



MDS 87/88 REP 16

Institute of
Social Studies

BREAKING BARRIERS

MOBILISATION OF POOR RURAL WOMEN IN SRI LANKA

A Research Paper presented by

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(The Netherlands)

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for obtaining the Degree of
Master of Arts in Development Studies

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The Hague, 1989

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This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies; the views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to record my sincere gratitude to all who inspired and supported me to realise this study. Especially I am grateful to the women of the Pragathaseeli Kantha Peramuna and in particular to my sister, friend and colleague Daya Ariyawathie.

My special gratitude is further to the Devasarana Development Centre, in particular Sarath Fernando, the All Lanka Peasants Congress, the Women's Action Committee, Wicky Meynen, Rachel Kurian, R. Cheran, Zandra Abeln and Hanneke Sprong.

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INTRODUCTION

i. Research Problem

The central theme of this study is mobilisation of poor rural women in Sri Lanka. 'Mobilisation' is defined as the process of people bringing together resources needed for action to achieve a common interest (Tilly 1978).

The purpose of this study is to analyse opportunities for mobilisation on class and gender based interests in the rural society of Sri Lanka. 'Opportunities' indicate facilitating factors as well as limiting factors which occur. Class and gender based interests are observed to be the major interests of poor rural women, although not the only ones.

I have chosen Sri Lanka because I lived and worked there for more than three years, and where I developed a sincere commitment with the situation of the poor peasantry and particularly with the women among them. This study is therefore also an attempt to couple theoretical knowledge and practical experience.

My interest to study 'mobilisation' springs from my personal involvement, not only professionally, but also as a participant in mobilisation processes myself. Being involved in socio-political activism since my teenager years, I know from experience how difficult it is to study mobilisation processes. The explanation for my own participation has changed during the years, depending on the change of the ideological climate. I only know that I have always been convinced that the interest of the organisation or movement I joined was my interest.

Despite the fact that I realise that with studying mobilisation we should take into account the unpredictable element inherent in human action, it is a challenge for me to explore a theoretical framework to analyse a mobilisation process. The theoretical framework that I developed has been the result of the interaction of my practical experience in Sri Lanka and the literature which I studied on this subject.

The basic principle underlying this paper is that I believe that every human being is an individual who is able to decide on his or her own actions.

However, I also understand that every human being is part of a social structure of power relations, which determines his or her action to a great extent. In this context, it is evident that the individuals who have more power, have more choices and chances to decide on their life and to act on their own interests than the have-nots. In this context, it also occurs that powerless individuals join for a common interest which leads to collective action to change a situation to a more satisfactory one. When I worked with women from poor rural classes in Sri Lanka, I realised how little choices and chances they have had to decide on their own life and act on their own interests.

It happens to poor rural women in certain areas of Sri Lanka that there suddenly appears a government officer to announce that they will be removed from their village, where they have lived already for generations, because the land is allocated to a multinational company.

It happens to poor rural women in Sri Lanka that their cottage industries like making ropes and baskets of natural materials suddenly lose their market because of an inflow of cheap and nicely coloured nylon stuff from other Asian countries. It happens to poor rural women in Sri Lanka that they must support the leading political party openly or do free labour for landlords/traders, otherwise they may lose a share of the scarce resources available to them.

It happens to poor rural women in Sri Lanka that they work under bad conditions to earn a meagre income to sustain the family and that when they come home after a long working day, there is still a lot of domestic work waiting for them.

It happens to poor rural women in Sri Lanka that they are easy victims of rape and other (sexual) violence.

It happens to poor rural women in Sri Lanka that they are practically 'invisible' in statistics and policy papers.

It happens to poor rural women in Sri Lanka that their interest is practically absent in the male dominated political parties and unions.

