (1998) and others. A threat to the Buddhist order by Protestant Buddhism, and the push for revival of the order of *bhikkhuni* since Independence will be discussed in this chapter.

Horner, (first printed 1930/1989) attempts to present the position of the laywomen and the almswomen in historical focus as she is drawn by the inspiration of these women, who are sincere in seeking the path to *nirvana*. Horner deals with the almswomen's (ancient *bhikkhunis*) admission into the order. The chief eight rules and the spiritual experience of some of the laywomen and alms women are discussed and compared to the modern renunciants, *bhikkhunis/dasa sil matas/sil attho* in Sri Lanka. Horner brings

to light alms women such as Dhammadinna, Khema and Patacara who had the gift of preaching, and converted men and women.

Since the late 19th century there has been a growing interest by concerned educated Buddhists in reviving the *bhikkhuni sangha* in Sri Lanka. This group of women (Theravada Buddhist renunciant women) has had much opposition from Buddhist lay men and women, as well as from *bhikkhus* at various times. Bishop Copleston, writing in 1892, describes the order of *upasika* as already falling apart. He stated that the tradition no longer existed. Ferguson, another missionary writing in the early 1890s, reiterates that the tradition of female ordained reuniciant was defunct (in Bartholomeusz, 1994: 28-29).

In the 19th Century, various Western women with a “cause” were linked to South Asia in the colonial period. Some travelled to the East bringing Christianity, Western education and values, social reform, women’s rights, and some modernizing processes to the women of Asia. These women undermined the beliefs held by Christian patriarchs and criticized colonialism, and this was also the era of the “new woman” (Jayawardene, 1995: 8). Feminism in the 19th century was not only a critique of patriarchal structures, which included the church and state, but was also a challenge to colonialism and the subordination and exploitation of women in the colonies. Many of the foreign women joined in the struggle for Independence. However, this approach did not lose sight of the universal condition of subordination, and claims the right of every woman to speak out against women’s oppression and exploitation everywhere (Jayawardena, 1995:10).

Buddhist Sri Lankans were swept along by the tide of change, which included Independence in 1948, and the political change in 1956 as Soloman Dias Bandaranaike came into political power winning the elections with a sweeping majority as a Buddhist Sinhalese Prime Minister, promising to give Buddhism and the Sinhala language its due place (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 127). His program attracted the rural population. With the Buddha *Jayanthi*³⁵ celebrations in 1956, Buddhist loyalties became a more powerful political weapon, with the elite spearheading a campaign to resuscitate Buddhism, while the general masses jumped on the bandwagon. Lay women, elite, and rural women observed the eight or ten precepts on the same general principles as male novices, and

³⁵ The 2,500th anniversary of the *parinibbana* (final passing) of the Buddha (Bartholomeusz, 1994:242).

were known as *dasa sil matas*, yet, they were denied the higher ordination that would make them *bhikkunis* although they lived the life of fully fledged *bhikkhunis*. As Bartholomeusz highlights, women around the island realised that renunciation, and especially celibacy, were related to female power (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 133).

History of Renunciation

Anagarika Dharmapala's call to the women to renunciate, and the changing social order of the nineteenth century brought about many changes. Renunciant women wore a white sari and blouse, and were known as an *upasika*: that is, one who keeps the five or ten precepts and renounces family life, one who is independent of men, but who stays in the community. Anagarika Dharmapala himself "wore white, did not shave his head but took the eight precepts, and by doing so he took an ascetic, celibate existence but lived in the world" (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:216). Since the Burmese lay renunciants were highly visible in Sri Lanka at the time, they set the example for the changing role of Sinhalese Buddhist women in the country. The latter saw the respect the public gave these women as they were educated and knew the Buddhist teachings well. Sri Lankan women renunciants and lay women realised that it was only through education they could be respected. However, they did not have access to education like the *bhikkhus*.

A pioneering female renunciant was Catherine de Alwis (a convert from Christianity to Buddhism). De Alwis was born (1860s) to Christian parents in Bentara in the south of Sri Lanka. She went to Burma and was received into the *sangha* with the name Sudharmachari³⁶. Since Independence Sudarmachari has had much influence on the *dasa sil mata* movement. Gombrich and Obeyesekera (1988: 284) say, "An upsurge of Buddhist nationalistic feeling due to the 2500th anniversary of Buddha's birth in 1956 elevated the status of the *dasa sil mata*. Sister Sudarma was the first *dasa sil mata* to enter university, and obtained a first class degree in arts having studied Pali, Sanskrit, Sinhala and Buddhist civilization. She started an *aramaya* at Ambalangoda (South of

³⁶After her parents' death, she met a Buddhist who consoled her and converted her to Buddhism from Christianity. She studied Buddhism, and went to Burma and became a *bhikkhuni*. She was given the name Sudharmacari and on returning to Sri Lanka she established the first *aramaya* in 1905 and called it *Sudharma Upasikaramaya* (later called Lady Blake's, after the British governor's wife). This is considered a milestone in Buddhist history (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 93-4).

Sri Lanka) with eight *dasa sil matas*. Later she became the principal of the *aramaya*” (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 281). Her organization took only educated women who had studied Buddhism to at least the eighth grade in school. Here, the women first take the eight precepts and after two years the ten. She upheld the Protestant Buddhist ideals and dedicated her life to social service. The pre-independence period valued the contribution made by *dasa sil matas* to the Buddhist revival. A new *aramaya* was opened at Biyagama mainly for the training of *dasa sil matas*. It is here we see a marked change from the *upasika*. The women are invited to preach in public, and teach meditation even to male laymen. They can be compared to the ancient alms women who taught the public. A committee of laywomen (this represents a remarkable change) runs another *aramaya* called ‘*Susilaramaya*’ which was established at Maharagama. “The committee exercises direct control over the religious lives of people who have undertaken more precepts than they have, and so have a higher religious status. This is a glaring departure from the Buddhist tradition” (Gombrich & Obeyesekera, 1988: 286).

The new *dasa sil matas* had little interest in social work, instead they wanted to meditate and reach for the higher life. The general pattern of life they looked for was similar to that practised at the Helen Ranawaka *bhikkhuni aramaya* at Pannipitiya, where about twenty *dasa sil matas* lived under the supervision of one senior *dasa sil mata*. Young *dasa sil matas*, who observed the ten precepts, ranged from nine to twenty years age, and were supported by voluntary donations (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 286). Younger ones attended school while the older women lived in the cells within the compound of the *aramaya*. Those wishing to renunciate made a payment of Rs.1000 for the accommodation. The movement which Sisters Sudarmachari, Mawichari, and Sudarma (now deceased) helped stimulate is now growing rapidly (1989 census). These *dasa sil matas* are gaining the respect of the laity and the attention of the *bhikkhus*. Contemporary *dasa sil matas* see their chief task as that of attaining *arahatship*. *Vipassana* meditation is gaining much attention, and some *dasa sil matas* have become skilled teachers of this technique (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 287). A minority of *bhikkhus* believe that a *bhikkhuni sangha* could be re-established and are prepared to work for this possibility. “The laity describes the *dasa sil matas*’ life as “*sil attho*” or pious women (*silvanta*) while observing the precepts, while the temple *bhikkhus* are criticized for the luxurious wordly lives they lead” (Bloss 1987:21).

The growth of the *dasa sil matas* may be symbolized by the change of colours of the robe from white, to white and yellow, to all yellow, or orange (see: Appendix G). They see themselves as occupying a level between the laity and *bhikkunis*. The *dasa sil matas* represent change. Sinhalese women from well to do families who were interested in the spiritual life were ordained as *upasikas*. At first it was only the elderly women who came to the *aramaya*, according to seventy eight year old pioneering *dasa sil mata* Kotmalee Dira Sudharma.³⁷ She studied at Lady Blake's in 1952 and still lives there as the *loku maniyo* (senior *dasa sil mata*).

It was not only older women, younger women also studied here. Following in the footsteps of Sudharmachari, additional centres for women who took the ten precepts were established. Some older women came here because they did not have a place to call their home. No one was turned away (Kotmalee Dira Sudarma, Interview, August 7th, 2000).

Eminent lay Buddhists such as Sri Nissanka and Sir D.B. Jayatilleke, encouraged the *sil maniyo* and were influenced by Dharmapala's reforms³⁸. Sri Nissanka and Jayatilleke "did not see the *sil maniyo/dasa sil matas* (pious women) as Buddhist renunciants. They were more interested in engaging the *dasa sil matas/sil maniyo* in social work. In other words, they wanted to see them "replace the Catholic nun in hospitals" (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 289). The Buddhist *sangha* and the educated elite, wanted to create a group like the Christian nuns who would be an intermediary between the lay and the monastic life; one involved in social work. *Bhikkhus*, teachers and the Sinhala educated class launched a campaign against the local and foreign Christian elite who were economically and socially privileged, and against the missionaries who dominated the field of education.

The most innovative feature of the 20th century was the institution of *aramayas* for female renunciants or *dasa sil matas*. The *dasa sil mata* of the late 20th century was the most rapidly growing and changing of all Buddhist female renunciant groups. These women realized the value of education in order to bring about social change. They realized that education would bring about the change that the renunciants of the late

³⁷ She was ordained by a Burmese renunciant named Mawicari. Kotmalee Dira Sudarma became a lay renunciant, as she felt she could carry out the mission of the Buddha by devoting her life to the religious path.

³⁸ Dharmapala was the founder of the Maha Bodhi Society (MBS). He propagated the need for a Buddhist society. He did not stress the need for progress towards Nirvana as the primary goal.

nineteenth century dreamt about. The *dasa sil matas* I interviewed have taken the ten precepts. Many of the *dasa sil matas* reported parental and sibling opposition to their decision to renunciate, but opposed their family's wishes. Hewahata bhikkhuni Susantha's parents and siblings were opposed to her renunciation.

Since I was 14 I knew I wanted to be a renunciant. I had a great respect for them. When I made the decision, my parents and brothers opposed my idea vehemently. My older brother still does not agree to it. Once I took the robes my parents, my sister and younger brothers supported me. I do not regret my decision (Susantha bhikkhuni, Interview, 5th August, 2000).

This represents a change as they decided against following society's expectation of marrying and nurturing a family.

The renunciant women of the late 19th and 20th centuries did not model themselves on the village *bhikkhu*, but on the *vanavasi* forest *bhikkhus*,³⁹ of Sri Lanka, as described by Carrithers (1983). These *dasa sil matas* lay stress on *sil* (observance of the precepts) and meditation as the basis (Falk, 2002: 10) of their practice. Nissan (1983: 37) points out these "*bhikkhunis* seek the ultimate goal of *nirvana*, a goal to be attained through disciplined, patient practice." Obeyesekere (1995) argues that once Independence was won, and Buddhism 'restored', the need for female participation in Buddhist activities became less politically important, and the elite support for renunciation of women declined.

In 1974, William Gopallawa, President of Sri Lanka, opened Madivala *upasikaramaya* and declared that his government would support women⁴⁰ who renounce the world (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 147). There is no formal organisation of renunciant women comparable to the *nikaya* organisation of *bhikkhus*. Unlike the *bhikkhus*, *dasa sil matas* do not have to be registered, and their change of status receives no formal recognition from the state, which enables them to remain independent of formal control.

³⁹ They consider the village *bhikkhu* to be worldly, unlike the forest *bhikkhu* who devotes time to meditation and lives a very simple life. The majority of *dasa sil matas* I interviewed aspired to be like the forest *bhikkhus*.

⁴⁰ "If the *dasa sil matas* in Sri Lanka take a keen interest to re-establish the *Meheni Sasana* (order of Buddhist renunciant) here, I have no doubt it will receive the support of the government" said the President (in Bartholomeusz, 1994: 147).

I always knew that I wanted to be a renunciant. I had to get married, as it was expected of me, I had eight children. I was a science teacher for many years. It was only after my child's death I realised I had to leave the home and pursue meditation. I am 78 years old. I did my Praccina exams at the Buddhist Pali University, and also my PhD in Buddhist studies. I spend months on end meditating. My family is all grown now, and they look after the father. So, I am free now to do what I love most, and that is teaching the dharma, and meditating (Bhikkhuni Soma, Interview, 22nd August, 2000).

It is time to listen to the voices of these women. Education has brought change to these renunciant women's lives. It has given these women the courage to challenge old Buddhist beliefs. They encourage each other to educate themselves and to learn the Buddhist teachings well. This is the reason they are encouraging children and other women to educate themselves and to be leaders in their society. They realize that change can come only through education.

My only thought was to be a renunciant. At the age of 14 I did so. Although my parents were not happy at first, my brother encouraged me, so they gave permission. I sat for my GCE Advanced level examination, and gained admission to the University of Peradeniya. I studied Philosophy. Then I sat for my Praccina examination, and passed well. I went to Taiwan, and studied there for four years under a very learned Bhikkhuni. Loku maniyo needed help here, to teach the young renunciants. We need to be educated well to earn the respect of the people and the bhikkhus (Hewaheta Susantha bhikkhuni, Interview, 8th August, 2000).

The *dasa sil matas*, like the majority of women in Sri Lanka, conformed to the expectations of society. They still are the nurturers. Some set up *vipassana* meditation centres, while others even became meditation teachers. A *dasa sil mata* is usually attached to a temple and is in sole charge of the meditation centre, as Vajira maniyo said:

We conduct daham pasal (schools teaching the dhamma) visit prisoners' children and hospitals and distribute clothes, make clothes for poor families. We also provide domestic care for new mothers; we say pirit, teach, receive alms and spend much of our time conducting pujas (alms giving) for the supporters (Interview, 7th August, 2000).

They became channels for passive merit making for supporters who provide this service with their money. This is a radical change for Sri Lanka.

Bartholomeusz (1994: 138) confirms the *dasa sil matas* wear a light yellow monastic robe, or orange, unlike the *upasikas* who wear white. Offerings to the *bhikkhus* by laypersons are placed on a white sheet. The modern *bhikkhuni*, *dasa sil matas* in Sri Lanka make their offerings directly to the *bhikkhu*, and this is another change. As liberal feminists, it limits itself to reform, seeking to improve the status of women within the system, but not fundamentally contesting either the system's operation or its legitimacy.

The older women of Athale, who spend their time at the *aramaya*, had this to say:

The changes are good for women and more women will be interested in becoming dasa sil matas. It will be good for this village if we have more sil attho, as they can help the men and women of this village. They can teach meditation (Karunawathi Interview, 4th August, 2000).

Nirmala Salgado (1996) focuses on two groups of renunciants and explores the religious education that is now accessible to Buddhist women at the grass roots level. The founding and growth of the Aligoda *aramaya* presents an interesting case study in interpretations of modern Buddhism at the microcosmic level. The tension between those who promote formal education and those who emphasise *vippasana* meditation represents change. She discovers both similarities and differences, and investigates the choices open to women who choose the renunciant life, including the ambiguous status of *dasa sil matas* and the recent movement to establish an order of fully ordained *bhikkhunis*.

Salgado claims that until recently, little attention was given to informal ways of knowing and transmitting religious knowledge, such as Uttera *Maniyo*'s use of imagery and story telling in her discussions of religious ideas (whether taken from texts or from real life experiences). This enhanced her teaching methods and these have often been ignored. Some of the older women in the village of Athale consider it their responsibility to transmit their religious knowledge to the younger people. This aspect was discussed in chapter 3.

Salgado (1997) examines alternative religious vocations and choices of cures that are open to women and demonstrates how the illnesses they suffer, concurrently with their ecstatic trances, can be cured within the framework of Buddhist renunciation in Sri Lanka.

Uttera *Maniyo*'s methods of transmitting knowledge extended beyond providing formal religious education for women at a hermitage. At the age of thirteen she was ordained as a *dasa sil mata*, and placed a high priority on education. "By her example as a strong role model and a pioneer, she influenced her junior *matas*" (Salgado, 1996: 70). She commanded respect from *dasa sil matas* under her tutelage and of the lay people because of her gift for teaching. Uttera *Maniyo* was a pioneering renunciant, as she had formal training and had used this in addition to alternative 'ways of knowing' and transmitting knowledge for the benefit of other renunciants, as well as for lay folk. She had great plans for a *pirivena* to be established near the *aramaya* (living quarters of *dasa sil matas*). This would have provided traditional education for renunciants (Salgado, 1996: 71). She died before she could see the completion of her plans. The new renunciant, Sumana *Maniyo*, who took over the *aramaya*, placed more emphasis on meditation. This building that was to have become a *pirivena* (place of Buddhist learning) became a meditation centre for laywomen. Sumana *Maniyo* was different, as she practised *samatha* meditation of the yogic kind. The individualism of meditation is a new change. Venerable Ananda Maitrya has predicted that in twenty years there will be no more *aramayas*, but only meditation centres (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988:239). There are many meditation centres in the cities today, but the *aramaya* is still a popular place in the village. Older women spend much time at the *aramaya* meditating and listening to *bana*.

At the village, there are older women who are not renunciants and they live with their daughters, but help at the *aramaya* on week ends by talking to young children, and teaching them songs about the Buddha. As Seelawathi amme said:

We spend much time at the aramaya, and when children come to the daham pasala on Saturdays, we help by teaching the younger ones short verses from the dhammapada and other verses. We must see that the teachings of the Buddha are not lost (Interview, 5th August, 2000).

It is no surprise that the Buddhist teachings have lasted so long even without the presence of the *bhikkhuni* sangha. The women have taken on the responsibility of teaching the Buddhist scriptures to the young. Salgado (1996: 74) states Sumana *Maniyo* was already married when she desired to become a *dasa sil mata*. She began to go into a trance, throwing herself on the floor, claiming to speak to supernatural beings. Her family was unable to explain her behaviour and believed she was insane. Finally, she left her husband and family and went alone to Delgahawatte (Salgado, 1996: 74). Here, she spent time meditating, and living on alms brought by the lay folk. Those who were sick or had incurable maladies began to seek her advice; she cured them through the use of herbal remedies and oils, and by chanting *pirit*. Her reputation as a religious healer spread locally, and she lived in this manner for about eight years. Eventually she acquired land and built a shrine and also built separate living quarters for renunciants and the laity. Women with psycho-somatic disorders continued to seek Sumana *Maniyo* for her healing powers while staying at the *aramaya*. Sumana *Maniyo* attracted women who seemed to have had a special relationship with deities and spirits. During morning and evening worship around the *bo* tree there would be daily occurrences of trances and conversations between supernatural beings and the renunciants. This usually took place during the chanting of *pirit* (Salgado, 1996: 72).

The Delgahawatte *aramaya* presents an interesting contrast in both formal education and the type of meditation that had developed at Aligoda *aramaya*. Salgado (1996:74) maintains that according to Sumana *Maniyo*, formal education for renunciants detracted from what should be the true Buddhist vocation: that of realizing a higher spiritual state through meditation. Messages that came to her from the deities⁴¹ often were about events in the time of Gotama Buddha. She claimed that these messages corrected errors found in the texts, which according to her, had been changed by the *bhikkhus*. Sumana *Maniyo*'s ways of knowing (understanding) came from spiritual powers associated with the meditative state that allowed her to communicate directly with the gods. For this reason lay followers and junior renunciants considered her unique. "Religious texts were, after all, written by fallible human beings" (Salgado, 1996: 74). This was in contrast to the *bhikkhus* who focus on textual studies. The daily activities involved in

⁴¹ These deities are from the Hindu pantheon which influenced Buddhism from the 11th century onwards. Gombrich (1991: 55) asserts, deities are not a problem in Buddhism, as they are powerful beings to be supplicated for worldly goods.

running the *aramaya* were intertwined with daily meditation for Sumana *Maniyo* and the other renunciants, who lived at Aligoda and the Delgahawatte *aramayas*.

This is in contrast to Athale village, where formal education is practised. The women organised talks by educated women or renunciants to teach them. Through their *samiti*, they invite outside speakers.

Now, we are able to get outside dasa sil matas or women to come into our village and teach us. We also have women educators, giving us talks on Buddhism and other topics. We know that it is with education that our village women will improve their lives (Chitraseeli, Interview, 31st July, 2000).

Self Appointed *Dasa Sil Matas/sil attho*

Most of the renunciants see themselves as Theravadins who embrace Buddhism and protect its integrity. They either live in groups at an *aramaya*, under the *bo* tree at Anuradhapura, or in caves in the Ruhunu National Forest. According to Horner (1989: 154) it is recorded that the Buddha warned *bhikkhunis* against living in isolated areas, yet these *dasa sil matas/ sil attho* have done just that. Since they are not under the monastic code, those who are attracted to the secluded life of the forests live there. I met three renunciants who live in the forest at Maligawila. I asked them for the reason for choosing to live in the forest, and how they survive there.

I can meditate here for nearly five hours at a time. This is the life I always wanted. I do not like living in the village. It is only by meditating one can attain nibbana. This is what the Buddha said. The villagers bring us dane on most days. If they don't we still manage. We have some dry provisions here. We have lived here for two years. There is an old Bhikkhu living in a kutti a few miles from here. We hardly see him (Vajira maniyo, Interview, 31st July, 2000).

Although it is customary for *dasa sil matas* to take the householder's ten precepts, there are women who have been given the renunciant's precepts when they renounced their lay life. However, there are others such as Sumanasili *maniyo*, who feel that it is not proper for female renunciants to take the ten precepts of the renunciant's order. Although she sees continuity between her vocation and that of the ancient *bhikkuni*, she

feels very strongly that *dasa sil matas* should have no right to assume the privileges of the *sangha* of *bhikkhunis*. For Sumanisili “purity of practise and preservation of tradition are more important than the precepts she has taken” (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 159).

Although the *dasa sil matas* are critical of the contemporary *sangha*, they hold its ideal in high regard. Therana and the others who live at Uttama Sadhu’s hermitage are not considered to be *bhikkhunis* by other *dasa sil matas*. Therana considered herself to be a *bhikkhuni* as she has kept the 311 rules of the *bhikkhu Vinaya* for the past 15 years, and considers Uttama Sadhu as her only teacher. She is a vegetarian, unlike the *dasa sil matas*, because she supports the spiritual issues of healing, through magical powers (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 185).

There are women who live by themselves under *Bo* trees. They depend on the villagers for alms. Sometimes they go on alms rounds to the village. They practice meditation and have taken the eight or ten precepts. Another group of *dasa sil matas* known as *sil maniyo* depend on charity, and live under *bo* trees.

They have no fixed abode, and often live at or near temples and receive food given in alms much like the *bhikkhus*. Two *bhikkhunis* who lived in a cave near a *Bo*-tree were organized differently. On full moon days the senior *bhikkhuni* went round the village collecting goods and cash on which they lived. They did their own shopping and cooking (Gombrich, 1971: 279).

The foreign lay renunciants who live in Sri Lanka are critical of the Sinhala *dasa sil matas*. They claim that the *dasa sil matas*’ lifestyle deviates from the Buddha’s vision of renunciation, and disapprove of the Sinhala renunciant women, saying “they do not know how to meditate, as they spend hours feeding Buddha statues” (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 171).

Salgado (1996: 65) says between 1984-1986 the Sri Lankan government made various attempts to provide education (up to university) for *dasa sil matas*. Subjects such as Pali, Buddhism, English, Sinhalese and health science were taught in Colombo and since then, education focusing on oriental languages has been made available to *dasa sil matas* on a district-wide basis. Since 1993 the government has funded daily classes for

bhikkhunis in eleven districts in the country. About 80 *bhikkhunis* have passed the *praccina pandita* examination in the past 5-10 years; 15 *dasa sil mathas/bhikkhunis* have completed a Bachelor's degree in local universities. These *matas* generally depend on their parents or relations for financial support for their tertiary studies, unlike the members of the *Sangha* who are usually supported by established, well-endowed *aramayas*, as well as by the state.

The majority of *bhikkhus* function as teachers and religious practitioners, while *dasa sil matas* are more involved in meditative and social activities. Salgado (1996: 66) asserts this is a radical break from the traditional role of the female as a passive supporter of religion. In 1984 the government decided to register the lay *bhikkhunis* in the hope of legally recognizing who a *dasa sil mata* really is, in the hope of upgrading her status in society. A set of guidelines was drawn up for a female who wants to become a *sil mata*. Some accepted these guidelines, while others rejected them reasoning that any reform should come from the *dasa sil matas* themselves, not imposed by others. This stand on their part emphasises that these young women are empowered, they can take decisions and they have 'power over.' i.e 'power over' is by staying outside the *sangha* the *dasa sil mata* have the power to evade the control of the *bhikkhu*. Weeraratne states that,

For the first time since the disappearance, the *bhikkhuni* order was restored at Sarnath India on 8.12.1996. The Sinhalese nuns who received their *bhikkhuni* ordination there came back to Sri Lanka after one year and two months at the invitation of the *bhikkhuni Sasanodaya* Society, Dambulla. On the *Medin Poya* day (12.3.98) they ordained 23 selected Sinhalese DSM Nuns into the *bhikkhuni sangha*. The ordination was confirmed and ratified by a quorum of the Theravada *Sangha* as required in the *vinaya*... (Weeraratne, 2001: 2).

This has created a direct threat to the orthodoxy⁴². The majority of the *sangha* are opposed to ordaining a woman. However, there are *dasa sil matas* and *bhikkhunis* in Sri Lanka today. I had the opportunity of meeting some of them and discovering their views about renunciation.

Although we do not have the support of the government, it does not prevent us from continuing the religious tasks

⁴² They are the conservative *bhikkhus*. However not all *bhikkhus* are conservative. Carrithers (1983) has discussed this. *Bhikkhus* involved in the JVP (*Janata vimukthi peramuna*) uprising in the 1970s and the political *bhikkhu* of the 1960s are examples of non conservative *bhikkhus*.

and we can strive for nibbana. If we get upasampada we will have to keep to the 311 rules. We prefer our status now, as we are not under the bhikkhus (Kolugala Dharmadinna, Interview, 8th August).

These women have taken a stand and very bravely follow their ideals. Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988) state there are lay renunciants who claim that they have discovered parts of the *dhamma* preached by the Buddha, but not recorded in Buddhist scriptures. The renunciants have collected them and transformed them into written work

While some of the nuns, such as the six year old, still impressed the adherents by delivering impromptu Pali sermons, the three most senior, the *sikkhamana*, were slowly writing out the entire canon- in its original, authentic version (Gombrich and Obeyesekere, 1988: 341-2).

There are other women who continue to live in forests or in cloisters who are self appointed by following the eight or ten precepts. These women have taken upon themselves to do something quite different from what is expected from them in rural families.

Bryson (1992: 5) argues that liberal feminism is based upon the belief that women are individuals, possessed of reason and they are equipped to fulfill human rights. Therefore, women should be free to achieve their full potential in equal competition with men". Miles (1989) has pointed out that it is difficult to distinguish between the effects of class, inequality and gender. Bowes asserts, given this problem, the correctives that are needed must be applied, and should extend to all forms of systematic exclusion of women by class or gender, and the differential treatment of women must be attended to. This involves not turning a blind eye to sexist violence and inferiority in the name of upholding cultural traditions of groups (Bowes, 1996: 5).

In 1984 the government drew up a plan to register renunciants prompted by the *bhikkhus*. However, these *dasa sil matas* did not sign the papers, because they did not want to be under the control of *bhikkhus*. This plan was to bring all the *dasa sil matas* under one umbrella, and to determine who will be recognized by the government as *dasa sil matas*. The ministry set up seventeen educational centres for the *dasa sil matas* in need of religious education (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 148). This was a scheme by which

the government wanted to stop the older woman joining and they passed a law prohibiting women over 60 from joining. These older women were powerful as they were the mentors for the younger women. The *bhikkhus* were getting rather nervous about losing their power and their hold on the religion. Tong (1989: 100) asserts that:

Based as it is on the value of power over, the domination by one group or person of all others, the masculine world can accommodate only those values that serve it. It has room for “true grit,” “doing what you have to do,” and “the end justifying the means,” but no room for “knowing when to stop,” savouring the best things in life (which we are told, are free), on reflecting on process as well as product. Thus to be a total man, or patriarch, is not to be a full human being but to be what Dorothy Dinnerstein termed, a minotaur... A male representative of mindless greedy power...”

Marilyn French (in Tong, 1989: 99) “insisted that “feminine” values should be re-integrated into the “masculine” society patriarchal ideology has created. We must value in our lives and actions “love and compassion and sharing and nutritiveness [sic] equally with control and structure, possessiveness and status”.

‘The Government Lords it over the people; Men Lord it over Women’, the demand that women have equal opportunities in education and that they be trained in practical skills that would enable them to be economically independent, comes from all Asian countries. (Kishida in Jayawardena, 1986: 239).

The issues that Kishida emphasized were the same as the questions raised by women in other Asian countries, such as equal opportunities in education and that they be trained in practical skills that would enable them to be economically independent. Kishida argued for sexual codes that would apply equally to men and women and for equality in law, as regards to civil and property rights. This is a cry going out from women in Asia (Jayawardene, 1986: 239). The women of Athale had similar needs and problems as *bhikkhuni* susantha said:

We need to get a good education for ourselves and our women and children. Practical knowledge is important, as our young people need to be involved in what ever education they received. When people are idle they do or say things that normally they wouldn't. We cannot walk on

the road, without getting comments from young men saying, 'why don't you give up the robe and come with me' or why don't you look at me? Even we are not left alone. They do not respect the robe we wear (Susantha bhikkhuni, Interview, 15th August, 2000).

Dasa Sil Mata/ Sil Attho/ Bhikkhuni In Modern Sri Lanka

Although the laity continued to support female renunciants for many years, a vast majority of lay nuns at present are very poor and find it rather difficult to keep the laity's patronage. Most of the lay *dasa sil matas/bhikkhunis* I interviewed chose the life of the renunciant because they felt a commitment to serve in the cause of Buddhism. *Dukkha* and lack of independence motivated many *dasa sil matas* to renounce the world (see: Appendix J 1). Carrithers (1983), in his study of the *forest bhikkhus* of Sri Lanka, made a similar observation between *dukkha* and renunciation. "*Dukkha* may be explained as old age, sickness or death; or sorrow lamentation, sadness and so forth... Forest *bhikkhus* say they took the robes because of disillusionment with the world" (Carrithers, 1983: 9).

*My family knew I wanted to wear the robes and be a renunciant, but they protested about it because it was expected that I marry my cousin. My parents and his parents were disappointed. The *dasa sil matas* do not get much support from the laity in some areas. However, I was determined, and left home with my older brother who supported me. I went to the local *aramaya* and took the ten precepts. My family then supported me. I studied for the *praccina* examination and did well. I teach at the *daham pasala* and meditate. Some days we do not get any *dane*. That is why I spend sometime at the vegetable plot, growing vegetables such as Gotu Kola, Okra, Spinach. I enjoy teaching the women and children that come to the *aramaya* (Dharmapala *sil mata*, Interview, 2nd Sept. 2000).*

The *dasa sil matas* I interviewed gave up lay life for different reasons; majority of the renunciants were attracted to the life of the renunciant, while two *dasa sil matas* gave up the lay life due to an argument with the family. For example, in 1960 Kotmalee Sudharma joined the renunciant life with many other rural women.

I did not want to get married, or to have children. I wanted to dedicate my life to Buddhism. I want to teach the dhamma and meditate (Interview, 9th August, 2000).

Kolugala Dharmadinna *dasa sil mata* gave up lay life as she was upset after her father's death. Since then she listened to *bana* preaching almost everyday with her aunt. Since she was interested in the teachings of the Buddha, she learnt the *suttas* well. The senior *dasa sil mata* invited her to say *pirit*, and as she said it so well the senior nun asked her to bring her horoscope. Although her mother was against her becoming a renunciant, she knew what she wanted to do. She had her heart set on renunciation and that's exactly what she did (see: Appendix I plate 10).

*I believe that it is the responsibility of the renunciants to create an environment that would attract a qualified younger generation of female renunciants who would not bring discredit to the *dasa sil matas*. Some young renunciants do not have much self-respect and do not set a good example. Therefore it is necessary to have some reform. However, this change or reform must come from within the renunciants (Dharmadinna *dasa sil mata* Interview, August 7th 2000).*

According to Kotmalee Dhira Sudarma (see: Appendix I plate 10), in 1988, Ayya Khema, a German born American *dasa sil mata* became an ordained *bhikkhuni* in a *Mahayana* ordination ceremony in California. This offended many Sri Lankan *bhikkhus*, as they thought it would pose a threat to the integrity of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka. This action claims to have destroyed support for the *dasa sil matas* in Sri Lanka. However, in December 1996 ten Sri Lankan women were ordained at Sarnath, India. Kotmalee Dhira Sudarma explains that:

*Renunciation served as a safety valve for women who had no other option in the late twentieth century. Women who were displaced and unable to support themselves economically became lay renunciants. This meant that women unsuitable for the vocation sometimes became *dasa sil matas* in early years. However, this idea has changed, and there are more younger, educated *dasa sil matas* now. Interest has sparked after the *bhikkhuni* ordination was held in Sri Lanka by educated *bhikkhunis*, and this took place in 1998 in Sri Lanka (Interview, 9th August, 2000).*

Bartholomeusz (1994) states how Buddhist women were either ordained in the *Mahayana* lineage as *bhikkhunis*, or were self-ordained, and undertook to observe the ten precepts. This is quite controversial as *bhikkhus* and laypersons view Sri Lanka as the “the bastion of orthodox in Theravada Buddhism”⁴³ (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 14). Many contemporary Sri Lankan Buddhists claim that they were destined to be the defenders of Buddhism as discussed earlier in the chapter. To the question, do you believe that the respect given by society to the *bhikkhus* will also be given to the *bhikkhunis*?” the majority of the renunciants said it will take a long time for them to get the same respect the *bhikkhus* have, while two *dasa sil matas* said it will be possible for them to have the same respect as the *bhikkhus*. Venerable Susantha *bhikkhuni* of Kengalla, Kandy, said:

Unless the bhikkhus take stock of them and become the type of bhikkhu that the Buddha was, it would be very difficult for them to protect Buddhism. Unless the bhikkhus become more sila, educated, disciplined and do some useful things to help society, the people will not accept them. Some of the bhikkhus are fearful of the Mahayana tradition, thinking it will destroy the Theravada teaching. These fears have to be dealt with. The older bhikkhus who are educated and have sila may live only for another couple of years, and after that there may not be any bhikkhus who are sila enough to continue the Buddha's teaching. The protection of the Buddha's message may come into the hands of the bhikkhunis and dasa sil mata. We too have to be educated well in the dhamma to be able to expound it, and teach. Then we will have the respect of the laity (Interview, 14th August, 2000).

Bhikkhuni Susantha gave education and learning the *dhamma* a very important place. Although the *bhikkhus* in her area respected her, she felt that the majority of *bhikkhus* did not respect the *bhikkhuni*. Religious education for the *dasa sil matas* needs improvement for them to become learned in the doctrines, as *bhikkhuni* Susantha said. The place of religious education for the elite and well-known *dasa sil matas*, status hierarchies operating within female renunciants, and biases in favour of *bhikkhus* over female renunciants is discussed by Bartholomeusz (1994) in great detail. With the demise of the *bhikkhunis*, *pirivena* education became the prerogative of the *bhikkhus*. However, the government of Sri Lanka has set up *pirivenas* in each area for the

⁴³ The view that Sri Lankans were the upholders of a great tradition. See the Mahavamsa on footnote .

education of the *dasa sil matas*, but these lay-women are unable to travel to them as these centres are mostly in the main cities and travelling expenses are not provided.

I asked “do you receive help from your family or do the public support you in your daily activities”. All the renunciants agreed that they get help from their families. Susila Sobanni *dasa sil mata* of Hulangashinna *aramaya* replied:

I receive family support from my two sisters and brother. There's only so much they can do, as they have their own families. My parents helped me when they could. Now, it is hard for them. Most dasa sil matas/bhikkhunis receive family support. Their studies are encouraged by sponsorship from rich families. The government has not given them financial support nor the accommodation. Constant help is from the daily alms they receive from the family and the village (Interview, 15th August, 2000).

The *bhikkhus* and the *samaneras* (see: Appendix I plate 8) are given education at *pirivenas* and at the universities. They are also given financial assistance by the government for books and other needs that are not given to *dasa sil matas* or *bhikkhunis*. The *dasa sil matas* and the *bhikkhunis* sent a joint proposal to the Department of Buddhist Affairs asking for support from the government, and they also hope to get support from the public for their cause. The *dasa sil matas* still depend on their family for support, although they claim to be independent. Two *dasa sil matas* interviewed were sponsored by two women in the village, in memory of their parents. It is still a very difficult life they face.

The Bhikkhus in this country have had it good for a long time, since the government supports their studies, lay women and dasa sil matas, bhikkhunis have served them well. Now the women need to be educated so the bhikkhus, should help, as there are learned bhikkhus in this country (Interview, 9th August, 2000).

The new *sil attho*, especially those with a good education, aspired for the higher ideal of striving to attain *nirvana* in this life. They dedicated their lives to learning meditation, and educating themselves. This view was true of the *bhikkhuni* and *dasa sil matas* I interviewed. *Bhikkhuni* Kusuma declares:

We represent change. The branch of the bo tree that bhikkhuni Sangamitta brought to Sri Lanka still survives.

So we as women have a right to protect Buddhism. All four groups, bhikkhu, bhikkhuni, laywomen, lay men are all necessary. Now that the bhikkhuni sangha has been established, it is the back-bone of Buddhism (Interview, August 19th, 2000).

The ideal of the female renunciant has given inspiration to women from rural areas, and their participation has created significant changes to the *sangha* of *dasa sil matas*. They are less involved in personal salvation through meditation, but like their counterparts, the village dwelling *bhikkhus*, they believe in a life of service to their fellows.

*We still get support and respect in the villages however, without the visibility and influential political support; the public sees us as marginalized individuals, and unlike bhikkhus, as having no special niche or status in the larger society. Yet, the majority of public supports us and sees us as individuals devoted to the dhamma, and serving the public. Therefore they give dane (Kolugalla Dharmadinna *dasa sil mata* Interview, 7th August, 2000).*

To the question, “what made you choose the vocation of a *dasa sil mata*”, the majority of the renunciants said they had thought about it for some time and three renunciants decided spontaneously. Anurudha Sudarmika *sil Maniyo* (see: Appendix I plate 11) answered:

A friend asked me if I would come with her, as she was joining the renunciants. I wanted to serve the community, so I decided to join her. I have never regretted the decision. My parents were not very pleased, but they supported me once they knew I was serious about it. I studied for my praccina exams at Lady Blake’s and in 1994 I passed the university entrance examination. I passed in 1998 with a degree in Buddhism Pali and Sanskrit. I wish to study further. I owe all this to loku maniyo Kotmalee Dira Sudharma (Interview, August 7th, 2000).

Kolugala Dharmadinna of Lady Blake *aramaya* exclaimed:

Marriage is dukka (sorrow). Women have no freedom as they have to look after their children and the husband. We are able to meditate and we have the conditions for achieving the liberating goal of the Buddhist path (Interview, August 7th, 2000).

It is quite clear that these young renunciants decided to give up their expected life style in the village to serve the community as renunciants, although *bhikkhus* still do not recognize the women renunciants as being part of the *sangha*. Renunciation by women has a long history. These women interviewed are not concerned that *bhikkhus* do not accept them, as long as the lay people do.

Last month a young girl from this village got married. The day before the wedding ten dasa sil matas from the aramaya were invited to the home for dane. The bride washed our feet and we were welcomed into the home. Loku maniyo recited verses from the Mangala Sutta after which we were served lunch. The villagers are aware that we have vegetarian food. It is good that people think of us worthy receipients (bhikkhuni Kusuma, Interview, 3rd August, 2000).

Bartholomeusz (1994) states clearly that her book is about Buddhism from the perspectives of Sri Lankan women who have renounced the world. She records that between 1989 and 1992 the renunciants numbers increased considerably. Women *upasika*, *bhikkhunis/dasa sil matas* who took up the ten precepts have embodied specific moral and spiritual values on their path to enlightenment. In older Sri Lanka *sil maniyo/dasa sil matas* had a low status as they were not learned, and did not keep the 311-vinaya rules. In modern Sri Lanka most *sil maniyo /dasa sil matas* are not influenced by the resistance of *bhikkhus* to establish the *bhikkuni sangha* as they do not believe that establishing the *bhikkhuni sangha* is necessary for proper Buddhist practice. These new *dasa sil matas* are educated.

The dasa sil matas are not able to give the pansakula (offer the rights to the dead). Everything else a bhikkhu does can be done by the dasa sil matas. Bhikkhus as well as dasa sil matas are invited for the danes. This is an auspicious time for the renunciant women as it is 100 years since the dasa sil matas were established in Kandy. At the yearly gathering at Anuradhapura 100 children became Samaneras (novices). I believe that education is the key to our success. The dasa sil mata has a great responsibility for the future of Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Idagama Vajira dasa sil mata, Interview, 8th August, 2000).

The modern *dasa sil matas/bhikkhunis* are challenging the *bhikkhus* with their way of life, as is highlighted in the interview I had with Kolugala Dharmadinna:

Renunciation, especially celibacy is related to female power. The rural woman is expected to marry, and have children. Otherwise she becomes a burden on her family. The City woman can become a professional and choose to forgo marriage and devote her life to career goals. In the village a woman is forced to marry. By renouncing I can devote my life to Buddhism, and by gaining a good education, I can help children and older people change their lives. I also give Buddhist talks to men and women, and I get invited to schools, to talk to the children. (Interview, 8th August, 2000).

This was Kolugala Dharmadinna's reason for choosing the life style of a *dasa sil mata*. It is important for us to understand the reasons why these young women renunciate. Kolugala Dharmadinna could be compared to the *bhikkhunis* of the past. Salgado (1996: 75) asserts that Uttara Maniyo had different views on renunciation as she made connections to the difficult times in lay life that prompted women to renunciate. When weaknesses arose in established Buddhist communities and institutions, laypeople responded in two ways. Some became self ordained and tried to follow the ideals set in the canon, or others attempted to be exemplary laypeople by following the "sangha ideal".

Bartholomeusz (1994: 166) asserts that Venerable Pannaseeha held a convention to discuss reforms to the community of *bhikkhus* at the *aramaya*. An item on the agenda was the restoration of the community of female renunciants. He had rejected the call to open the door to even the possibility of restoring the *bhikkhuni* sangha. The paper submitted read,

...The *sangha* may lead the Sinhalese Buddhists to keep to the caste system, with the Buddhist sects exclusive to the various castes, and refusing to restore the *bhikkhuni* order to women, so that they can never challenge the superiority of the male dominated *sangha*, which was originally an "Ubhato *sangha*," the two fold *sangha* of *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 166).

He belongs to an orthodox tradition that protests against changes, which question the integrity of that tradition and reinforces the Hindu caste system. Even these words have not stopped young rural women's quest for renunciation. French (in Tong, 1989: 101) states, "where as power-to is constructive, power-over is destructive. Power-to seeks to create and to further pleasure for everyone; power-over seeks to destroy and spread

pain". Mary Daly challenges patriarchy's construction of gender. As Daly sees it, "oppressive gender roles will be deconstructed as a result of a revolution, that she predicts, will begin with dissident women" (in Tong, 1989:102).

It is argued that the *bhikkhus* were concerned that they would have to compete with women for donations, including temple property lands. This is not what the Buddha preached! Another reason the *bhikkhus* cite for their inability to resuscitate the order of *bhikkhuni* is the lack of the consecrated boundary⁴⁴ needed to induct a woman and the lack of a proper quorum, of Theravada *bhikkhunis* required to preside over such an ordination. The Venerable Sumedha of the Vajiraramaya temple in Colombo argues that the lineage cannot be restored until Maitreya Buddha (the Buddha that is to come) appears a thousand years from now (Bartholomeusz, 1994: 168). Balangoda Ananda Maitreya, former leader of the *Amarapura nikaya*, is also opposed to establishing the *sangha* of *bhikkhuni*, because women must receive ordination from both the community of *bhikkhus* and the community of *bhikkhuni*. Bartholomeusz (1994: 168) states Balangoda Ananda Maitreya agrees for "women to 'enter' as lay-reunciants and keep the 311 rules of the *bhikkhuni*, as their status then, would be much higher and female renunciants should become more learned, so that *bhikkhus* could go to them for advice like the *bhikkhus* in Burma did".

The *dasa sil matas*, "As lay *bhikkhunis*, or *sil maniyo*, can evolve their own rules of conduct, create their own rituals of ordination, and yet be part of the larger tradition of Buddhist asceticism" (Obeyesekere, 1995: 403). This situation is preferred by the women, as they do not have to support the male *sangha* where gender, caste and seniority exist. Neither do they have to deal with biases in favour of male over female, female householder over renunciant, urban over rural, elite over peasant, educated over uneducated. The space these renunciants have created for themselves between the laity and the *sangha* signifies a disruption of the *sangha*. They have gone against the grain by not being content with leaving enlightenment only to the male *sangha*, and being celibate, have refused to take on traditional roles of becoming a mother or wife. Their activities with the public on peace marches against the civil war in the country and rituals are discussed by Nattier (1999) in detail. These new *bhikkhunis* and *dasa sil*

⁴⁴ The consecrated boundary is referred to as *sima* (Pali, Sinhala).

matas I interviewed have created their own power, prestige and authority by being well educated. This is the modern renunciants way of dealing with power relationships.