To analyse opportunities for mobilisation on class and gender based interests in such a situation where these women hardly have resources and where efforts at mobilisation are very easily suppressed, appears not to be a hopeful

enterprise. But my experience with a poor rural women's organisation in Sri Lanka showed that there existed such a mobilisation how marginal and fragile these initiatives sometimes were. My experiences also exposed that opportunities for mobilisation on class and gender based interests varied enormously all over Sri Lanka. There are various factors that divide the poor rural women in Sri Lanka, particularly ethnicity (and to a lesser extent caste) and regional development imbalances, which influenced the formation of class and gender relations. However, there are also factors that unite poor rural women and which may go beyond factors that divide them. The case study at the end which records the mobilisation process of poor rural women on class and gender based interests, should be seen in this context. The case study at the end should be understood as the closure of the circle of theory and practice.

ii Methodology and Organisation of the Paper

Chapter I contains the theoretical framework including certain central concepts and definitions which I used as tools to analyse the opportunities for mobilisation of poor rural women in Sri Lanka and in particular in the case study of village M. I developed this theoretical framework from an interaction of a literature study and my own practical experiences.

The major definitions to analyse the process of mobilisation are taken from Charles Tilly (1978), who has done a lot of historical research on mobilisation and collective action. A central concept which is used by me is the concept of 'opportunity' which is taken from Tilly (1978) and which concerns the factors that facilitate and limit the process of mobilisation. To define 'common interests' I found the distinction of interests in 'objective' and 'subjective' interests made by Balbus (1971) very useful. Balbus argues that the aggregation of 'objective' interests (defined externally to the individual consciousness) and 'subjective' interests (consciously experienced interests) is a major condition for mobilisation. Objective interests are explained by him as similar conditions of people which affect their situation irrespective their individual will because they are the result of social relations in the society.

With several Marxist and feminist scholars and a scholar on ethnicity, I try to identify the social relations which affect the condition of poor rural women (their objective interests). And because I know from experience that the reality of poor rural women is very complex, I also studied various literature to understand how the various social relations that affect poor rural women, inter- relate with each other.

Chapter II deals with poor rural women in the society of Sri Lanka. In the first part of this chapter I will, after a brief socio- economic overview, apply the theoretical framework to analyse the historical process of the social formation of the agrarian society of Sri Lanka to identify the 'objective' interests of poor rural women. I also try to identify the opportunities for mobilisation on these interests for poor rural women. This first part helps to explain the complex situation of poor rural women in Sri Lanka.

In the second part of this chapter, I will explore the concrete characteristics of rural poverty, how the interests of poor rural women in Sri Lanka look like in concrete. I make use of several surveys on poverty and rural women in Sri Lanka.

Chapter III deals with the state and poor rural women in Sri Lanka. Again I use the theoretical framework of Chapter I to analyse the role of the state in the formation of the social relations which affect poor rural women and in the creation of facilitating and limiting factors for mobilisation of poor rural women on class and gender based interests. I will analyse in this chapter the nature of the state (the interests represented in the state) and the development policies of the state.

Chapter IV analyses the question whether the numerous non-governmental initiatives in Sri Lanka, which are concerned with the plight of poor rural women, really represent the interests of these women. What role do the NGOs play in the creation of factors that facilitate or limit the process for mobilisation of these women on class and gender based interests? I will study the customary women's societies, the developmentalist NGOs, the workers and peasant unions and the women's movement in Sri Lanka.

Chapter V is the case study. This chapter analyses the process of mobilisation on class and gender based interests of a group of poor rural women of village M in Sri Lanka. I selected this case study because the women of this group are not only organised at village level, some of them are also activists in a nation wide organisation of poor rural women to challenge class and gender based interest conflicts at macro level. The case study is based on information which I gathered from a village survey in 1981, from my own records of discussions, interviews and observations during the period 1980-1986 and from the continuous correspondence with the women's group during times of my absence. The purpose of this case study is to analyse a concrete situation with the theoretical framework which I developed in Chapter I. Chapters II-IV are the context of the case study. This last chapter therefore should be understood as a closure of

the circle of theory and practice. In the end of this chapter I make an attempt to summarise the opportunities, i.e. the facilitating and limiting factors, which I observed in the mobilisation process of the women of village M.