New Developments

An important change that has taken place is that in almost every temple in the country committees of women have been formed (e.g. *Kantha samithiya*, *Mahila sabawa*, *Mahila samitiya*). “As an indication of the rising importance of women, these committees are no more striking than are women’s institutes in Britain. They do indicate the embourgeoisement of Sinhala society” (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988: 234). Jary and Jary (1995: 193) argued what the establishment of the welfare state is, which is full employment, real improvements in living standards. The mass production of consumer goods had removed material and cultural differences between the classes. They also attribute the success of the political party to these changes and argue that material and social changes had a major impact on working class political consciousness, leading to identification with the middle classes. However, the distribution of poverty had shown that there were still great numbers of people who did not enjoy a ‘middle class’ standard of living.

In August 1990, at the inauguration ceremony of the new ministry of Buddhism, the *bhikkhunis/dasa sil matas* were also represented and the Minister for Buddhist Affairs welcomed them together with the other *bhikkhus*. The *dasa sil matas* considered it a big step forward; since this was the first time the *matas* had received public recognition. However, the hostile attitude of some *bhikkhus* present was apparent: the *Mahanayaka* of the *Ramanna nikaya* openly condemned them. He said, as they were not *bhikkhunis* “...but lay-people, they had no right to act like *bhikkhunis*, but only as lay people”. He further added that *bhikkhus*, should not be subjected to ridicule in this way, and punishment by law of such persons should be the responsibility of the new ministry (Potthewala Sri Panchasarabidana *Mahanayaka*, 1990: 19).

According to a report from the third international Sakyadhita conference on Buddhist women held at Sri Lanka in October 25-29 1993, Ven. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, an American *bhikkhuni*, stated, “Today, at an international conference in the capital of the

modern nation of Sri Lanka, we have been forbidden to discuss the issue of ordination for Buddhist women” (Kustermann, 1993: 7). However, the ordination of women was very much an issue that was discussed. Supporters of *bhikkhuni* ordination at this conference suggested that Sri Lanka could no longer be considered a ‘central land’ in which the *dhamma* flourished as the four categories of disciples that the Pali canon spoke of which consisted of *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunis*, lay men and lay women were not present, and therefore Buddhism in Theravada countries was defective. A radical challenge to the concept was introduced by Dharmacharini Sanghadevi (1993: 3) of the Buddhist order of England argued “...the Buddhist texts made no sense in a Western context, and new structures were necessary. An appeal was made to the Eastern women not to give ‘blind support’ to an often-corrupt *bhikkhu sangha*. There is nothing to be gained spiritually in venerating someone who is not worthy of veneration, but unfortunately not all *bhikkhus* are so worthy”. As a new model she put her own tradition forward. “We have only one set of precepts for both women and men, therefore only one ordination. This offered a new model to the rest of the Buddhist world. The question of ordination touched a wider issue, of the changes a religion undergoes when it moves across cultures to become a world religion, this of course, applies to Sri Lanka as well” (Sangadevi, 1993: 3).

Dasa sil matas, *bhikkhunis*, *sil maniyo* have defied conservative *bhikkhus* by establishing themselves in the role of the ancient *bhikkhuni*. However, most *dasa sil matas/bhikkhunis* do not consider themselves to be the *bhikkhuni* of the past even though they have assumed the *bhikkhuni* vocation. This has certainly brought about changes to the role of Buddhist women in Sri Lanka, as they are not under the control of the *bhikkhus*. This should bring joy to the advocates of the restoration of the *bhikkhuni sasana*, and to the women of Sri Lanka, as one of their cherished dreams has been realized.

I asked the *dasa sil matas*, *bhikkhunis* what they thought was the future of the *bhikkhuni* in Sri Lanka? All the renunciants said it would take time to get established, but since they have made a start it should improve with time. Some of the older *bhikkhus* do not recognize them to be *bhikkhunis/dasa sil matas*. However, foreign *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* recognize their status. Four renunciants said they would need to be highly educated, to make an impact on the people.

We do not get much respect from our own bhikkhus. This is due to the divisions in the three nikayas, as they are based on caste. In other countries there is uniformity among the bhikkhus. It is going to be very difficult for us, as the culture has set many rules for the community (Venerable Susantha bhikkhuni Interview, 21st August, 2000).

Sri Lankan *dasa sil matas* however, keep to the precepts and try their best to be accepted by Sri Lankan *bhikkhus*. There are some *bhikkhus* which support them which has given much encouragement to the *dasa sil matas* I interviewed. Salgado (in Tsomo, 2000: 39) states that when she visited the forest hermitage in 1997, ten *samaneris* from the training centre were among the women chosen for the dual ordination and they participated in the *upasampada* ceremony with other *samaneris* in India. Ordinations were conducted with the assistance of *Mahayana* countries. The ordination ceremony at Sarnath in India were ordained by a Korean, while at Bodhgaya Taiwanese *bhikkhunis* assisted Sri Lankan *bhikkhus* from the *Maha Bodhi* society of India, in organizing the *upasampada* ceremonies. Cooperation, rather than divisiveness has prevailed in the attempt to bring the *upasampada* to Theravada Buddhist women of Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

Although the roles that *bhikkhunis/dasa silmatas* play in contemporary Buddhist society may seem subordinate to the roles of the *bhikkhu*, the *bhikkhunis* and *dasa sil matas* believe that they are essential and necessary for the proper maintenance of Buddhism. As long as they are content and find fulfillment in their role, Buddhist women will continue to renunciate. Young women meet with difficulty from their families when they wish to renunciate. They have to display great strength and determination to be allowed to take the robes. A girl is usually not accepted into an *aramaya* without the consent of her parents, since they have to pay the costs of her ordination. The push to acquire ordination and recognition as *bhikkhunis*, who are members of the *sangha*, comes from foreign *bhikkhunis* who feel the need for such acceptance. The *Theravada* canon is explicit in prohibiting the ‘going forth’ of persons without the permission of the *sassana*, yet *upasikas/ bhikkhunis* have done just that. Lay female renunciants have justified their activities in terms of the traditional scriptures. Their decision to occupy a space between the laity and the *sangha* shows a

significant disruption of the tradition. They are not content with their traditional roles as *sil attho* who attain merit, and essentially leave the task of enlightenment up to the male *sangha*.

Upasikas/dasa sil matas/bhikkhunis subvert both hierarchies of male over female and *sangha* over laity; they draw no sharp divide between their 'social service' activities and their Buddhist *sasana* practice, nor do they see their mode of life as beneficial only to themselves. These *dasa sil matas/bhikkhunis* interviewed said they spend many hours perfecting their meditation practice, and they feel empowered by this as the laity turns to them to learn meditation, and to offer them *dane*.

There has been a gradual growth of the *dasa sil mata/bhikkhuni* movement. The wandering women in white, whom Coplestone spoke of in the 1890s, were elderly women who spent their last years in worship. Sister Sudharmachari with her white blouse and yellow robe signified she was not a member of the *sangha*, but neither was she a wandering *bhikkhuni* who was undisciplined and uneducated. However, she initiated only women over 40. In the 1930s-1940s, with the influence of Sister Mawichari and Sister Sudharma, she initiated younger women who wore the yellow robe. The *dasa sil matas* broke away from the *upasika* status and saw themselves as occupying a level between the laity and the *bhikkhunis*. They have embraced *vippasana* meditation and gradually gained the respect of the Buddhist laity of Sri Lanka. The modern *bhikkhuni/dasa sil matas* who were interviewed (see: Appendix J 1) are educated, they have learnt the *dhamma* and provide education for children, and also conduct meditation classes and wear the orange robe. The educated *bhikkhunis/dasa sil matas* have taken on the role of teaching the *dhamma* to men and women. Most of them are invited by schools and other organizations in the area where they live, to give talks on the *dhamma*, or to teach meditation.

Conclusions can be drawn from the views of *dasa sil matas, bhikkhunis* who were interviewed. Despite subordination to the male *sangha*, the majority of women find fulfilment in their renunciation. Although critical of the *sangha*, the *dasa sill matas* agree with *bhikkhus* that it is impossible to re-establish the order of *bhikkhunis*. They agree with the *bhikkhus* that Sri Lanka has a role to play as the protector of Buddhism. However, they do not agree with the *bhikkhus* that they are inferior. They argue that their practice is as good as the *bhikkhus*'. However, they are aware that unless they get

a good education, and become well versed in the *dhamma*, neither *bhikkhus* nor the public will respect them. They take on the society ascribed roles as nurturers of children and *bhikkhus* e.g. *bhikkhus* get fed first at a *dane*. The *dasa sil matas* join the women in serving the food to the *bhikkhus* first although the *dasa sil matas* were also invited to the *dane*.

Much of the criticism that came from the *dasa sil mata/bhikkhunis* I interviewed was that *bhikkhus* should stay out of politics. They felt that *bhikkhus* who engaged in violence or even supported it, should not be allowed to practise as a *bhikkhu*. The *dasa sil matas* I interviewed live close to a temple, and take part in the temple activities. They devote their lives to study, meditation, Buddha *puja* and teaching. They see themselves as protectors of Theravada Buddhism. The *dasa sil matas* had been presented by a teacher *bhikkhu*, in a ceremony marking their passage from laity to *sangha*, as they took the renunciant's ten precepts. The *bhikkhunis* had the 311 precepts. All the *bhikkhunis* view their practices as traditional Sinhala Theravada Buddhism.

Sil properly maintained attracts the generosity of the laity and serves to guide the laity into better paths. The renunciants feel empowered by this, as they are following their hearts' desires. Renunciation and celibacy has brought them freedom and power. The determination to become a *dasa sil mata/bhikkhuni*, and the active *sasana* practices they follow, stand in constant stark contrast to certain dominant cultural expectations of Sri Lankan women. The more daring sought relief from conventionally held beliefs in this manner. Protestant Buddhism encouraged Buddhist women to renunciate, however it is not to Protestant Buddhism or village Buddhism that we need to probe further, but to the nature of Theravada Buddhism as Gombrich and Obeyesekere (1988: 288) have discussed. Although some of the glaring injustices such as sati and the ban on widow remarriage were not prevalent in Sri Lanka, other social structures are still patriarchal and give women a subordinate role. The Buddhist texts or the teachings do not change, but the practices must change, some of the *dasa sil mathas* agreed. The path that Buddha pointed out gave women equality, and that is their concern. Nothing can stop them from following the path they have mapped out. They see themselves as part of the bigger picture that the Buddha disclosed. The women know they have to reach above the clutches of patriarchy and the imperialism of the west, as the movement to re-establish full ordination for women in Sri Lanka is being discussed.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions

Data gathered for this study will be passed on to the community through the NGOs representatives, and the study will prove useful for the community of Athale as it shows how women have empowered themselves through Buddhism, as they have great confidence in Buddhism to help them through their struggles. Their practice may not seem all Buddhist, but for these women, it is to Buddhism that they look in times of need. Results reveal that Buddhism is 'of prime importance' in the lives of the women of Athale, and they empower themselves through their practice of Buddhism. My hope is that many Sri Lankans will read this research, as well as others interested in the country and Theravada Buddhism. Hopefully the research has been useful for the communities involved.

For myself, my knowledge of Theravada Buddhism, the struggle of rural women, and the issues they face, has expanded greatly and my perspectives on many issues have been altered by my involvement in the research process. I saw the need to evolve methodologies that begin from the experiences of women in the village. For researchers undertaking similar research, I leave the methodological process, especially the interviews and observations, additional similar research of participant observation for you to follow or refute as Denzin asserts, no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival causal factors. Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of observations should be employed (Denzin, 1978: 28). And as the Buddha himself said:

One may overpower and conquer in battle, a thousand times, a thousand men, but yet he remains the greatest conqueror who conquers and overpowers himself (Piyadassi, 1991: 322).

In this study I have attempted to explain Sinhala Theravada Buddhism as practised by the women of Athale. As the women said, Buddhism is their life and what keeps them going in the village. My approach was influenced by *Buddhist Precept and Practice* by Gombrich (1991). However, the research methods were developed by listening to many women's voices and by observation.

How important is Buddhism in the everyday lives of rural women? And what impact has changes in Buddhism and in modern life since independence had upon laywomen and *bhikkhunis/dasa sil matas*? This thesis analysed the questions that I asked of the women. Studies of rural villages of South East Asia have shown that Third World Women comprise the majority of the poor, who suffer economic and social disadvantages, including gendered forms of domination. My observations of the everyday lives of the women of Athale revealed the importance Buddhism had upon their lives, and disclosed power structures into which their lives are enmeshed.

Centuries of foreign rule repressed the Sinhalese spirit and by the 1860s, Buddhism in Sri Lanka had lost a great deal of its influence on even those who were ardent followers of the Buddha. The *sangha* was lax, meditation had been neglected, and the old scholarly tradition lived only in its own shadow. The late 19th and the 20th century saw a revival of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, which was led by Anagarika Dharmapala. Theravada became an instrument for modernization and social transformation. The British, through an education system, created an English-speaking middle class, a unified judicial system, and a capitalist industrialisation which initiated the search for modernisation and a reaffirmation of religious identity. Christian missionary activities challenged the old ways of thinking. Religious, social and cultural values posed by the activities of Christian missionaries, together with new liberal ideas, affected the established religious social cultural hierarchies in Sri Lanka. Reform and revival played a major role in the dilemmas faced by the people.

Dharmapala's central concern was Buddhism. He imbued Buddhism, with a sense of validity as an instrument for the reaffirmation of the Sinhalese cultural identity, for elites, as well as masses. His Buddhism was a new Protestant creed. Dharmapala insisted that Buddhists look to the past glory in its outlook for a modern Sri Lanka. Since Independence, politicians have used Buddhism for personal gain and a minority has used it against the other ethnic minorities of Sri Lanka.

In this research I discussed the methods used for data gathering, and the difficulties faced by women of Athale village. Methods employed for the research of rural women included interviews with women of the village of Athale, the *gramasevika* and *gramasevaka* of the village, *bhikkhuni/dasa sil matas*, and *bhikkhus* at the *aramaya*, Weheragoda *aramaya*. Others included the health nurse of the area, the principal of the

school and the representatives of the NGO and other Sri Lankan women were also interviewed for this research. In fieldwork, women's work, their daily routines and Buddhist practices were observed. The impact of Buddhism on their lives and theories of power and liberal feminism were adopted for analysis.

The Non Government Organisations, sponsored by the Norwegians are commanding greater attention within civil society, and have played a major role in the villages of Sri Lanka since the 1980s. The main task of the NGOs is to raise the village to a position where it may step out of poverty. Many NGOs foster close links with community-based organisations, channelling technical advice or financial support, as their idea was to make resources available to women. Meeting women's practical needs and solving immediate survival problems, was their concern. The Athale women look towards education as their main concern for their children. They realize that it is through education that they can change their status in life. Strategies of empowerment had to be used. Sri Lankan women, both rural and urban, participated in the struggle for the suffrage movement, and made their voices heard. The Norwegian peace brokers are working with the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil tigers towards a peaceful solution to the ethnic crisis.

Buddhism is given a very important place in the lives of the women of Athale, in both their work and their homes, as homage is paid to the Buddha, and the Buddhist ways are taught to the children. Older women spend much time at the *aramaya* or at the Weheragoda *aramaya* listening to *bana* or observing the precepts. The women bring *dane* to the *aramaya* as organised, which is the focal point of the village for the women.

Some of the women are very concerned about the harm that has been done to the village by using pesticides or planting quick cash crops, such as sugar cane. They have started planting trees that are beneficial for the soil. British colonial policy disempowered women, as they lost control over their land. Marriage laws also worked against women. 'Equal land rights for women' is the cry from rural women. They became economically and socially dependent on male kin. Although it is asserted by some Sri Lankans that their form of Buddhism is the "purest", it is very much influenced, distorted, and circumscribed by Hindu customs, as in the caste system, which discriminates against women. In other words, Buddhism in Sri Lanka, as in every other society, adapted to local socio-cultural conditions for survival.

Some *bhikkhus* are concerned with property they hold. Villagers work in these lands, such as paddy rice fields. When the crop is harvested, the first portion is given to the temples, for the use of the *bhikkhus*. The possibility of restoring the *bhikkhuni sangha* is on the minds of some women in the village. However, this needs more discussion by the *bhikkhus* and *dasa sil matas*. A reason the *bhikkhus* cite is the lack of the consecrated boundary needed to induct women and the lack of a proper quorum of Theravada *bhikkhunis* required to preside over such an ordination. The focus on education and training women as *bhikkhunis*, and the fact that *upasampada* is now available to women, might give the ordained women a necessary acceptance and befitting status in society. It is interesting that in the 7th century it was the Sinhala *bhikkhunis* who braved the seas and went to China with the Buddha's message, which still survives there. *Bhikkhus* also claim that the lineage cannot be restored until Maitreya Buddha (the Buddha that is to come) appears 1000 years from now. It is interesting that in the Chinese Mahayana tradition, Buddhists see the Maitreya Buddha as female (the goddess of compassion and unconditional love).

The conclusions drawn from this research are that the women of Athale draw upon the strength of the Buddhist faith to deal with their life's struggles. The women speak for themselves and are empowered by the consciousness raising approach. The women have realized that the Buddhist approach to life, with its emphasis on kindness, compassion, nonviolence and respect for people is the essence of the Buddha's teaching. Due to the unemployment of the men in the village, the women have become the breadwinners for the family. The influence of the *samiti* has given women a sense of power as they have increased their access to, as well as control over income. They have become empowered by this. They have taken a small step to make a change to their lives and to their village. The renunciant women emphasized the purpose of meditation to build peace within one's self.

No matter how much you cry and regret

The past is the past...

See the ocean, the vast ocean,

See the sky, the endless sky.

Look ahead with confidence

Knowing that you are not alone.

(Jikyu's poem).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adam, Enid. L. (1991). Buddhism in Perth: A Source of Alienation or a means to Integration. Unpublished Masters dissertation, University of Queensland, Queensland.
- Agarwal, B. (1994). A Field of One's Own. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Afshar, Haleh. (1998). (ed.). Women and Empowerment. Great Britain: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Alexander, M. & Mohanty, C. (eds.). (1997). Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures. New York: Routledge.
- Ames, M. (1966). Ritual Presentations and the Structure of the Sinhalese Pantheon, in Nash, M. (ed.). Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism. Cultural Report Series. 13, 27-50.
- Andrews, P. (1996). Sisters Listening to Sisters. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Anthias, F., & Yuval-Davis, N. (1992). Racialized Boundaries: Race Nation, Gender Colour Class & the Anti Racist Struggle. London: Routledge
- Anthias, F. (1999). Institutional Racism, Power and Accountability. Sociological Research, 4 1 [on-line]. Available <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/4/Lawrence//anthias.html> 5/5/02.
- Appadurai, A. (1981). Worship and Conflict Under Colonial Rule: A South Indian Case. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ariyaratne, A. T. (2000). Healing Divided Societies: A Sri Lankan Experience. Sri Lanka: Vishva Lekha.
- Bandarage, A. (1997). Women, Population and Global Crisis. New Jersey: Zed Books.
- Bartholomeusz, T. (1994). Women Under The Bo Tree. Virginia: University of Virginia.
- Bartholomeusz, T., & de Silva, C. (1998). Buddhist Fundamentalism and Minority Identities in Sri Lanka. New York: State University.

- Bartholomeusz, T. (1999). Buddha as Mother and Mother as Buddha. Available.
<http://web7.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/in...673&dyn=3!xm 2 0 A54955673>
- Bechert, H. (1978). Contraditions in Sinhalese Buddhism. In Contributions to Asian Studies. 4, 7-17.
- Bechert, H. & Gombrich, R. (1984). The World Of Buddhism. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Bechert, H. (1994). Buddhistic Modernism: Present Situation and Current Trends in Buddhism into the Year 2000. Thailand: Dhammakaya Foundation.
- Blackstone, K. (1998). Women in The Footsteps of the Buddha. Surrey: Curzon Press.
- Bloss, L. (1987). Female Renunciants of Sri Lanka. Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies. 101 (28).
- Blue, G., Bunton, M., & Crozier, R. (2002). (eds.). Colonialism and the Modern World. Selected Studies. New York: M.E. Sharp, Inc.
- Bond, G. (1988). The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka. Columbia: University of South Carolina.
- Boserup, E. (1970). The Woman's Role in Economic Development. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Bowes, A. (1996). Evaluating an Empowering Research Strategy: Reflections on Action Research with South Asian Women. Sociological Research, 1 1. [on-line]. Available WWW:<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/1/1/1>.
- Bryson,V.(1992). Feminist Political Theory: an Introduction [on line]. Available WWW:<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/5/5/2>.
- Carr, M., Chen, M., Jhabvala, R. (1996). (Eds.). Speaking Out. Canada: Aga Khan Foundation.
- Carrithers, M. (1983). The Forest Monks Of Sri Lanka. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Carrithers, M. (1984). 'They Will Be Lords Upon the Island:' Buddhism in Sri Lanka. World of Buddhism. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd.
- Central Bank of Sri Lanka. (1998). Economic Progress of Independent Sri Lanka. Colombo: Central Bank of Sri Lanka.
- Coakes, S. J. (1995). Participation of Women in Rural Communities. Unpublished doctrol dissertation, Cutin University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia.
- Cole, S., & Phillips, L. (1995). Ethnographic Feminisms. Canada: Carlton University Press.
- Connolly, P. (1985). The Politics of the Informal Sector: A Critique. In Beyond Emplyment, Household, Gender and Subsistence. (ed.). Redclift, N. Mingione. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Copleston, R. (1984). Buddhism Primitive and Present in Magadha and in Ceylon. London: Longmans.
- Corless, R. (1989). The Vision of Buddhism. The Space Under the Tree. New York: Paragon House.
- Datta, R., & Kornberg, J. (2002). (eds.). Women in Developing Countries. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
- De Alwis, M. (1999). 'Respectability', 'Modernity' and The Policing of 'culture' in Colonial Ceylon. In A Burton (ed.). Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities London: Routledge.
- Denzin, N. (1989). The Research Act. A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods. (3rd ed.). Englewood: Prentice Hall.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (1994). (eds.). Handbook of Qualitative Research. Thousand Oakes. California: Sage Publications.
- Denzin, N. (1997). Interpretive Ethnography. Thousand Oakes. California: Sage publications.
- De Silva, K. (1997). More The Impossible Dream. Lanka Guardian: 19 22 April.

- De Silva, L. (1986). One Foot in the World: Buddhist Approaches to Present Day Problems.<http://www.enabling.org/ia/vipassana/archive//D/Desilva/currentproblemsDesilva.html>
- Dewaraja, L. (1978). Position of Women in Buddhism. Buddhist Quarterly. 11, 2-3.
- Dharmasena, A. (1995). Agricultural land use in Asia.1994. Report of an APO seminar 8-18 Nov Tokyo, Japan: Asian Productivity Organisation.
- Dharmasiri, G. (1997). Buddhism as the Greatest Ally of Feminism. Recent Researchers in Buddhist Studies. Colombo: Karunaratne & Sons Ltd.
- Douglas, Mary. (1966). Purity & Danger: an Analysis of Concepts of Pollution & Taboo. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Dube, L. (2001). Anthropological Explorations in Gender Intersecting Fields. India: Sage Publications.
- Edwards, L., & Roces, M. (2000). Women in Asia. Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Evers, Hans-Dieter. (1972). Monks, Priests And Peasants. Leiden: E.J.Brill.
- Fees, (2001). Fees For Higher Degrees At University proposed by government. (2001, June 1). Daily News, p. 2.
- Fetterman, D. (1998). Ethnography Step by Step. California: Sage Publications.
- Fernando, S. (2001). Sri Lanka: The Price of Globalisation. Oxfam Horizons. 1 (3), August 6-9.
- Gellner, E. (1983). Nations and Nationalism. Oxford, Great Britain: Basil Blackwell Ltd.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). In a Different Voice. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Glucksmann, M. (1994). The Work of Knowledge and the Knowledge of Women's Work. In Researching Women's lives from a Feminist Perspective. (Eds.) M. Maynard., & J. Purvis. Great Britain: Taylor and Francis Ltd.
- Goldberg, D. (1993). Racist Culture. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Golde, P. (1986). (Ed.). Women in the Field: Anthropological Experiences. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gombrich, R. (1966). The Consecration of a Buddhist Image. Journal of Asian Studies, 26, 23-36
- Gombrich, R. (1988). Theravada Buddhism. A Social History from ancient Benares to Modern Colombo. London: Routledge & Kegan.
- Gombrich, R., and Obeyesekere, G. (1988). Buddhism Transformed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass University Press.
- Gombrich, R. (1991). Buddhist Precept and Practice: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon. Delhi: Motilal Oxford University Press.
- Gross, R. (1993). Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Gross, R. (1998). Soaring and Settling. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.
- Gunawardena, R. (1979). Robe and Plough: Monasticism and Economic Interest in Early Medieval Sri Lanka. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press.
- Guruge, A. (1984). Buddhism the Religion and its Culture. Sri Lanka: Vision House.
- Hammersley, M. (1992). What's Wrong With Ethnography: Methodological Explorations. London: Routledge Press.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, A. (1995). Ethnography Principles in Practice. London: Routledge Press.
- Harris, E. (1999). The Female in Buddhism in K.L Tsomo (ed.). Buddhist Women Across Cultures. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Hartsock, N. (1990). Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women? In L.J. Nicholson (ed.). Feminism/ Postmodernism. New York and London: Routledge.

- Hawkins, J. M. (1982). Oxford Senior Dictionary. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heyzer, N. (1986). Working Women in South East Asia: Development, Subordination, and Emancipation. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Hilsdon, A. (1995). Madonnas and Martyrs. Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Holt, J. (1991). Buddha in the Crown. Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka. New York: Oxford University Press.
- hooks, b. (1984). Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre. Boston: South End Press.
- Horner, I. B. (1989). Women under Primitive Buddhism. London: Routledge and Sons Ltd.
- Hosken, F.P. (1997). Women's Property Rights Still Denied. Win News, 23 (4), 1-3.
- Jagger, A. (1977). Political Philosophies of Women's Liberation. In Feminism and Philosophy. (eds.). Mary Vetterling-Braggin[online]. Available WWW:<http://www.socresonline.org.uk/5/5/2>.
- Jary, D., and Jary, J. (1995). Collins Dictionary of Sociology. Great Britain: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Jayawardena, K. (1985). Some Aspects of Feminist Consciousness in the decade 1975-1985. CENWOR, UN Decade for Women, Progress and Achievements of Women in Sri Lanka.
- Jayawardena, K. and Jayaweera, S. (1985). The Integration of Women in Development Planning in Asia and the Pacific. (ed.). Noelleen Heyzer. Kuala Lumpur: Asia Pacific Development Center.
- Jayawardena, K. (1986). Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World. London: Zed Books.
- Jayawardena, K. (1995). The White Woman's Other Burden. New York: Routledge.
- Kabilsingh, C. S. (1984). Bhikkuni Patimokkha. New Delhi: Chaukhambha Orientalia.
- Kabilsingh, C. S. (1991). Thai Women in Buddhism. Berkeley: CA: Parallax Press.

- Kawanami, H. (1996). Women in Buddhism Revisited: in Coslett, T., Alison Easton, et al (eds.). Women, Power And Resistance. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Kelly, Joan. (1984). Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Khantipalo, Bhikkhu. (1977). The Noble Eightfold Path and its Factors Explained. Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society Inc.
- Kiribamune, S. (1992). Religion And Its Relevance to The Lives Of Buddhist Women. Sri Lanka: CENWOR Convention.
- Koczberski, G. (1998). Women in Development: a Critical Analysis. Third World Quarterly. 19 (3), 395-409.
- Kustermann, G. (1993). Buddhist Women in Modern Society. Sakyadhita Newsletter, 5(1). [On line]. Available <http://www2.hawaii.edu/...wsLetters/>
- Ling, R. (1976). The Buddha: Buddhist Civilization in India and Ceylon. London: Harmondsworth.
- Mahavamsa, (1960). The Mahavamsa or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon. Translated By W. Geiger. Colombo: Ceylon Government Information Department.
- Malalgoda, K. (1972). Sinhalese Buddhism: Orthodox and Syncretistic, Traditional and Modern. Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies. 2, 156-69.
- Malalgoda, K. (1976). Buddhism in Sinhalese Society 1750-1900. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Marx, K. (1963). Early Writings. Translated and edited by T. M. Bottomore. London: Watts.
- Mason, J. (1996). Qualitative Researching. London: Sage Publications.
- Maynard, M., & Purvis, J. (1994). (eds). Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective. Great Britain: Taylor and Francis Ltd.
- Miles, R. (1989). Racism. London: Routledge.

- Millen, D. (1997). 'Some Methodological and Epistemological Issues Raised by Doing Feminist Research on Non-Feminist Women'. Sociological Research Online, 2, (3), <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/3/3.html> 30/09/1997.
- Mohanty, C. (1991). 'Under Western Eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses' in Mohanty, C., Russo, A., & L. Torres (eds.). Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Morgan, R. (1993). The Word of a Woman. Selected Prose 1968-1992. London: Virago.
- Nagata, J. (1999). Globalisation of Buddhism and the emergence of religious civil Society. Communal/Plural. 7 (2), 231-247.
- Narasimhan, S. (1999). Empowering Women. London: Sage Publications.
- Nattier, J. (1994). Hierarchy, Status Dissonance, and Conflict Resolution in Early Indian Buddhism. Unpublished Manuscript. Buddhist Christian Studies. 19 (1), 152-190.
- Nicholas, C., & S. Paranavitana, (1961). Concise History of Ceylon. Colombo: Ceylon University Press.
- Nissan, E. (1984). Recovering Practice: Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka. South Asia Research. 4 (1), 42-44.
- Oakley, A. (1981). Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms. In H.Roberts (Ed.). Doing Feminist Research. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Oakley, A. (1985). The Sociology of Housework. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.
- Obeyesekere, G. (1963a). The Buddhist Pantheon in Ceylon and its Extensions. Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism. Cultural Report Series 13.
- Obeyesekere, G. (1963b). The Great Tradition and the Little Tradition in the perspective of Sinhalese Buddhism. Journal of Asian Studies. XX11 (2), 139-154.
- Obeyesekere, G. (1966). Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon. The Two Wheels of Dhamma. (3).

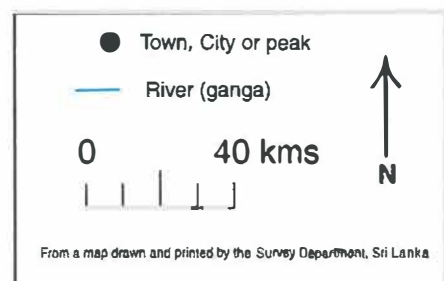
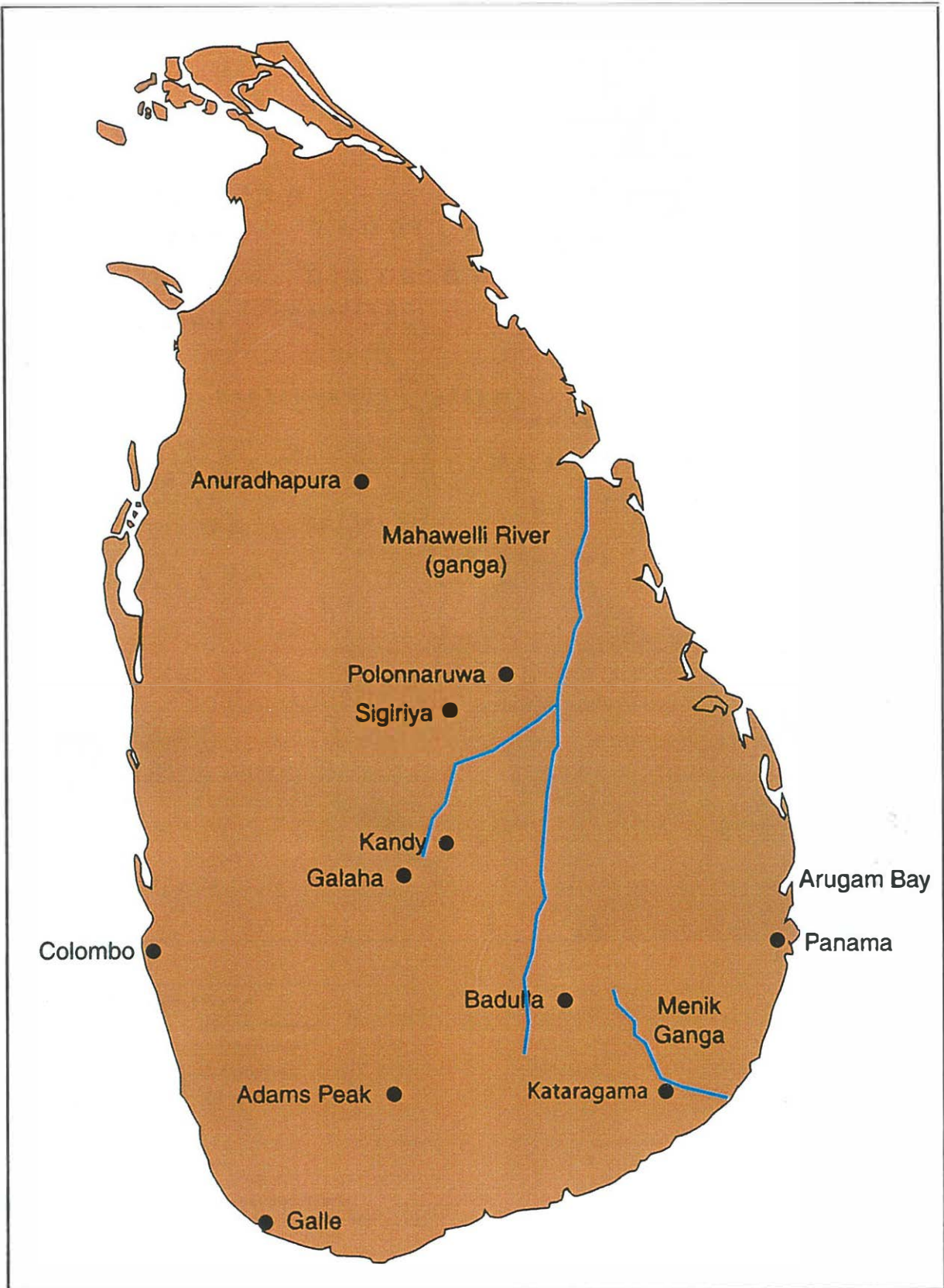
- Obeyesekere, G (1967). Land Tenure in Village Ceylon. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Obeyesekere, G. (1972). Religious Symbolism and Political Change in Ceylon. In The Two Wheels of Dhamma: Essays on the Theravada Tradition in India and Ceylon. No 3. (Ed.). Bardwell Smith. American Academy of Religion.
- Obeyesekere, G. (1988). Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka. New Jersey: Princeton University.
- Obeyesekere, G. (1993). "Duttagamini and the Buddhist Conscience," in Douglas Allen (Ed.). Religion and Political Conflict in South Asia: India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Obeyesekere, R. (1995). Women Under the Bo Tree [Review of the book Women Under the Bo tree]. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion. 34 (3), 402-403.
- Osella, F., & Osella, C. (2000). Social Mobility in Kerala. London: Pluto Press.
- Ozorak, E. Weiss. (1996). The Power, but not the Glory: How Women Empower Themselves through Religion. Journal for The Scientific Study of Religion. 35 (1) 17-29.
- Patton, M. (1990). Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods. London: Sage Publications.
- Peach, L. (1999). Women Under the Bo Tree [Review of the book Women Under the Bo Tree]. Buddhist Christian Studies. 19 (1), 218-223.
- Piyadassi, Mahathera. (1991). The Spectrum of Buddhism. Sri Lanka: Karunaratne & Sons Ltd.
- Perera, H. (1987). Changing Status of Women in Sri Lanka. International Journal of Sociology of the Family. 17, 1-23.
- Prorok, C. & Chhokar, K. (1998). (Eds.). Asian Women and Their Work. USA, Indiana: National Council for Geography Education.
- Rahula, W. (1956). History of Buddhism in Ceylon. Colombo: Gunasena.

- Rahula, W. (1967). What the Buddha Taught. (2nd ed). London: Gordon Fraser.
- Rahula, W. (1993). History of Buddhism in Ceylon. (3rd ed.) Sri Lanka: Buddhist Cultural Centre.
- Reinharz, S. (1992). Feminist Methods in Social Research. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Risseuw, C. (1988). Fish Don't Talk About The Water. Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Robinson, M (1975). Political Structure in a Changing Sinhalese Village. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roberts, H. (1981). Doing Feminist Research. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Roberts, M. (1997). For Humanity. For the Sinhalese. Dharmapala as Crusading Bosat. Journal of Asian Studies. 56 (4) 1006-1032.
- Rossman, G., & Rallis, S. (1998). Learning in the Field: an Introduction to Qualitative Research. California: Sage Publications.
- Rowbotham, S. (1992). Women in Movement. London: Routledge Chapman & Hall, Inc.
- Rowland-Serdar, B., & Schwartz-Shea, P. (1997). Empowering Women: Self, Autonomy, and Responsibility. In Memory, Identity, Community. (Eds.). Hinchman, L., & Hinchman, S. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Rowles, G. (1990). Place Attachment among the Small Town Elderly. Journal of Rural Community Psychology. 11, 103-120.
- Salgado, N. (1996). "Ways of Knowing": Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies. 19 (1), 61-81.
- Salgado, N. (1997). Sickness, Healing, and Religious Vocation: Alternative Choices at a Theravada Buddhist Nunnery. Ethnology. 36 (3), 213-26.
- Sanday, P. (1981). Female Power and Male Dominance: On the Origins of sexual Inequality. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

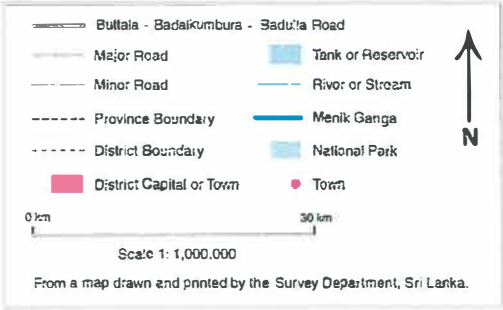
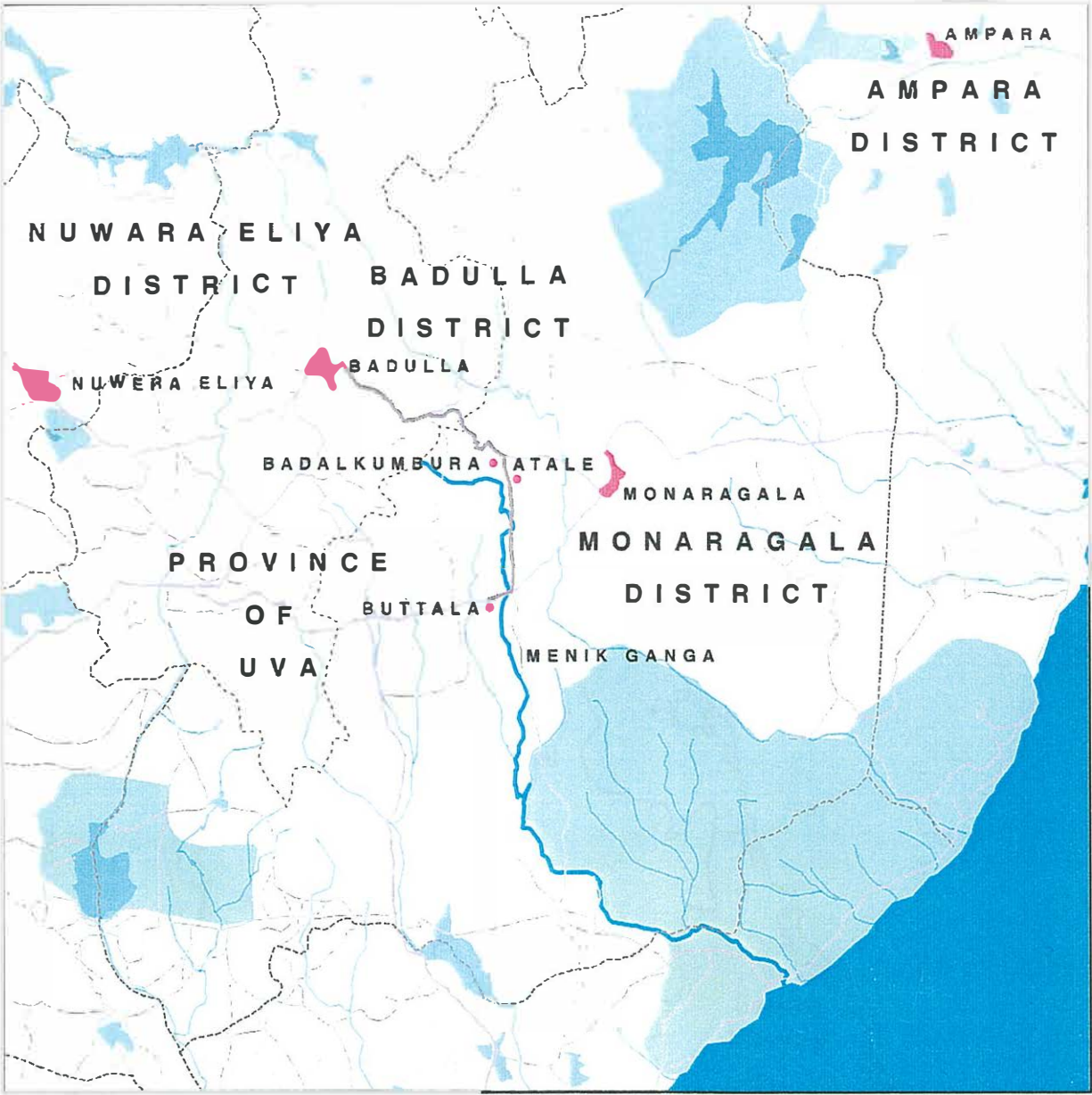
- Sanghadevi, D. (1993). Role of Lay Women in Buddhism. Report on the Third International Sakyadhita Conference on Buddhist Women. Colombo, Sri Lanka October 25-29 [online] Available WWW:<http://www2.hawaii.edu/1999/11/25>.
- Schuler, S., & Hashemi, S. (!993). Defining and Studying Empowerment of Women: A Research note from Bangladesh. Arlington, VA: JSI Research & Training Institute.
- Seneviratne, H. (1978). Rituals of the Kandyan State. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Seneviratne, H. (1997). Identity Consciousness and the Past. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Seneviratne, H. (1999). Work Of Kings: The New Buddhism In Sri Lanka. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Seneviratne, T., and Currie, J. (1994). Religion and Feminism. Women's Studies Int. Forum, 17, (6), 593-607.
- Smith, B. (1972). Sinhalese Buddhism and the Dilemmas of Reinterpretation. The Two Wheels of Dhamma. 3, (19), 79-106.
- Spencer, J. (1990). A Sinhala Village in a Time of Trouble. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Spiro, M. (1970). Buddhism and Society. A great tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
- Sponberg, A. (1992). Attitudes Toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism. In Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender.(ed.).Jose Cabezon. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Spradley, J. (1979). Ethnographic Interviewing. Orlando: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Spradley, J. (1980). Participant Observation. Orlando: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Stirrat, R. (1992). Power And Religiosity in Sri Lanka. Cambridge: University Of Cambridge Press.

- Swearer, D. (1995). The Buddhist World of South East Asia. New York: State University of New York.
- Swearer, D. (1995). Sinhalese Buddhism and the Dilemmas of Reinterpretation. The Two Wheels of Dhamma, (3).
- Tambiah, S. (1966). 'Polyandry in Ceylon with special reference to the Laggala Region' in Furer-Haimendorf, C.Von (ed.). Caste and Kin in Nepal. India and Ceylon. Bombay: Asia Publishing House.
- Tambiah, S. (1986). Sri Lanka: Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Tambiah, S. (1992). Buddhism Betrayed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Taylor, J. (1994). A Social Political and Ethnoecological Study of Community Forests and Rural Leadership in Northeastern Thailand. Indian Ocean Centre for Peace Studies. Occasional Paper, 36. Feb 1-10.
- Taylor, S. J. (1991). Leaving the Field, Research, Relationships and Responsibilities in Experiencing Fieldwork: an Inside View of Qualitative Research. (Eds.). W. B. Shafir & R. A. Stebbins. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Thiruchandran, S. (1997). Ideology, Caste and Gender. Delhi: New Vikas Publishing House.
- Tong, R. (1989). R. Feminist Thought. A Comprehensive Introduction. London: Westview Press Inc.
- Tong, R. (1998). Feminist Thought. A More Comprehensive Introduction. (2nd ed.). Australia: Allen and Unwin.
- Trainor, K. (1997). Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
- Tsomo, K. (2000). (ed.). Innovative Buddhist Women. Swimming Against the Stream. Great Britain: Curzon Press.

- Van Maanen, J. (1988). Tales of the Field: on Writing Ethnography. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Weber, M. (1958). Religion of India. Glenco, Ill: The Free Press.
- Weber, M. (1963). The Sociology of Religion. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Weedon, C. (1999). Feminism, Theory and the Politics of Difference. Oxford, U.K: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Weeraratne, D. (2001). Revival of the Bhikkhuni Order in Sri Lanka [on line]. Available [WWW:http://www.buddhanet.net/nunorder.html](http://www.buddhanet.net/nunorder.html)[21/06/01].
- Welch, C. (2001). NGOs and Human Rights. Promise and Performance. (ed.). Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Wickramasinghe, A. (1994). Deforestation Women and Forestry. Amsterdam: Institute for Development Research.
- Wickramasinghe, A. (1998). Women's Roles in Rural Sri Lanka in Asian Women and their Work. (eds) Prorok, C., and Chhokar, K. University of Pennsylvania, Indiana: National Council for Geography Education.
- Wickremaratne, A. (1995). Buddhism & Ethnicity in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka: International Centre for Ethnic Studies.
- Wijeratne, M. (1990). Buddhist Monastic Life. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Worthington, L. J. (1997). Attitudes of Young Adult Catholic Women. Unpublished honours dissertation, Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia.
- Wijesekera, N. (1990). The Sinhalese. Colombo: M.D. Gunasena & Co., Ltd.
- Yalman, N. (1962). The Ascetic Buddhist Monks of Ceylon. Ethnology, 1 (3) 315-328.
- Yalman, N. (1966). Dual Organization in Central Ceylon. Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism. Cultural Report Series.13.
- Yalman, N. (1967). Under The Bo Tree. Berkeley: University Of California Press.

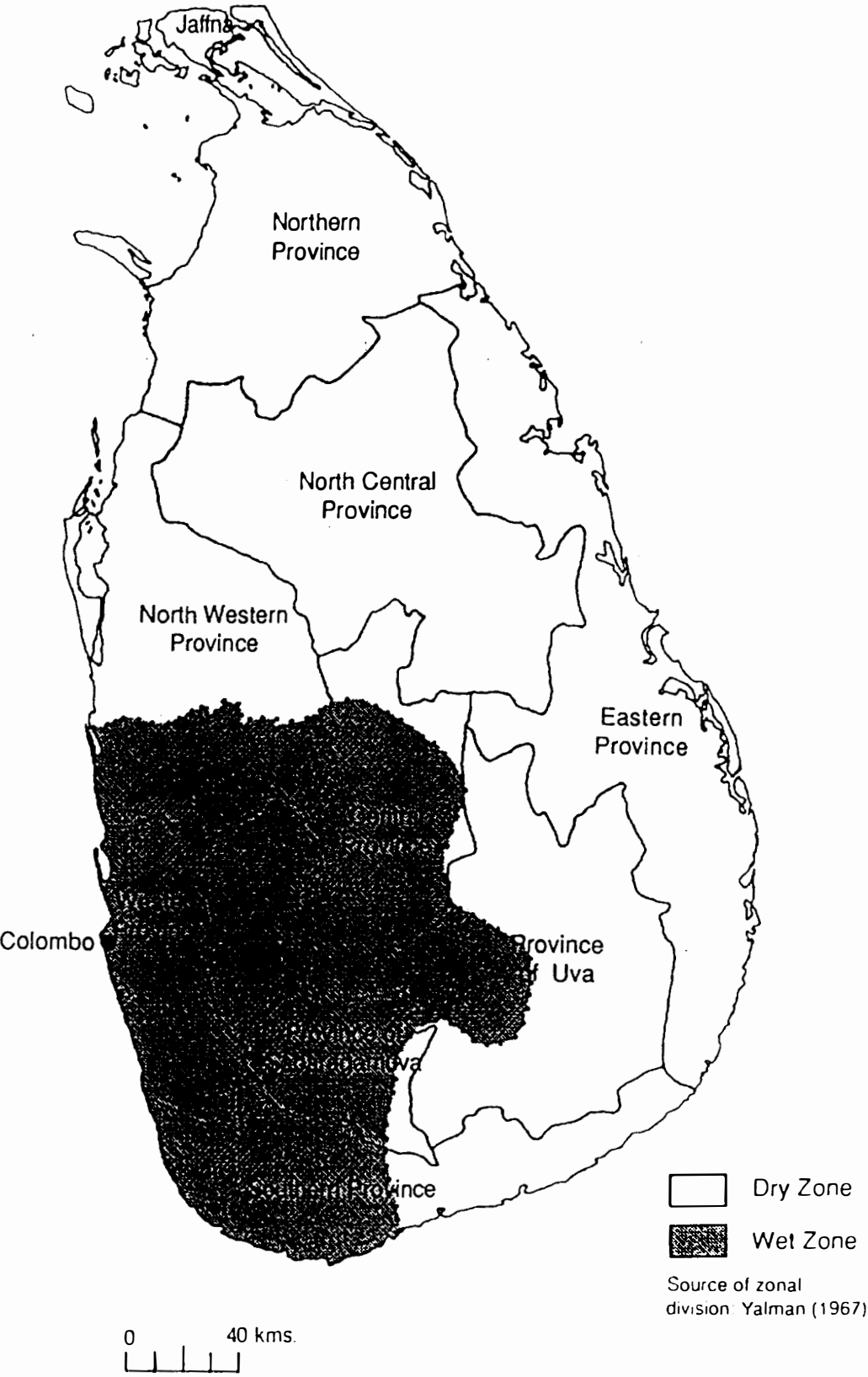


Appendix A - Sri Lanka



Appendix B - Map of Atale

Appendix C



Sri Lanka: provincial divisions

Appendix D

LETTER TO NGO

To the NGO
Badulla District
Sri Lanka

Dear Officer/ Participant

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter to the women of Athale and giving me the opportunity to introduce myself and explain the aims of this study.

My name is Lalani Weddikkara, a Master's student (Religious Studies Department) at Edith Cowan University, in Western Australia. Since we have met before on one of my many visits to Sri Lanka, we will not be total strangers. I hope to live among you the villagers of Athale to observe the Buddhist religious practices of the women. My research topic being "the role of Buddhism in the changing lives of rural women in Sri Lanka".

The first part of the study will consist of a questionnaire. The second part would be an in depth discussion with about 20 women (lay and nuns). All information will be strictly confidential. You will find the questions simple to answer, but I would appreciate them being answered as accurately as possible.

By participating in this study you are assisting me in my research, which will help in evaluating how Buddhism has impacted on women of the village. You may wish to leave the study at any time you wish, and it will not have any adverse effects on you. Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Lalani

Appendix E

Table 1

Demographic and geographical data for Athale

Population

Families	210
Women	420
Men	449
Total	869

Homes

Total number of homes in Area	210
-------------------------------	-----

Cultivated land in acres

Sugar cane	257
Banana	16
Pineapple	06
Paddy	14
Dry land crops	520

No of trees

Coconut	4000
Kos	6640
Del	208
Areca Nut Trees	6800

Those who have the right to vote

Punsisigama	157
Athale	158
Meegahayaya	161
Moragammana	68

Other land uses in acres

Common land	05
Cemetery	01
Protected land	35

Water sources

Common Wells	07
Private	02
Other wells	01

No of houses with electricity

Punsisigama	27
Athale	25

Primary schools

No of children	70
No of teachers	07

Pre schools

Number of schools	02
No of children	
Punsisigama	20
Athale	15

Support Industries

For sugar Cane	04
For paddy	01
For Coconut	01

Data from *Grama Niladhari*

Appendix E

Table 2

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA FOR RESIDENTS OF ATHALE VILLAGE

	Name of Village	Name of respondent	Address	Age	Religion	Level of Education	Profession
1	Athale	M.D. Gunawathi	Badal kumbura	34	Buddhist	grade 5	Unemployed
2	Athale	P.M. Karunawathi	Pallewella, Badalkumbura	48	Buddhist	Not provided	Farming
3	Athale	M.P. Chitra Seeli	Pol Idama, Badalkumbura	33	Buddhist	Grade 8	Farming
4	Athale	Chandrawathi	Meegahayaya, Badalkumbura	24	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Farming
5	Athale	D.P. Vasantha Sadanayaka	nisansala, Badalkumbura	26	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Farming
6	Athale	K.B. Agnes Perera	meegahayaya, Badalkumbura	65	Buddhist	grade 10	Unemployed
7	Athale	D.M. Punchi Menika	Athale post, Badalkumbura	55	Buddhist	grade 5	Farming
8	Athale	A.M. Missinona	Punsisigama, Badalkumbura	61	Buddhist	never attended school	Unemployed
9	Athale	D.M. Seelawathi	Athale, Badalkumbura	65	Buddhist	never attended school	Farming
10	Athale	W.M. Pemawathi	Pallewella, Badalkumbura	40	Buddhist	grade 10	Not provided
11	Athale	R.M. Kusumawathi	Badugasmulla, Badalkumbura	36	Buddhist	grade 10	Not provided
12	Athale	W.P. Sisiliyawathi	Badalkumbura	54	Buddhist	grade 5	Unemployed
13	Athale	R.M. Dingiri Menika	Puwak Aramba, Badalkumbura	45	Buddhist	grade 8	Farming
14	Athale	Y.m. Leelawathi	Punsisigama, Badalkumbura	40	Buddhist	grade 5	Farming
15	Aathale	D.M. Sumanawathi	2nd Post, Athale, Badalkumbura	65	Buddhist	Not provided	Farming
16	Athale	Sita Kumari Galagoda	2nd Post, Athale, Badalkumbura	30	Buddhist	grade 10	Sewing
17	Pol Idama	T.S. Alice Nona	Pol Idama, Badalkumbura	60	Buddhist	grade 5	Unemployed
18	Meegahayaya	M.D. Anulawathi	meegahayaya, Badalkumbura	46	Buddhist	grade 5	Unemployed
19	Punsisigama	P.V. Shrimathi Indrani Vithanage	Punsisigama, Badalkumbura	30	Buddhist	grade 10	Not provided
20	Meegahayaya	J.M. Anulawathi	meegahayaya, Badalkumbura	35	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Unemployed
21	Meegahayaya	A.W.M. Suncetha	meegahayaya, Badalkumbura	42	Buddhist	grade 5	Farming
22	Punsisigama	Deepa Kumari Lakmini Swamamali	Punsisigama, Badalkumbura	20	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Farming
23	Madugaha Pattiya	Kusumawathi Weerasinghe	2nd Post, Athale, Badalkumbura	28	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Not provided
24	Athale	B.C. M. Chandrawathi	nisansala, Badalkumbura	35	Buddhist	grade 10	Farming

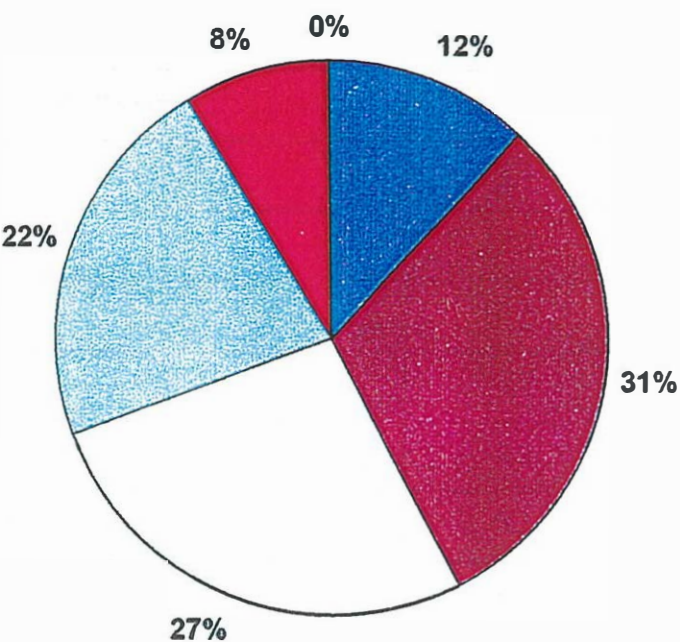
25	Meegahayaya	A.J. Nandawathi	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	44	Buddhist	grade 5	Not provided
26	Meegahayaya	O.B. M Vimalawathi	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	52	Buddhist	grade 5	Not provided
27	Namiritha	P.A. Nadika Priyangani Perera	2nd Post,Athale,Badalkumbura	19	Buddhist	G.C.E. A/level	Not provided
28	Athale	L.D.M. Sirimawathi	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	42	Buddhist	Grade 2	Farming
29	Athle	D.M Bandara Wardana	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	55	Buddhist	Grade 2	Farming
30	Athale	T.B Chandrawathi	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	47	Buddhist	Not provided	Unemployed
31	Athale	M.G.Chitraxeeli	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	45	Buddhist	Not provided	Unemployed
32	Athale	D.M.Sumanawathi	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	35	Buddhist	grade 10	Farming
33	Athale	D.M. Sudukumarihami	Pallewella,Badalkumbura	56	Buddhist	Not provided	Farming
34	Meegahayaya	D.M. Somawathi	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	55	Buddhist	Grade 2	Farming
35	Meegahayaya	K.M. Muthumenika	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	60	Buddhist	Grade 2	Unemployed
36	Madugaha pattiva	J.Siriyawathi	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	32	Buddhist	Not provided	Sewing
37	Meegahayaya	W.M. Chandrawathi	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	35	Buddhist	Not provided	Farming
38	Meegahayaya	H.M. Kusumalatha	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	24	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Unemployed
39	Meegahayaya	R.M. Gunawathi	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	34	Buddhist	Not provided	Farming
40	meegahayaya	K.M. Kalumenika	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	46	Buddhist	grade 10	Farming
41	Athale	D.M. Seelawathi	Badugasmulla,Badalkumbura	40	Buddhist	grade 10	Farming
42	Athale	K.B Agnes Perera	Pallewella,Badalkumbura	70	Buddhist	never attended school	Not provided
43	Athale	D.Seyawathi	Badugasmulla,Badalkumbura	40	Buddhist	Not provided	Not provided
44	Punsisigama	Bandara Menike	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	65	Buddhist	grade 5	Not provided
45	Athale	A.I. Sisiliyawathi	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	62	Buddhist	Grade 2	Unemployed
46	Athale	P.M. Nonaham	Pallewella,Badalkumbura	75	Buddhist	never attended school	Unemployed
47	Athale	S.A. Vijitha	Pallewella,Badalkumbura	35	Buddhist	grade 10	Farming
48	Athale	A.K. Asoka Damayanthi	Badugasmulla,Badalkumbura	35	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Farming
49	Athale	J.M. Karunawathi	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	62	Buddhist	Grade 2	Not provided
50	Athale	D.M. Heen Kumari	Pallewella,Badalkumbura	56	Buddhist	Not provided	Not provided
51	Athale	J.M. Kumarihami	Pallewella,Badalkumbura	50	Buddhist	Not provided	Not provided
52	Athale	G.M. Indramalini	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	25	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Farming
53	Shrilani	D.G. Sreemathi	Pallewella,Badalkumbura	30	Buddhist	grade 10	Farming
54	Athale	A. Privadarshani	Badugasmulla,Badalkumbura	22	Buddhist	G.C.E. A/level	Farming

55	Athale	Niranjala Damavanthi	Badugasmulla,Badalkumbura	25	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Unemployed
56	Athale	D.P.Indrani	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	35	Buddhist	Not provided	Farming
57	Athale	Tilaka Amirigala	Athale post,Badalkumbura	32	Buddhist	Not provided	Farming
58	Athale	Jayanthi Malegama	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	22	Buddhist	G.C.E. A/level	Unemployed
59	Athale	Wasalage Sirimali	2nd Post,Athale,Badalkumbura	45	Buddhist	grade 5	Farming
60	Athale	D.Dharmawathi	Pallewella,Badalkumbura	38	Buddhist	Not provided	Farming
61	meegahayaya	A.P.Yasawathi	Badugasmulla,Badalkumbura	34	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Farming
62	Athale	Wasalage Yasawathi	2nd Post,Athale,Badalkumbura	40	Buddhist	grade 5	Farming
63	Athale	Mahadara Duraliyas Hami	2nd Post,Athale,Badalkumbura	72	Buddhist	never attended school	Unemployed
64	Athale	Dadallage Seelawathi	Pallewella,Badalkumbura	56	Buddhist	grade 10	Farming
65	Punsisigama	Kumarawadu Babynona	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	78	Buddhist	never attended school	Not provided
66	Punsisigama	Kande Hamalin Nona	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	67	Buddhist	Not provided	Not provided
67	Punsisigama	Weeraddana Dayani	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	35	Buddhist	grade 10	Farming
68	Punsisigama	Lalitha Rajani	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	27	Buddhist	Not provided	Farming
69	Punsisigama	Nirmala Medis	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	22	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Farming
70	Punsisigama	N.G.Somawathi	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	45	Buddhist	Not provided	Unemployed
71	meegahayaya	M.Jayawathi	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	34	Buddhist	Not provided	Sewing
72	Athale	T.Padmalatha	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	27	Buddhist	Not provided	Farming
73	Athale	M.T.Senani	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	22	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Farming
74	Athale	K.W.Nansimona	Pallewella,Badalkumbura	68	Buddhist	never attended school	Unemployed
75	Athale	D.Snyalatha	Badugasmulla,Badalkumbura	45	Buddhist	Not provided	Unemployed
76	Athale	D.S.Raniyawathi	Badugasmulla,Badalkumbura	45	Buddhist	Not provided	Unemployed
77	Athale	M.T.Padmini	meegahayaya,Badalkumbura	22	Buddhist	Not provided	Farming
78	meegahayaya	C.H.Mangalika	Athale post,Badalkumbura	19	Buddhist	G.C.E. A/level	Not provided
79	Athale	A.B.Yasawathi	Punsisigama , Badalkumbura	22	Buddhist	G.C.E. A/level	Not provided
80	Athale	T.B.Yasawathi	Athale,Badalkumbura	23	Buddhist	G.C.E. O/level	Teacher
81	Athale	G.Mallika	Pallewella,Badalkumbura	33	Buddhist	grade 10	Unemployed
82							
83							
84							



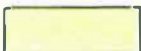



Appendix E

Table 3

Level of Education of Women of Athale Village



LEGEND

-  Never attended school
-  Grade 1 to Grade 5
-  Grade 6 to Grade 10
-  G.C.E. Ordinary level
-  G.C.E. Advanced Level
-  Graduate or Diploma

Appendix E

Table 4

Unemployment Rate by Province in 1996

Province	Total	Male	Female
Total	11.4	8.2	17.8
Western	12.2	10.0	17.0
Central	10.6	6.9	14.4
Southern	14.8	10.6	22.7
North Western	8.3	5.4	15.2
North Central	8.1	5.1	14.9
Uva	9.1	7.5	12.2
Sabaragamuwa	12.2	7.8	20.8

Source: Department of Census and Statistic

Appendix F 1

Sample QUESTIONNAIRE

The role of Buddhism in the changing lives of rural women in Sri Lanka.

- 1. Name of village.....
- 2. Personnel details
 - 1. Name of respondent.....
 - 2 Address.....
 - 3 Age.....
 - 4 Nationality.....
 - 5 Religion.....
- 3. Highest educational achievement.....
- 4. Profession.....
- 5 Marital Status.....unmarried/married/divorced/ widower
- 6 Family details

Name	relationship to Householder	age	sex	religion	profession	monthly wage	Grade In school

- 7 How long have you lived in this village?
- 8. At religious festivals do you take a leading role?

If not give reasons...
- 9. Has your position in the village changed since becoming actively?

Involved in Buddhist affairs.

Some examples of In-depth discussions

1. Please explain the daily religious observances you adhere to?
2. Did your grand mother, mother teach you religion. How did they teach you
3. Who else taught you Buddhism....
1. Do you see any changes in the way you were taught Buddhism and the way your children are taught?
2. Do you see a shift from Buddhism being taught by a Religious specialist to now being taught by lay people? If so how do you explain this?
3. How has the new economic position of women changed their lives and how they interact in society?
4. Are women (nuns) as religious specialists able to transmit religion? Has domestic worship become popular?
8. Has modern reformist Buddhism touched the lives of women?
9. What are the variations in the households, due to women becoming religious transmitters?
10. Can you explain your meditation practices please...How and where you learnt the practice
11. Has the Kataragama cult touched the lives of the village?
12. How much of a patriarchal society is your village?
13. According to your opinion, has Buddhism changed since Independence? Why do you think so....
14. According to your opinion is a woman's support extremely necessary for a man to be involved in religious affairs?

15. How does a mother gain respect and honor in society if one of her sons becomes a Buddhist Monk?
16. How far are the teachings of the Buddha relevant to you society today?
17. How has Buddhism changed your life?
18. What are the benefits of being a Buddhist?

Name of Village
Address
Name of respondent

Age	Profession
Religion	Marital status
Level of Education	

1. Name of spouse/child	Relationship	Age	Male/Female	Religion	Profession	Monthly Income
2. Name of spouse/child	Relationship	Age	Male/Female	Religion	Profession	Monthly Income
3. Name of spouse/child	Relationship	Age	Male/Female	Religion	Profession	Monthly Income
4. Name of spouse/child	Relationship	Age	Male/Female	Religion	Profession	Monthly Income
5. Name of spouse/child	Relationship	Age	Male/Female	Religion	Profession	Monthly Income
6. Name of spouse/child	Relationship	Age	Male/Female	Religion	Profession	Monthly Income

Can you explain how you observe daily Buddhist practice

If not please give reason

Do you Meditate?

If yes do you meditate

Whom did you learn from?

Where

If not give reason

Would you like to learn to meditate?

From whom would you like to learn

Do You have non-Buddhist friends/ Relatives?

If yes what religious affiliation do they have

Do you have caste conflicts in your village

If yes, do you like this conflict to go in your village?

If yes, please give reasons for this

Work

Family

Friends

Recreation

Politics

Religion

According to your opinion is it men or women who are more interested in religion

Is it true to believe that men need the co-operation of their wives for them to be involved in religious activity?

If yes, what type of support do they need?

According to your opinion does a woman who participates in religious activity receive more prestige in society?

If yes please explain

Is ritual and merit making activities dependent on women than men?

If yes, give reasons

Please explain the reasons for people not having enough money

Can you give reasons for the majority of people being poor in this country?

Do you agree that the ordination of a son will give a mother some prestige in society

Are their benefits of being a Buddhist in this country

If yes, please explain

Has being a Buddhist ever brought you discredit?

If yes, please explain

Does your husband/son drink alcohol?

are they addicted

If yes, How long have they been addicted to this?

Due to the addiction are they violent towards the family/ neighbours?

Are you against drinking?

If yes, what actions have you taken to combat the problem?

Do you think it has been successful?

Do you own a radio?

Do you listen to the Buddhist preaching?

If yes, do you listen everyday

Do You listen to the Pirit broadcast?

Do you listen to the broadcast in the night?

Do you listen to the Poya day broadcast

Do you go on Pilgrimage

If yes, how many times a year?

How much would you spend for it?

How do you find the money required

With whom would you go on pilgrimage?

If you do not go on pilgrimage please give reasons for

Would you like to go on pilgrimage

Are you an Office bearer of any committee?

If yes, name of committee

What type of business do you do

ග්‍රාමීය කාන්තාවගේ ජීවන රටාව කෙරෙහි මුද්‍රාගතවේ මලපැව.

ගවේ නම:

පොද්ගලික තොරතුරු:

1. පිළිතුරු දෙන්නකුගේ නම:
 ලිපිනය: වයස: ජාතිය: ආගම:

ලබා ඇති ඉහළම අධ්‍යාපනික මට්ටම: \...

රැකියාව:

විවාහය අවිවාහය බව: අවිවාහය/විවාහය/දික්කසාදය ඇත/වැන්නද?

2. පවුලේ තොරතුරු:

සාමාජිකයාගේ නම	ගෘහමුලිකයාට ඇත නැත	වයස (අවු)	ස්ත්‍රී/පුරුෂ භාවය	ආගම	රැකියාව/ ලේඛය	මාසික ආදායම (දොලර්) ලේඛය	මාසික ඉහුණ ගන්නා ලේඛය
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							
6.							
7.							

3. ඔබ මෙම ගවේනික තොරතුරු කලක් ජීවත්ව ඇත්ද?
 උපතේ සිටම: ඔව්/නැත
 නැත නම් වර්ෂ ගණන:

4. ආගමික පිළිවෙත්:

I. ඔබ සැම රෝග දිනකම සිල් සමාදාන වන්නේද? ඔව්/නැත
 නැත. නම්, ඊට හේතු මොනවාද?

මල් පහන් පුරා කිරීමට පමණක් පත්කළ යන්නේද? ඔව්/නැත

II. ඔබගේ ස්වාමියා/දරුවන් සැම රෝග දිනකම සිල් සමාදාන වන්නේද? ඔව්/නැත
 ආත්මාණී ඊට හේතු මොනවාද?

මල් පහන් පුරා කිරීමට පමණක් පත්කළ යන්නේද? ඔව්/නැත

III. ඔබ පත්කළ යුතු පිළිගන්නේද? ඔව්/නැත
 ඔව්. නම්, සබ්පතා/මාස්පතා/වාර්ෂිකව/ඉදහිට
 නැත. නම්, ඊට හේතු මොනවාද?

IV. ඔබ පත්කළ යුතු ආගමික උත්සව වලදී ප්‍රියාකාරී මෙහෙයක් ඉටුකරන්නේද? ඔව්/නැත
 නැත. නම්, ඊට හේතු මොනවාද?

v. එම සහ ප්‍රදේශීය වෙසක්, පොසොන් පොතොය සමරන්නේ කෙසේද? පැහැදිලි කරන්න.

.....

.....

vi. එම වදනේදී ජීවිතයේදී අනුගමනය කරන කොටස පිළිවෙත් පෙන්වන්න? පැහැදිලි කරන්න.

.....

.....

vii. එම කෙටි ප්‍රශ්න පත්‍රයේදී පවත්වන්නේද? ඔව්/නැ

ඔව්. නම්, දිනපතා/සතිපතා/මාසිකව/වාර්ෂිකව/ඉදහිට

වසරේ පැවැත්වීමට හේතු පෙන්වන්න?

.....

නැ. නම්, කොපමණවිටම හේතු පෙන්වන්න? පැහැදිලි කරන්න.

.....

.....

viii. එම භාවනා කරන්නේද? ඔව්/නැ

ඔව්. නම්, දිනපතා/සතිපතා/මාසිකව(පෝය දින)/වාර්ෂිකව/ඉදහිට/වන්නා හමන් වලදී පමණක්

භාවනාව ඉගෙන ගන්නේ කාගෙන්ද?කොගේදද?

නැ. නම්, ඊට හේතු පෙන්වන්න?

.....

ix. එම භාවනාව ඉගෙනීමට කැමතිද? ඔව්/නැ

ඔව්. නම්, එම භාවනාව ඉගෙනීමට කැමති ජනප්‍රියතම/පුරුෂයකුගෙන්ද?

(මෙහෙයුමකගෙන්ද)/(භාවපුරුෂයකුගෙන්ද)

x. එමට අනෙකුත් කැපයුම්/පහසුකම් සිටිද? ඔව්/නැ

ඔව්. නම්, ඒ අය පිළිපදින ආගම/ආගම් පෙන්වන්න?

.....

.....

xi. එම ජීවත් වන ගමේ කුලයේදී පවත්වන්නේද? ඔව්/නැ

ඔව්. නම්, මෙම කුලයේදී දිනපතා පවත්වා ගන්නා එම කැමතිද? ඔව්/නැ

ඔව්. නම්, ඒට හේතු පෙන්වන්න?

.....

xii. ඒ ඒ අංශයට එම දෙන වැයකින් තම උදකුණ යොදා පහත සඳහන් වගුව පුරවන්න.

	අගමැති	තරමක්	අවුට්	කොගෙන්ට
	වැයකින්	වැයකින්	වැයකින්	වැයකින් නැත
රැකියාව	1	2	3	4
පවුල	1	2	3	4
සමාජය	1	2	3	4
විවේක කාලය	1	2	3	4
දේශපාලනය	1	2	3	4
වෙනත්	1	2	3	4

xiv. ඔබ පිටත සෑදූ, ප්‍රශ්න ආවේණික කටයුතු වල යෙදවීම ජනගහණ සහය සැපයීම සඳහා වේ/නැත
 ඔබ. නම්, අවශ්‍ය තුළින් අන්දමේ සහයක්? පැහැදිලි කරන්න.

xv. එබේ මඟ අනුව බොද්ධ ජනප්‍රවාද පුරුකවෙහිලද පුරුකයාව වඩා උග්‍රය අතින් වැඩි නොයෙයක් ඉටුවේද ? සිව්/කැම

198

xxiii. එම යතු රේඛාවක් තිබේද? ඔව්/නැත

ඔව්. නම්,

ඉවැව්දුලියේත් සහපතා විනාශය වන ශත වසරක් දෙන්නේද?

ඔව්/නැත

දිනපතා විනාශය වන සෙත් පිරිත් වලට එම යවත් දෙන්නේද?

ඔව්/නැත

දිනපතා රාත්‍රී විනාශය වන පිරිත් වලට එම යවත් දෙන්නේද?

ඔව්/නැත

පෝය දින ආගමික වැඩසටහන් වලට එම යවත් දෙන්නේද?

ඔව්/නැත

xxiv. එම වන්දනා ගමන් යන්නේද? ඔව්/නැත

ඔව්. නම්, වර්ෂයකට කී වරක්ද?

එක් වන්දනා ගමනකට වැඩ වන සාමාන්‍ය පුදල රු.....

වට පුදල එම සොයා ගන්නේ කෙසේද? පැහැදිලි කරන්න.

.....

.....

.....

වන්දනා ගමන යන්නේ එම කාලයද?

.....

.....

නැත. නම් වසේ කොයක්කේ ඇයි? හේතු දැන්වන්න.

.....

.....

.....

එම වන්දනා ගමන් යාමට කැමතිද? ඔව්/නැත

xxv. එම ගමනේ යම් සම්ප්‍රදාය සාමාජිකයෙක්ද? ඔව්/නැත

ඔව්. නම්, සම්ප්‍රදායේ නම

සම්ප්‍රදායේ කෙරෙහි වැඩ කරනු ලබන.....

.....

.....

Appendix G

The impact of Buddhism
in the lives of
women in Sri Lanka

Name of Village

Address

Name of respondent

1. How does Buddhism influence your occupation or daily routine?
2. Do the marriage customs relate to Buddhism? Eg. Inter racial or religious marriage?
3. How do the values and attitudes of people reflect on the teachings of Buddhism?
3.1 Birth
3.2 Illness
3.3 Pilgrimages
3.4 Pilgrimage to Sri Pada
3.5 Harvest
4. 4 What are Buddha's teachings about caste?
4.1 What do you think about caste?
5. How do you explain the conflict in the country to your children in relation to the teachings of Buddhism?
6. What effects do the teachings of Buddha have on the agricultural productivity of the land?
7. (a) What is the teaching of the Buddha?
(b) How do you practise it in your community?
8. How does Bodhi Puja reflect the teachings of Buddhism?

9 (a) Have you heard of the Sai Baba movement?

(b) If so what do you think of the Buddha's teachings and Sai Babas'?

10. Do you think that women as meditation teachers is a good idea?

11. Do you meditate ? ☐ If you meditate, what would you say are the main benefits?

12. (a) Do you belong to any voluntary organisation?

(b) If yes are you an active participant?

13. Are men and women equal in this society?

14. Did foreign rule bring divisions by gender into Sri Lanka?

15. Are ritual and merit making activities dependent on women?

If so why?

16. Does participating in ritual merit give women more prestige and public recognition?

Can you demonstrate if this is so?

17. Do women have a significant role in maintaining the Buddhist folk traditions?

18. Do you agree that the ordination of a son will guarantee a better place in your life?

ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ ස්ත්‍රීන්ගේ දිවිපෙවන කෙරෙහි මුද්ධාගමේ බලපෑම.

ප්‍රශ්නාවලිය

1. ඔබගේ රැකියාව කෙරෙහි වෘත්තීයමය වශයෙන් ඔබගේ වැදගත්කම කටයුතු කෙරෙහි මුද්ධාගම බලපාන්නේ කෙසේද ?
2. විවාහය ආශ්‍රිත කටයුතු කෙරෙහි මුද්ධාගම බලපාන්නේ කෙසේද ? වෙනස් ජාතින් අතර සිදුවන විවාහ වෘත්තීයමය වශයෙන් ඔබගේ ආගමිකයින් අතර සිදුවන විවාහ කෙරෙහි මුද්ධාගම බලපාන අන්දම උදාහරණ වශයෙන් සලකන්න
3. පහත සඳහන් අවස්ථාවලදී මුද්ධාගම බලපාන සැටි පැහැදිලි කරන්න
 1. දරුවකු ඉපදුන අවස්ථාවේදී
 2. කෙනෙකුට අසතිපයක් (ආරෝග්‍ය ගාලාගත වීමට තරම් උග්‍ර) සෑදුනු විට
 3. ව්‍යාධි ගතකර යන්නට සැලකෙන අවස්ථාවේ දී
 4. ශ්‍රී පාද ව්‍යාධිවේදී
 5. ගෝයම් කරන අවස්ථාවේදීමේවා පිළිබඳ ඔබ දරන මතය කුමක්ද?
4. කුලය පිළිබඳ මුද්‍රාණීය දේශනා කළේ කුමක්ද?
කුලය පිළිබඳ ඔබේ අදහස කුමක්ද?
5. දැනට රටේ සිදුවන දේ පිළිබඳ ඔබේ දරුවකුට පහදා දෙන්නේ කෙසේද? (මුද්ධාගම ඇසුරින්)

- 6 කෘෂිකම්මයෙන් ලබන ඵලදාව කෙරෙහි මුද්‍රාදායම යම් විධියකින් හෝ බලපාන්නේද?
7. මුද්‍රාදායමින් උගන්වන්නේ කුමක්ද? ඔබේ ගමේ අය මුද්‍රාදායම අදහන්නේ කෙසේද?
8. මුද්‍රා වහන්සේ බෝධි පුජාව පිළිබඳ කුමක් දේශනකර තිබේද?
9. ඔබ කායි බඩා යනුවෙන් හඳුන්වන පුද්ගලයා හඳුනන්නේද? ඔව් / නැ ඔව් නම් කාට් බඩාගේ ව්‍යාපාරය පිළිබඳ ඔබ අසා තිබේද?
ඔබ් නම්, මුද්‍රාදායමින් කායි බඩාගේ ධර්මයන් පිළිබඳ ඔබේ ඔව් / නැත අදහස් මොනවාද?
10. ඔබේ අදහස අනුව ස්ත්‍රීන් විසින් භාවනාව ඉගැන්වීම සුදුසුද? ඔව් / නැත
11. ඔබ භාවනා කරන්නේ ද? ඔව් / නැත
ඔව් නම්, ඔබ එහි ක්‍රියාකාරී සාමාජිකයෙක්ද? ඔව් නැත.
12. ඔබ කිසියම් සේවේච්ඡා සංගමයකට අයත් වන්නේ ද? ඔව් / නැත.
ඔබ එහි ක්‍රියාකාරී සාමාජිකයෙක්ද? ඔව් / නැත
13. ඔබේ මතය අනුව මෙම ගමේ සමාජය තුළ ස්ත්‍රීන් සහ පුරුෂයින් සමතැන් ලබන්නේ ද? ඔව් / නැත.
14. ශ්‍රී ලංකාවේ විදේශීය පාලනය යටතේ සූත්‍ර පුරුෂයින් අනුව යුමය බෙදී තිබුණේද? ඔව් / නැත
15. පිංකම්වලදී සිරිත් විරිත් අනුගමනය කිරීම සත්‍රීන් මත රදන්නේද? ඔව් ඊට හේතු
16. පිංකම්වල ආදි කටයුතු වල යෙදීම නිසා සත්‍රීය සමාජයේ උසස් පිළිගැනීමක් ලබයිද? ඔව් / නැත.
ඔව් නම් මීට උදාහරණයක් දෙන්න.
17. පරම්පරාගත බොද්ධ සිරිත් විරිත් පවත්වා ගෙන යාමේදී සත්‍රීයකට විශේෂ ස්වාභාවයක් ලැබෙන්නේද? ඔව් / නැත.
18. ඔබේ පුතකු මහණ කිරීමෙන් මෙම ආත්ම හටයේදීම යහපත් ප්‍රතිඵල ඔබට ලැබේ යැයි ඔබ සිතන්නේද?

Appendix H
Questionnaire for
Bhikkunis/
Dasa sil matas
Sil maniyo.

Name of Village
Address
Name of respondent

Q1. What do you think is the future of the Dasa sil matha/Bhikkhuni in this country?

--

Q2. Although the Bhikkhuni/dasa sil mathas do not get much recognition from the Bhikkhus, are you able to fulfil your ambitions?

--

Q3.A. Do you agree with the Bhikkhus that Bhikkhunis will never be established in Sri Lanka?

--

Q3.B. Do you agree that the Bhikkhus are the protector's of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka?

--

Q4. Do you believe that the respect given by society to Bhikkhunis, will also be given by the Bhikkhus?

--

Q5. Do you believe that the dasa sil mathas/Bhikkhuni's are the backbone of Buddhism in Sri Lanka?

Q6. Do you agree that the responsibility of teaching Buddhism to children are in the hands of women?

Q7. Do you meditate? Is it Samatha or Vipassana meditation that you use?

Q8. Do you receive help from from your family or from the public to support you in your daily activities?

Q9. What was the Buddha's attitude to caste? What is your attitude to caste?

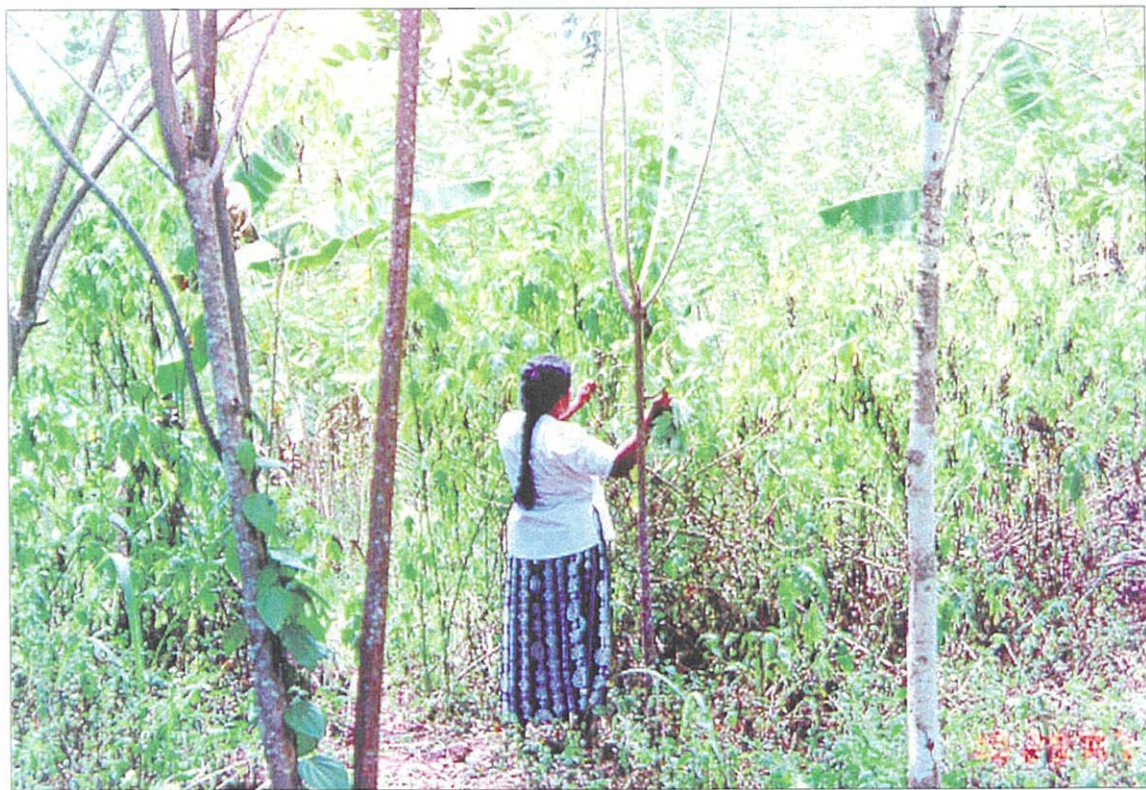


Weheragoda Temple



2.1

View from the aramaya herbs and plants



2.2

Suneela's experimental plot of land



Vanavasi bhikkhu



Gal lena



Vanavasi bhikkhu at Maligawila



Older resident



Athale village homes and residents

5.1



Interview at hall

5.2



Women at the aramaya

5.3



Meeting at Badalkumbura



Entrance to the home



Cleaning pepper



Back garden



Drying pepper

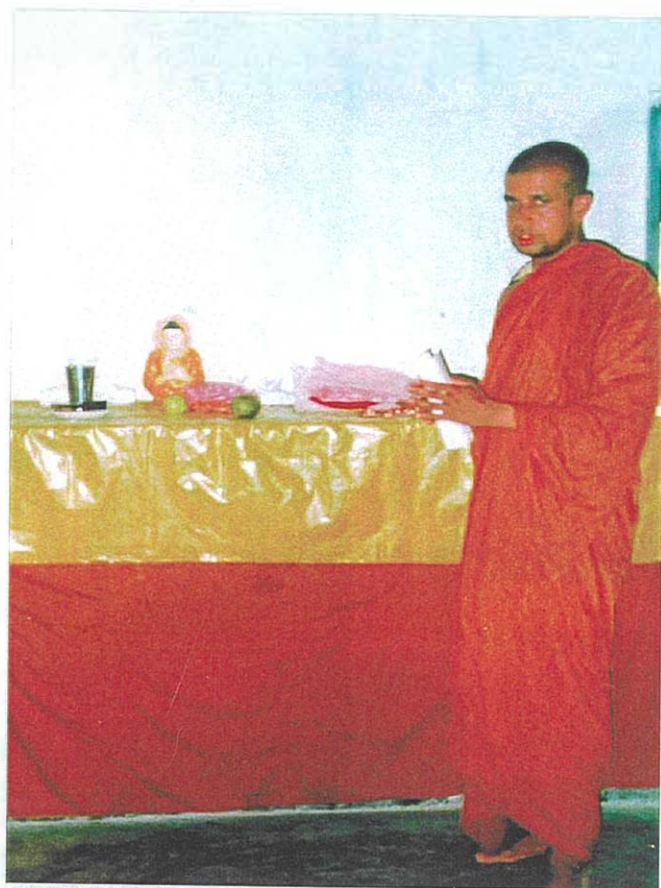


Children ready for school

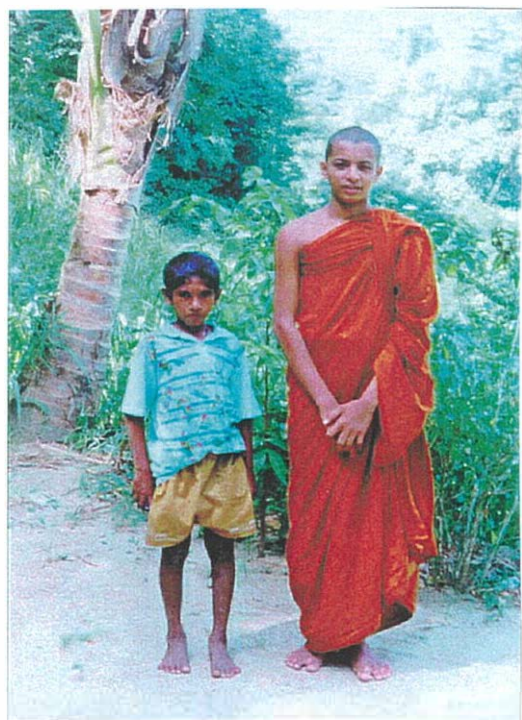


Punsisigama village

8.1



Bhikku at village aramaya



8.2 Samenara and friend at aramaya

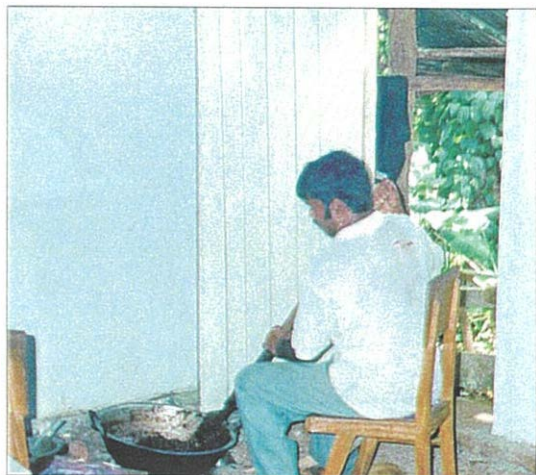


8.3 Shramadana work at aramaya

Athale village aramaya



Wife pounding leaves for porridge

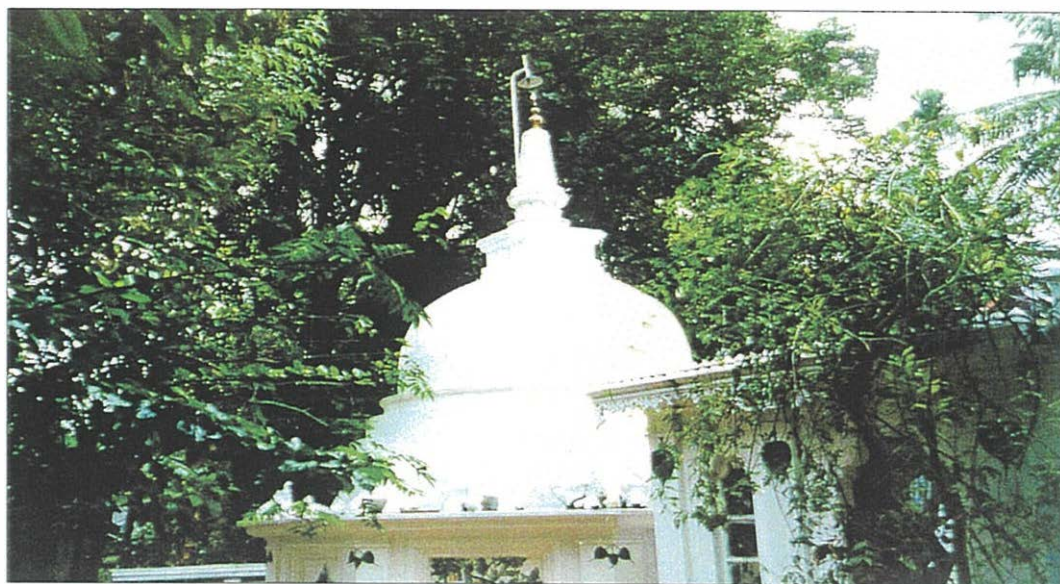


Husband cooking a special sweet

Atale village kitchen



Plate 9



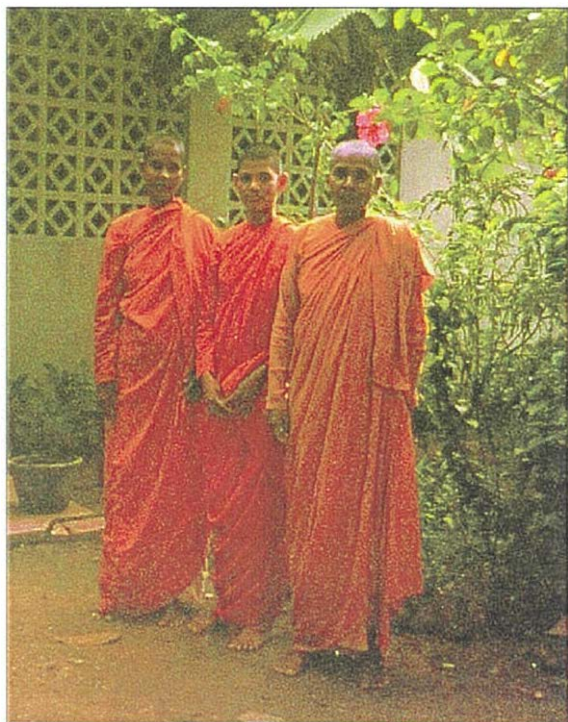
Lady Blake aramaya
at Kandy



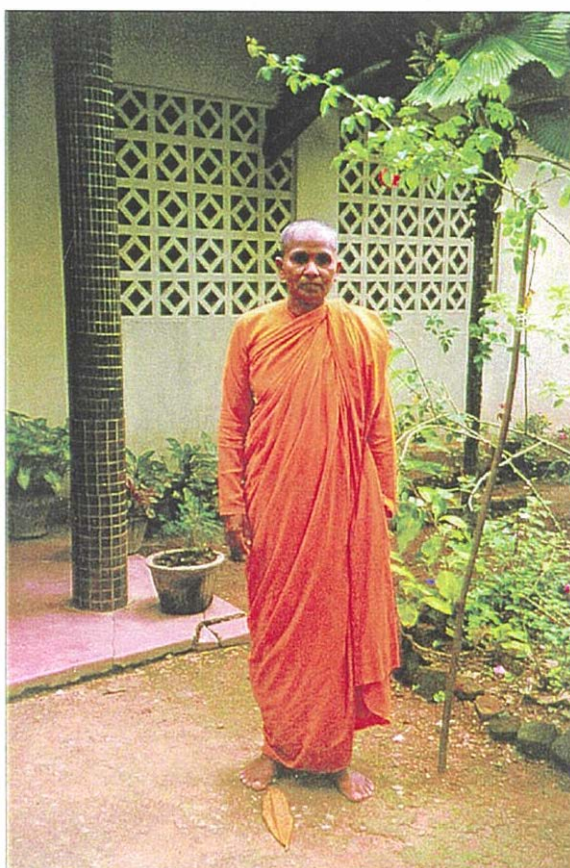
Ven Kotmalee Dhira Sudarma dasa Sil Mata
(front) and Kolugala Dharmadinna



Nawalapitiye Anuradha sil maniyo and dasa sil matas



dasa sil matas and
bhikkhuni Susantha



Venerable Susantha
bhikkuni of Gal len vihare,
Kengalla



13.1

Budu pilimaya



13.2

Children

Appendix J.1

ORAL LIFE STORIES OF BHIKKHUNI/ DASA SIL MATA

1. Life Stories from Renuniciant *Dasa Sil Matas* in the Year 2000

Kolugala Dharmiddna's life story

"The keta bird although she lives in a cage has the freedom to go on singing more than a woman, as she does not have that freedom"...

My family comes from Barigama, in the district of Galagedera. My father worked at a vegetable market. I'm the oldest in the family. I have two brothers. After my father's death we went to live at my mother's village at Kolugala. Up to the fifth grade I studied at the Dodampala primary school. Then I went to take *sil* with my mother. I learnt Pali *gathas*, and the satipattana. I learnt to say *Pirit* with the older people. I loved this. Later on I joined the Sarvodaya movement, which helped me get some experience working with young children I studied children's development, their nourishment needs and dress making. However, my heart was on learning meditation. I went for two weeks at a time and I meditated looking at a skull, which reminded me that we become nothing. Once I decided to become a *dasa sil mata*, I spoke to my mother about it. She protested vehemently. I spoke to the *loku maniyo* (head *dasa sil mata*) at Lady Blake *aramaya*, who was Kotmalee Dira Sudharma. She encouraged me. One day I went with the other *dasa sil matas* for a *pirit* ceremony, and the *loku maniyo* wanted me to recite the *pirit*. After this she got my horoscope read and she told my mother that it would be a sin for her if she did not let me become a *dasa sil mata*, as my horoscope says that I would be a good candidate to take the precepts...I am invited to give talks and to offer Buddha *puja* at various temples. Education is a very important tool if the *dasa sil matas* are to gain the respect of the society. Children are a treasure that the country has. Therefore it is the responsibility of the *bhikkhus*, *dasa sil matas*, parents, teachers and society to protect them and teach the ways of the Buddha. Kotmalee Dira Sudharma is very religious, but she is getting old now. My greatest wish is to write a book about her, as she is quite a unique person, and is full of the good qualities of the Buddha. I would like the world to hear about her...I would like to help children who are unable to walk. Specially now, that our country has so many children without their parents, and our displaced.

2. Life story of Idagama Vajira Sil Mata

“The rules however will make it difficult. It means living under bhikkhus orders. So by being a dasa sil mata I can strive for Nirvana,”

Since I was very young I accompanied my mothers sister to observe *sil*, and listen to *bana* preaching. I was very interested in what was going on and got involved in the proceedings. I learnt the three main ways to cultivate spiritual strength. Giving *dane*, which reduces greed and selfishness; observing the precepts, which keeps one from doing wrong deeds; and meditating, which enables one to let go through an understanding of the laws of importance and non self. I gained insight, and felt the need to become a *dasa sil mata*. I was only 14 years old. I had studied to year six. Although at first my parents disliked the idea, they soon gave into my insistence as I really felt I could do this. After becoming a *dasa sil mata*, I studied and passed the ordinary level exam. I was sent to Madiwela *Pirivena* and I obtained the Advanced level. I was lucky my parents gave me funding to study at the Buddhist Pali university, where I passed the *Tripitaka* Praccina exams. I enjoy studying the texts, and meditating. I had a good teacher to teach me meditation.

My goals for the future, would be to encourage children to study, I hope to establish a good library so that children who come to learn here will not be disadvantaged... I'm not against getting *upasampada*, or the *bhikkhunis*. We are already doing that work.

3. Life story of Anuradha Sudharmika Sil Mata

“I have written some praises to the Buddha, and would like to publish them”.

I have three older brothers one younger sister and a younger brother. I attended St. Andrews *Balika Vidyalaya*. After passing my O'levels I decided to become a *bhikkhuni*. Only because another friend wanted to be a *bhikkhuni*. My parents and older brothers were angry and against this. They wanted to see me married In 1986 I gave up my family life and became a *dasa sil mata*. In 1990 I came to Kandy and studied at Lady Blake *pirivena* until 1987. I did well at my advanced level exam and gained admission to the Peradeniya University. I gained a B.A. honours degree. Then I studied for a

diploma in English, and also studied Japanese, Pali and Sanskrit. I passed the Praccina exams. I involve myself in social work, teach meditation and also teach at the *daham pasala*. I teach Pali sutras to some young women and men that attend the *Pirivena*. I have discussions on the sutras, and discussions on the teachings of Buddhism. My future goals are to obtain the highest qualification academically, and practice meditation and teach the children that come to the *pirivena*. I would also like to publish books I have written. I would like to write a book about the *loku maniyo* who has lived here for 38 years. The help I received from her is immeasurable.

4. Life story of Walpola Dharmapali *Sil Mata*

"I wish to teach the dhamma to the length and breath of the country".

I always knew I wanted to be a *dasa sil mata*. As soon as I finished my G.C.E. ordinary level examination I went to the *aramaya*. My parents and my sister were against me becoming a *dasa sil mata*. Only my elder brother agreed. He was able to convince the other members of the family to agree with my intentions. I was very keen on studying, and taught at the *daham pasala* and helped in the cleaning of the *aramaya*. I was successful in the Praccina exam and I also did the diploma. We have a shortage of teachers in the country. We get about Rs. 200.00 a month, while the temple *bhikkhus* get various grants from the government. The *dasa sil matas* are not willing to join together in submitting a proposal. The public has respect for both *dasa sil matas* and *bhikkhunis*. I have been at this *aramaya* since 1978. Children who need help come here to learn. Their parents can't afford to spend on tuition classes...On Saturdays I look after the vegetable and medicinal herb plots. We grow vegetables such as *Gotukola*, *Dambala*, *Kohila*. The days we do not get any *dane*, we use the vegetables that are grown here and cook them ourselves.

5. Life story of *bhikkhuni* Venerable. Susantha Maniyo

“We need to be united as bhikkhus, and bhikkhunis who possess the qualities of the Buddha, such as compassion, kindness, patience, goodness...”

It was three years ago that a few *bhikkhunis* went to Taiwan, on the advice of some of the *Mahatheras*, and according to the Gnathi Chathuthi Karma Upasampada of the Theravada tradition it was then that we were given the status of *bhikkhuni*. The *bhikkhuni sangha* was taken to China in the 5th century by brave Sri Lankan *bhikkhunis*. The book titled “Somlin discipline for *bhikkhunis*”, which was the discipline taken from Sri Lanka is still used in Taiwan. It was from this discipline, and lineage that we received *Upasampada*, according to the Theravada tradition. This has given us the same status as the *bhikkhus*.

We need a strong band of united *bhikkhus* and *bhikkhunis* who possess the qualities of the Buddha. If the *bhikkhus* will become more *sila*, the people will begin to respect them, and accept them. Most of the *bhikkhus* are disillusioned, and caught up by the temptations of the world. There are very few young men and women today who are ready to give up their lay life and join the *sangha*. According to today’s climate it will take a long time for the *bhikkhunis* to be established. We are interested in teaching the Buddha’s message to as many people and teaching meditation. The *bhikkhus*, *bhikkhunis*, *dasa sil matas* are the backbone of Buddhism and the strength of Buddhism. The responsibility lies in the hands of all Buddhists. The Buddha gave us the message, so it’s the responsibility of all Buddhists to live by this message and to share it with others. It’s a gift we have from the Buddha. It’s the women that come to the temple more often, so we teach it to them so that they can teach the whole household. The mothers are interested they will send the children to the *daham pasala*. The environment is good for children at the temple. Children learn how to speak to each other, and respect each other. They learn humility, obedience. Teenage children question things that bother them and we discuss these issues. It’s a learning environment. As an individual I follow Buddha’s message and live by the rules. I spend time meditating and protect myself. I help the lay people by explaining the Sigalova Sutraya. I take different aspects of life and explain how to live as the Buddha taught.

Appendix J.2

LIFE STORIES OF WOMEN OF ATHALE

1. H.M. Bandara Menika Alu Udama Athale -age 74

We were very much involved in slash and burn (*chena*) agriculture. This was all jungle. was a hard life. I went with a man who was to be my husband at the tender age of 13. I attained puberty after I had lived with this man. We had eight children. I got married only after the fourth child, (a son) was born. My husband built a small hut in the jungle and lived there. I lived closer to the village and the temple. My hut was made of wattle and daub, and the roof covered with coconut leaves. consisted of one big room. Everyone lived and slept in this room. The kitchen was outside. We had one lamp. I planted vegetables, such as *battu*, sweet potato, finger corn, medicinal herbs, coconut, areca nut, betel leaves etc.

I collected firewood from the jungle. Water had to be brought from the river. I had to pound the maize, the chillies and the rice. The older children helped to look after the other children. My mother hardly visited us, as they had to do their own work. In times of sickness, I had to walk to the government hospital. We went to the village doctor only if we were bitten by a snake, or any other creature, or had a stomach pain. If a mother who was feeding a baby became sick, then we would get a man, even from another village to perform a *thovil* (exorcism) for the woman. Sometimes he would boil water while reciting *mantara* to ward off evil spirits.

My husband grew Paddy, Maize, corn and coconut. He had to work hard in the fields. We helped each other from the burning of the land to the collection of the paddy. Everyone lives as good neighbours. My husband had to sleep on a platform that was built on a treetop, to keep watch and protect the crops from wild elephants, wild boar and other animals. He and other men sometimes built a fire to protect themselves. They used to sing *kavi*, to keep awake. Each person asked questions and gave answers in song. This is how they kept awake until the early hours of the morning.

To irrigate the fields a small dam was built on the *Manik ganga*, and the water was diverted to the paddy fields. It was in the month of September with the rains that they planted the seeds. We used bulls to plough the land. Men sowed the seeds. We had special Buddhist rites before the seed was sown. The men chanted special *gathas*, so that we would get rain, and have a good harvest at the end. Men walked backwards sowing the seeds. We rotated the crops. In the past paddy was harvested only once a year. Now they plant paddy twice a year. I went to help with the gathering of the paddy. Before we started, a few sheaves were plucked and hung from a rope on top of the shed on the field, as *dana* to the God's. At the end of the harvest, we trampled the paddy, boiled it and then gave thanks to the God's for the good yields, and partook in a big *dane*. Everyone who helped joined in this. It is only if you work hard, you will have good rewards.

Things are quite different today. Life is much easier for the women. They take the chillies maize and even the rice to be ground in the big machines. The paddy is harvested using machinery. The paddy is then collected into bags and taken to the factory. This is a big change from the past. The roads are much better; we can even get a vehicle to come if someone is sick. Although things are better, everyone seems to be in a big rush

I still go to the temple to observe *ata sil* on *Poya* days and listen to *bana*. I take part in *Bodhi puja*, and help the temple in any way I can. Our *aramaya* has been there since the time of King Valagamba. Now, it is getting very difficult for me to walk too many times to the temple, so I do my meditation at home in the best way I know.

2. J.M. Kumari Hamy- Athale - age 75

I came to Athale from Badulla. I did not attend school even though there was a school I could attend. I had to help my mother with the house work and looking after the sisters and brothers, as I was the oldest. We lived at Passara first, and then came to live in this village. We have lived here for over fifty years. There were no roads, no shops in this area. This was all a big jungle where elephants roamed. We had to walk quite a distance to buy salt. We grew manioc, sweet potato, chillies and other vegetables and herbs. I used to grind maize in the night after working a full day in the field, to make *Halapa* for

breakfast. Most of the time we had rice, sambal and a vegetable for lunch, and the same for dinner. I even used to make my own oil from coconut. I used to frighten the animals by singing songs and *ganthas*. They can be quite destructive. Once an elephant had come right into the garden, it trampled all the manioc plants, broke my king coconuts leaving a trail of destruction.

I was alone in the kitchen cooking when the elephants came. I made a big noise banging pots and pans together, and shouted at the elephant, it walked away quietly. We had to work from dawn until late at night. I to woke up early to give *Bodhi puja* and then cook breakfast and lunch, and went to the field to work. I came home in the afternoon to give lunch to the children and attended to my home garden after which I cooked dinner. This was my daily routine.

I was 14 years old when I got married. I had my first child at 15. I had three sons. I breastfed them until they were 4 years old. The children went to the local school. My oldest child became a monk, at a young age. At the age of 40 he became very sick, I took him to the Weheragoda temple priest for medicine, but he died soon after. The other two sons are doing well. I have always taken *ata sil* on *Poya* days. I don't do any work on those days. We get *dana* for lunch, and I listen to the *Bana* afterwards. Every night I meditate. I can't do much work now, but I help the temple always and prepare food for the monks, and help them whenever I can.

The government has given us food stamps. Since, we have grown vegetables in the home garden we can manage with what we get. I can still walk, so I go to temple and spend my time listening to *Bana*. I attend *Bodhi puja*. Recently, a very learned monk came to our temple, so I went and listened to what he had to say.

Things are much easier for the new generation. They have roads, which are accessible to vehicles. Heavy machinery is used to collect the sugar cane and take it in tractors to the refinery. Now you don't have to grind flour by hand, you can buy it in the shops. People are still very busy, they don't get enough rest. Society has changed. Everyone is trying to earn more money. The biggest problem in this village is the lack of water to homes. However, we have electricity now, which is a big improvement in the facilities available in the village.

3. Life story of R.M. Karunawathi – Punsisigama - age 67

When we forest arrived in this village it was a thick jungle. Elephants roamed the area. Now there are only a few elephants left and they live in the jungle near the *aramaya*. There were no houses in this area. We did *chena* (slash and burn) agriculture. My husband lived by himself on the plot of land in a little hut we built. It was here that we grew maize, corn and other vegetables such as beans, *battu* for our consumption. If we had extra then we would barter it for salt, soap etc. The *Mudalali* (businessmen) would come to collect the grain. We receive about Rs 8.00 for a bushel of maize.

I went to live with my husband when I was 15 years of age. We had six children. Two daughters and four sons. I had to bring them up by myself. I had studied up to the fourth grade. Our neighbours were helpful. That's how it was in the village. We helped each other. My sons have studied to their O levels. The daughters are married and have their own families. They live in the village.

Things are very different in the village these days. People are earning more money. They grow sugar cane, pepper which bring in more income. For a ton of sugar cane they pay Rs 1050.00. The big tractors are hired to collect the sugar cane and they take them to the factories.

We have roads so the vehicles can come close to the homes in an emergency. Now, I spend time looking after my sons shop. I enjoy this as I meet people and talk to them. In our day, we went to the temple, that was the meeting place for all. Now, the *Kade* (shop) is the meeting place. They sit and drink tea, chew beetle leaves and talk about politics. I visit the village *aramaya* and take *bodhi puja* and listen to *Bana* when I can. Although the income generated in the village is better, there are other problems. Men have taken up drinking alcohol, and they waste money. The women still work hard to keep the family together.

Appendix J.3

Interview with the *bhikkus* in residence at the *aramaya*

1. Venerable monk, please tell me about your order and about this district, its history, the people and where you live.

I belong to the Siyam Nikaya of the Malwatta Chapter. It goes back to the times of the Kandyan Kingdom. A monk named Sarankara Welwita brought *upasampada* from Siam with a monk named Upali. It was this Buddhism that spread to the district of Uva. It was established at the time of King Tissa, or better known as Saddhatissa, King Duttugemunu's brother. This area became a huge forest after the war between King Elara and King Duttugemunu and Buddhism declined, King Duttugemunu's reign (161-137 B.C.) of twenty years was spent mainly in activities to advance the Buddhist religion. He built two great monuments at Anuradhapura. After his death his brother Tissa became King. He was a great benefactor towards the religion, which earned him the epithet *Sadha* (*Sadha* means pious or of great faith). Buddhism was established in the area again.

2. What did the Buddha teach about the caste system? Does the caste system still exist within the school of monks?

The Buddha was very much against divisions of any kind. There were many different castes in India at the time. The Buddha was very much against this division of society. Once the Buddha was enlightened he welcomed all castes to join him. In place of caste he established the *bhikkus*, *bhikkhunis*, *upasikava* and the *upasikas*. However, when *bhikkhu* Mahinda and sister Sangamitta brought the Bo sapling to Sri Lanka, they were accompanied by people of 18 different castes. I believe that it was from this that the caste system got established in Sri Lanka. Another story I heard is about King Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe. He is supposed to have bowed low to a monk from a very low caste in greeting. When he realised this the king passed a law that only people from the high castes should be taken into priesthood. This is against the Buddha's teaching. Even today although it is not talked about, as it is not politically correct to do so, the caste system exists. It is specially so in the big temples where there is much land and money involved. Not so in poor villages. We treat everyone a like.

4. What did the Buddha teach? What is the practice in the village?

Buddhism is a philosophy and it is a way of life. It's a deep philosophy. It gives a path to follow in this world. Buddha asked not only the Buddhists but all people to follow the four noble truths and the eightfold path: the noble truth of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the noble truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The noble eightfold path, namely: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right endeavour, right mindfulness and right concentration. This is how he addressed his companions at *Isipatana*, and outlined the path of deliverance, which he himself had discovered. He spent 45 years teaching. He appointed no successor, nor did he think in terms of an administrative set up. The *sangha* (community of monks) was provided with a strong constitution in the form of the 227 *Patimoksa* rules. Caste or class had no meaning decisions were made democratically. He established a strong religious tradition. This was the ideal.

In the village the people have to go through a very difficult time merely to survive. Life is harsh, so they have adopted ways of surviving through difficult times. They worship gods, and make pleas to them for help. The Buddhist tradition accepts the existence of other God's, so this is not anything strange that the village people are engaged in. If it helps them in their survival, then there can be no harm in it. It is their belief. They ask for help from the God of Kataragama, Pathini and Saman. It gives the people a sense of relief.

5. Do you think that the *bhikkhuni*'s will be established as a community in Sri Lanka?

It will be very difficult to establish a female community as the *bhikkhus* themselves took a very long time to get established. They went through difficult times. There was a time that the people did not respect them much. When was that? Soon after a *bhikkhu* assassinated the Prime Minister of the country in 1959. The people lost faith. Only the monks in the big temple got support. It took a long time to get re-established. Even today, there are monks who get too involved in the politics of the country; or some do

not behave like they should, and this makes it difficult for everyone else. The total support of the laity is very important for the *bhikkus*. The *bhikkunis* too will need the full support of the laity as well as the *bhikkus*. This will be very difficult. May be in another fifty years or so. There is no *pirivena* teaching, or any other education available to them. Education is very important if they are to get established. To continue the Buddha's teaching, it is important to have both *bhikkhus* and *bhikkunis*. There are many hurdles they will have to overcome in political arena as well as in society. We will help them in any way we can.

6. What do you think is the future of the *dasa sil mathas* in Sri Lanka?

They have established themselves for a very long time, and the people have accepted them. Most of them are elderly. They are women who have left their homes either in anger, or because they had nowhere else to go. Some of them have learnt the *dhamma* and taken the *dasa sil*. There are no *pirivenas* for such people, so they have no chance of getting an education on the *dhamma*. Because they live on their own, with no financial support, they are vulnerable to the evils of society. We cannot help them, as they can't live in temples. *Dasa sil mathas* have submitted a memorandum to the ministry of Buddhist affairs, regarding provision for their safety. There are some younger *dasa sil mathas* who are educated, some have gone to the university. They help with different activities in the villages. Some of them teach in schools, or become counsellors to young people and even to married couples. Some of them help children with their schoolwork, and run the Sunday Schools. They are an asset to the village.

7. What is the status of Buddhism in Sri Lanka today?

Today society is concerned about its status and wealth. People only think of how much more money they can earn. They do not spend time on religious practice. A university educated monk said "the Buddhism that Buddha preached has slowly declined. Although Buddha said that his teaching would last for 5, 000 years, this will not be so, as the majority of people in today's society have become greedy and self-centred. They do not think of others, and are not compassionate. They do not meditate nor do they

listen to *bana* or listen to religious truths. There are only very few people who can understand the teachings. Yes, the *damma* will not survive in this type of climate.” “It is not possible for people these days to attain “*nirvana*” as it has become a Buddha-less period another *bhikkhu* added. “These days, the life of a *bhikkhu* has become entangled with politics. Politicians expect to get help from monks for their purposes. They use monks to get votes from the people. It’s a corrupt society”.

8. What has to be done to change the situation?

The government should support the *bhikkus* and help safeguard the teachings of the Buddha. The lay society is not able to provide the needs of the *sangha*. Only Rs 1700 is given to each monk toward *pirvena* education. Very old useless books are collected (books which are discarded by people) and sent to the *sangha* as texts for the Praccina exams. These books are really irrelevant for this exam. If the Buddha *sasana* is to survive in this country, then the government should provide a good education system for the *sangha*. “Even those monks who have a university degree are not given any jobs” another university educated monk added. He also stated that he feels that the World Bank will not give aid to Sri Lanka if the government supports the *sangha*. He felt that this was a plot against Buddhism by the World Bank. He thought that this was a method used by the World Bank to wipe out Buddhism, and spread Christianity the *bhikkus* feel that they do not get support from the government, so this is one of the reasons for many *bhikkus* leaving the order.

9. Do the young men who join forces get advice or a blessing from the temple priest?

We usually have a *bodhi puja* for the person who is leaving to join the forces and for his/her family. Amulets are made and blessed and given to the young men. A special *pirit* (*thun this paye pirit*) is recited and then *dane* (food offered to monks) is given. These young people join the forces not only to protect the country, but they feel that if they die in service to their country their parents will benefit from government compensation.

10 Sri Lankans believe that Theravada Buddhism is the “purest form of Buddhism.” Where do women fit into this?

The women (*dasa sil mathas*) do not have a definite goal, or a clear direction on how to achieve what they are aiming for. Unfortunately, they do not have a *pirivena* (a place of learning) to study. They have to study by themselves. Their family has to support them if they want to study. As the *dasa sil mathas* were established a long time ago, people have accepted them. Some are fortunate enough to be supported by a wealthy family, during their studies. They have the protection of the Buddha *sasana*. Yet, most of the older women have only a limited understanding of what they are taught. It is hard for them as they live in a harsh society. They have to protect themselves. Some of the traditions from Mahayana have been incorporated by some *dasa sil mathas*; eg. *bodhi puja*. Only what is necessary has been taken from the Mahayana tradition. It is difficult for these two schools to be totally free of each other. People like to experiment with different things. The householder has equal rights. Man and woman are treated equally. This was what the Buddha taught. Sometimes cultural factors have influenced people's ideas. Buddha gave women equality, but today, this equality that was envisaged by the Buddha has been taken away by the men

Stories of Renunciant Women: from early times

“Now lord, are women, having gone forth from home into homelessness in the *dhamma* and discipline proclaimed by the truth-finder, able to realise... (Spiritual) perfection? The Buddha replied, women, Ananda, having gone forth... are indeed able to realise...perfection”(Chullavagga, 1952,cited in Horner, 1989: 121).

From the time of Prince Gotama's earliest teaching women have actively participated in Buddhism. The first women lay disciples converted soon after Gotama's initial sermon in the Deer Park at *Isipatana*. “To these women, Gotama spoke of exactly the same matters in exactly the same terms” (Horner, 1989: 48). Prince Gotama accepted women as spiritual equals. The fact that women are spiritually equal in Buddhism is confirmed in the fifth book of *Vinaya-Pitka* (Book of Discipline). “The eight chief rules (*garudhamma*) did not arise as a discipline for a particular offence, but as a disciplinary

aspect of Gotama's monastic system. Women from all castes, were able to join the *sangha* and it was not regarded as the birthright of a privileged few people" (Horner, 1989: 118-119). In fact, Buddhism was in many respects a social criticism of the Hindu caste system.

And be it woman, be it man, for whom such chariot doth wait, by
that same car into Nirvana's presence shall they come
(Kabilsingh, 1984: 13).

During the time of Prince Gotama a number of women entered the *sangha*. The story of Ubbagiri is one in which she mourns the loss of her child, until Gotama points out to her that it is part of life to die. A brief discourse with Gotama "turned Ubbagiri from a lamenting mother into an *arahat*" (Jootla, cited in Horner, 1988: 12). Another woman, *Patacara*, lost her entire family: her husband, two small children, parents and a brother in various accidents and she went insane with sorrow. It was Gotama's compassion that taught her to come to terms with this tragedy; in order to cope with her sorrow she became a *stream enterer*¹. Later she was ordained a *bhikkuni*. *Khema*, queen of King *Bimbisara* was overcome with vanity about her own beauty, before Gotama created before her a vivid image as in a mirror of a beautiful woman fanning him. Yet, before her very eyes, this image seemed to grow older and older. On the recitation of a verse of wisdom by Gotama, *Khema* became a *stream enterer* (Horner, 1989: 306). She went through all the stages of enlightenment to attain *arahatship*. Prince Gotama, as noted in the Pali scriptures, was also seen as a great healer and physician to women. This is evident in the story of *Kisagotami*. Her experience of *dukkha* relates specifically to her relationships: she mentions the pain of child- birth, death of all her family members and the social consequences of her widowhood. Hinduism demanded that a widow should absent herself from domestic ceremonies, such as birth, naming, marriage and death as widows were considered inauspicious omens (Horner, 1989: 72). In Buddhism, although a woman was left there was no alteration to her social status (the widow did not suffer moral degradation though her husband was dead. She was not considered to be a bad omen).

¹ 'Stream enterer (Sotapana), the first stage in the realization of Nirvana. (Horner, 1989:306)

Gotama, had great compassion for Kisagotami²

Going along, about to bring forth, I saw my husband dead; having given birth on the path, (I had) not yet arrived at my own house. Two sons dead and a husband dead upon the path for miserable (me); mother and father and brother were burning upon one pyre. O miserable woman, with family annihilated, immeasurable pain has been suffered by you; and your tears have been shed for many thousands of births. Then I saw the flesh of my sons eaten in the midst of the cemetery; with my family destroyed, despised by all, with husband dead, I attained the undying (*Therigatha* 215-221 in Blackstone, 1998: 43).

Blackstone states that in the *Therigatha* accounts, unlike in the *Theragatha*, references made to *dukkha*, relate specifically to her relationships: pain of childbirth, but her greatest suffering is from the death of her family members and the social consequences of her widowhood is described in great detail and with great compassion. It also evokes a strong emotional response. Even now it is difficult not to sympathize with Kisagotami's description of loss and despair. In the *Theragatha*'s descriptions of pre-renunciation experiences of hardship in social relationships, there is simply no comparison with the extreme grief expressed by Kisagotami, nor is there a discussion of the social consequences of family death. The *Therigatha*'s descriptions of pre renunciation experiences revolve around relationships, while the *Theragatha* de-emphasizes the pre renunciation experiences of the *theras* (elders) (Blackstone, 1998:44).

In the *Therigatha* Mutta revels in her freedom by referring to her renounced domestic responsibilities saying, "Free am I, oh, so free am I by being freed by means of the three crooked things: the mortar, pestle, and my crooked husband" (*Therigatha* 11, in Blackstone, 1998: 44). *Thera* Sumanagala glorifies in his freedom from farm labour: Free am I, free am I, oh, so free am I from the three crooked things: the sickles, the ploughs and the curved spades. The struggles that women faced by *alms women* can be identified. With freedom from secular roles Mutta and Sumangala have attained a religious goal. While Mutta includes her relationship with her husband as one secular responsibility, Sumanagala admits no such relationship (Blackstone, 1998: 45).

² The Buddha's advise to Kisa-Gotami "Go, enter the town, and at any house where yet no man hath died, thence bring a little mustard seed." The truth grasped, Kisa-Gotami became a stream- entrant and asked for ordination (Horner, 1989: 305).

Women's Struggle for Liberation

Mahaprajapati, the Buddha's foster mother, took the eight chief rules (*garudhamma*). The followers had to conform to the eight important conditions imposed by the Buddha when he allowed the *bhikkhuni sangha* to be established (Horner, 1989:118). The rule that proved crucial to the continuation of the *bhikkhuni sangha* was the sixth of the eight: valid higher ordination (*upasampada*) for women had to be performed by members of both *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni sanghas*. This was a problem faced in the establishing the tradition of the *bhikkhuni*. The *garudhamma* (eight rules) were as follows;

“An almswoman, even if of a hundred years standing, shall make Salutation to, shall rise up in the presence of, shall bow down before, and shall perform all proper duties towards an almsman if only just initiated. An alms woman is not to spend the rainy season in a district in which there is no almsman. Every half month, an almswoman is to await from the Chapter of almsmen two things, asking as to (the date of) the *Uposatha* ceremony, and the (time when the almsman) will come to give the exhortation. After keeping the rainy season, the almswoman is to hold *pavarana* (to enquire whether any fault can be laid to her charge) before both *sangha* has, with respect to three matters, namely what has been seen, what has been heard, and what has been suspected. An almswoman who has been guilty of a serious offence is to undergo the *manatta* discipline towards both *sanghas*, When an almswoman, as novice, has been trained for two years in the six rules, she is to ask leave for the *Upasampada* initiation from both *sangha*, an almswoman is on no pretext to revile or abuse an almsman. From henceforth official admonition by almswomen of almsmen is forbidden, whereas the official admonition of almswomen by almsmen is not forbidden. These are rules never to be transgressed in (Horner, 1989: 119-20).

These rules contradict Prince Gotama's admonition that all people should be treated as being equal. There is much scholarly debate about the historicity of this account. The social world of ancient India was certainly patriarchal. Blackstone (1998: 118) suggests, his hesitancy in opening the *sangha* to women, the subservience he required as a condition for women's ordination, and his stipulation that women dwell communally because of the problem of rape contributed to the obstacles women faced. It is even suggested that he shared his culture's devaluation of women, even though he acknowledged their capacity to attain the highest goal. The effect of social disrespect, enforced subordination and neglect by the Buddha is reflected in the alms women's understanding of liberation as struggle. The lifestyle of a renunciant offered women an

alternative, although women were subordinate to men. However, we do not only hear of the women's difficulties, we hear how they overcame them and also of their triumphs and their compassion for individuals caught up in worldly life, and their hope that they will eventually attain a liberating perspective.

Mahaprajapati is said to have asked the Gotama, through the help of Ananda, if the observance of the rule of seniority should not hold good for the almsmen and almswomen according to the status, and not according to their sex.

This is impossible, Ananda, and unallowable that I should so order... You are not, almsmen, to bow down before women...or to perform towards them those duties that are proper from an inferior to a superior (Homer, 1989: 121).

The status of women would certainly have changed had she succeeded. However, this discrepancy confined women to a subordinate position in the Buddhist community and emphasised the value attached to salutation and through it to the position of the male (Homer, 1989: 121). The majority of female renunciants do not believe that the Buddha could have subordinated learned almswomen to novice males. They feel that it was done by the early male *sangha*, to control the almswomen, and it continued although the status of *bhikkhuni* lapsed. Blackstone argues that even today in Theravada countries where the *bhikkhuni sangha* has died out, the same story continues to be cited by both those opposed to, and in support of, the reinstitution of *bhikkhuni* ordination (Blackstone, 1998: 39).

Bhikkhuni Kusuma (in Tsomo, 2000: 7) has discussed inaccuracies about *bhikkhunis* recorded in the Buddhist canon, particularly in the *Chullavagga* text. Reference is made to the *garudhammas* by the Buddha, which states “ if you Gotami, undertake the acceptance of these eight rules, then that in itself will be your ordination”, and she accepts the ordination from the Buddha. Soon after, Gotami, is supposed to have questioned the Buddha about the Sakyan women who should be ordained. The Buddha replies, “O bhikkhus, I allow bhikkhunis to receive upasampada from *bhikkhus*”, thus, the other women were ordained by *bhikkhus* (Tsomo, 2000: 7). *Bhikkhuni* Kusuma argues that this makes it clear that it was only Mahaprajapati who accepted the *garudhamma*, and not the other women. It asserts the view that Sakyan women and Mahaprajapati were ordained under very different procedures.

Horner (1989: 154) argues, the almswomen occasionally went to the forest to meditate. Since there is not much literature, about the environment or solitude of almswomen, it is possible they were prohibited to live in the forests. The story of the rape of Uppalavanna may have prohibited the almswomen from living in the forest. Horner (1989) suggests, that the Buddha himself may have brought this to the notice of King Pasenadi of Kosala, of whom he requested a place of residence for the community of almswomen, in order to protect them from evil minded men who are taken over by lust and become disrespectful and violent towards the almswomen. The king built a residence³ for the women on one side of the city (Horner, 1989:155-156).

According to Blackstone, out of the seventy-three poems in the *Therigatha*, eighteen (24.7%) contain social interactions and they all occur in a context of confrontation and temptation with the pleasures of sexual intimacy. In the *Theragatha*, of the two hundred and sixty four poems, only eighteen (8%) portray similar situations. The figures are misleading, she asserts (1998: 51). The analysis suggests that while the female poets were concerned with social issues, the male poets consistently de-emphasized social interaction, which means their emphasis was on the current situation, while for the *theris* renunciation was a transformation.

A concept common in some parts of Sri Lanka was that being born a woman is a consequence of sin in previous lifetimes. Traditionally, a common aspiration among women was to be a man in a future birth, for only a man could become a Buddha. This however has not deterred women from becoming renunciants (Obeyesekere, 1995).

Feminist scholars denounce the Buddhist texts as male centered (Gross 1993: 257). The point is that these were not Gotama's words if they were written 300 years later by *bhikkhus* who wanted to keep power to themselves. Why are these rules in the text at all? If we look back to the earlier times when Hindu traditions discriminated against women, then it is not surprising. Horner argues that the rule is the outcome of an age old and widespread tradition, that it is a provision to keep women in their place, which means looking after the children and the husband and taking *dane* to the *bhikkhus*, which reinforces male domination. Hinduism influenced Horner herself, as she makes

³Excavations at Savathi found evidence of this as it excavated the *vihara* known as the Jetavana (Horner, 1989: 156).

excuses for the bhikkhus for this rule, as women co-operated with men in their subordination. It seems more like a good way of keeping the women under control by the men.

Buddhist women faced obstacles in their spiritual lives, in religious practices, lifestyle customs, instructional opportunities, meditation forms and institutional structures of which were freely available to laymen and to *bhikkhus*. Kabil Singh (1991: 29) suggests that subordination was a strategy to avoid disapproval in the Hindu social climate of the time and to ensure women's protection within the *sangha* community. She also blames the Hindu influence, for discriminating against women on the male members of the *sangha* who compiled the official texts 300 years after the death of the Buddha.

It is argued that Gotama was aware of women's problems and he intended to prevent some of the worst offences (such as the rape of Uppalavanna).

The "homeless" life was praised and idealized as the ultimate escape from domestic problems and mental miseries. Buddhist texts reflect voices that expressed concerns for the male dominated monastic order, since the death of the Buddha, and how to deal with regulating a lifestyle suitable for both bhikkhus and bhikkhunis (Sponberg, 1992: 23).

It reflects the Hindu influence on Buddhism. These attitudes seem to have influenced women. Some of the above ideas are challenged in a message in the Kalama Sutta in Theravada Buddhism. It emphasizes that one should be critical of all forms of authority. Gotama advises the kalamas who were doubting all thought systems that were going around at that time, and advises the kalamas not to be led by reports, or tradition, hearsay, or what was taught by a teacher (Piyadassi, 1991: 90). The Kalama Sutta invites each person to seek religious truth for him or herself. Gotama encouraged his followers to challenge his own authority.

O kalamas⁴, when you know for yourselves that certain things are unwholesome and wrong and bad, then give them up... And when you know for yourselves that certain things are wholesome and good, then accept them and follow them (Dharmasiri, 1997:139).

What was the status of the early *bhikkhunis*? They probably had a very difficult time, considering that we do not have much information about them in Sri Lanka yet. It is no

⁴ This message to the Kalamas is contained in the Kalamma Sutta. Dharmasiri, 1997:139

surprise therefore of the demise of the *bhikkhunis* in the eleventh century. The gender imbalance in Buddhist societies, gendered interpretations of Buddhist tenets demand our attention in transforming outmoded attitudes and structures.

Early History of Female Renunciants in Sri Lanka

Nicholas & Paranavitana (1961: 51) states, the first emissaries from India bringing the *dhamma* to Sri Lanka were Mahinda and his sister Sangamitta (250-210 B.C.E). They brought the famous *Bo* sapling (a branch of the tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment). The monastic organisation (the *sangha*) flourished at Anuradhapura, the capital for about 1200 years. According to the *Mahavamsa*⁵ Sri Lankan *bhikkhunis* went to China by sea in the 5th century and established the Buddhist tradition, which still exist there which continues even today as Nagata (1999: 242) says, In Mahayana tradition, by contrast, the nuns [sic] order has existed uninterrupted, with claims of continuity back to 5th century CE roots in Sri Lanka. On this basis Fo Kuang Shan movement has the authority to re-ordain Theravada *bhikkhunis*:

As a result of the eleventh century BCE Chola invasion of Sri Lanka, the original order of Theravada nuns was destroyed, and unlike that of the monks, [sic] whose order was restored with the aid of the Siamese *vinaya*, it was never resurrected. Since at least the beginning of the twentieth century, women, both Southeast Asian and Western, have made efforts; to regain the lost order, but to date they have been only recognized as novices, with limited privileges. Whereas the monks [sic] are expected to take 248 precepts as qualifications for full status and privilege as *bhikkhus*, aspiring nuns [sic] are only permitted to take a maximum of ten or more often eight (Nagata, 199: 242).

The *bhikkhu sangha* suffered the same fate as the *bhikkhunis* but King Vijayabahu brought the *bhikkhus* from Burma. It is said "... there were not five *bhikkhus* left to form a quorum, so the Burmese *bhikkhus* established a new line of succession..."(Gombrich, 1991: 37). This tradition continues to this day. However, as the *bhikkhuni sangha* was not re-established in Sri Lanka, the *bhikkhus* who belonged to the high caste made sure they were the only preserver of Buddhism. Until 1815 no one

⁵ The most important literary source of Sri Lanka is the chronicle *Mahavamsa* and the continuation of it is known as the *Culavamsa*. It was compiled by a learned *thera* named Mahanama, who drew on earlier literary sources for his information. The four main themes are the Buddha's visits to Ceylon, Indo-Aryan colonisation of the island, the introduction of Buddhism and the epic of *Dutugamunu* (Nicholas & Paranavitana, 1961: 11-12).

challenged the issue of admitting 'low caste' men into the *sangha* or women into the *bhikkhuni sangha*. Theravada Buddhists in Sri Lanka assert that they are the conservators of 'true' Buddhism. This is the "Mahavamsa view"⁶ which:

Defines the world historical role of Sri Lanka as the strong hold of Buddhism and Buddhist civilization. The date of Vijaya's landing is synchronized with the day of the Buddha's *parinibbana* (death) and the Buddha tells the king of the gods of Vijaya's landing, and asks the latter to protect the prince and his followers because 'in Lanka, O lord of gods, will my religion be established...' It is also the view that legitimises the idea that Sri Lankan Buddhists have a sacred mission,⁷ which is to maintain the purity of the Buddha's message, and disseminate his teachings in a world that is changing (Seneviratne, 1997: 7-8).

The nationalist resurgence of the nineteenth and twentieth century, and the popular imagination fashioned the image of the island's past. The sacred trust of the great tradition is a matter of myth rather than history. The city of Anuradhapura and the other ancient cities of Ceylon [sic] were extensively described in such works, often as bearing witness to the past greatness of a people.

Anuradhapura⁸ was also one of the most photographed sites of the South Asian colonies. 'Discovered' in the jungle, and embodying many secrets of the past. The ruined cities appealed to the European romantic imagination (Seneviratne, 1997: 32).

⁶ Mahavamsa is the text drawn upon by all modern writings on the early history, archaeology, of the island. A version of the text was translated into English in 1833 by Upham and in 1837 by Turnover. He covered 24 centuries of Sri Lanka's history. The discovery of such a history of the island was tantalizing to Europeans and was investigated; for this island had until then been thought of as being without a proper history (Seneviratne, 1997:30).

⁷ A Sinhala Buddhist nation came to be imagined through history. The *Mahavamsa* became a critical text in European investigations. Writers of 19th century memoirs, travel guides, histories referred to it. Today, it not only retains this status, but is also a key text in legitimising nationalist readings of the island's past. (Seneviratne, 1997: 31) See also Nissan and Stirrat 1987.

⁸ History as contained in the Mahavamsa, was the history of Anuradhapura, the island's first royal and monastic centre. The British government praised itself for discovering this lost city from the jungle, otherwise it would be unknown they said. This was when the Sinhalese claimed that the city was never lost as Buddhists throughout the centuries visited the city on pilgrimages. Harischandra campaigned to reappropriate it from the colonial power (Seneviratne, 1997:33).