This study will end with a conclusion which summarises my major findings which concern the opportunities for mobilisation on class and gender based interests of poor rural women in Sri Lanka.

iii Limitations of the Study

Of course and unfortunately, I met many limitations while studying 'mobilisation of poor rural women in Sri Lanka'. One major limitation was that it was very difficult to find studies which concerned class and gender based interests of poor rural women in Sri Lanka. Most studies were biased towards more powerful interests such as ethnic interests, interests of middle and rich peasants, interests of the (urban) 'proletariat', interests of the national government and moreover interests of the masculine gender.

And the few studies, which were concerned with the gender based interests of women, were often not concerned with the class based interests of poor rural women. The class and gender based interests of poor rural women seemed to be practically absent in the literature available to me. To illustrate this problem I want to quote the Sri Lankan social scientist S.T. Hettige (1984) who writes in the introduction of his book Wealth, Power and Prestige:

"I had no access to every house at any time of the day. Most of the poor villagers, particularly the labourers, spend most of the day time away from their homes, such houses are either closed or watched by children during the day. When the parents return home often after dark, they are tired and ready to go to bed soon after the evening meal. In well-to-do houses only children below school going age and women are left behind during day time. It is impolite for a man to enter into houses on such occasions" (1984:23).

Another and related limitation to study mobilisation of poor rural women in Sri Lanka and the case study in particular, is the fact that I was an outsider (of a different class and a non-Sri Lankan). This of course coloured my view.

However, during the process of mobilisation of the women of village M I had become a part of this process myself and the continuous dialogue with organisations of poor rural women, and the one of village M in particular, was of great importance to become a 'half-insider'. The report of the case study is read and approved upon by some women of the women's society of village M.

In this line I want to quote Tilly (1978) who writes:

"the trouble with studying 'opportunity' is that it is hard to reconstruct the opportunities realistically available to the group at the time" (1978:7, see also chapter I).

CHAPTER I

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter an attempt will be made to outline a theoretical framework and to identify and examine certain central concepts and definitions, as tools to analyse the opportunities for mobilisation of poor women in the rural society of Sri Lanka and in particular in the case study of the women's society of village M.

I.1 Mobilisation, Opportunity, Interests

To define the concept of **mobilisation** I refer to the definition of Charles Tilly, a scholar whose contribution to the theoretical understanding of mobilisation is based on an extensive use of historical research on collective action. Tilly defines mobilisation as

"the process by which a group acquires collective control over the resources needed for action" (Tilly 1978:7).

Tilly mentions resources like labour power, goods, weapons, votes and "whatever is usable in acting share interests" (Tilly 1978:7). I suggest it is important to consider additional resources such as personal experience, capacities and skills and personal relationships. Mobilisation leads to **collective action**, which is defined by Tilly as

"a people's acting together in pursuit of common interests" (Tilly 1978:7).

Organisation is the instrument, that

"aspect of a group's structure, which most directly affects its capacity to act on its own interests" (Tilly 1978:7).

It therefore follows that **mobilisation** is the process by which a group goes from being a passive collection of individuals to an active participant in public life (Tilly 1978:69). Tilly makes three crude distinctions of mobilisation: defensive, offensive and preparatory mobilisation.

"Defensive" Mobilisation occurs when a group experiences a threat from outside, such as a decline of (real) wages, eviction from their lands, severe discrimination, violence.

"Offensive" Mobilisation occurs when a group pools resources in response to chances which appear to achieve the interests of its members. (This may even lead to the transformation of an unwanted social structure).

"Preparatory" Mobilisation is the combination of both. Preparatory mobilisation often began defensively. Examples are workers and peasant unions (Tilly 1978:73,74).

Tilly explains that the analysis of mobilisation implies to study "the ways that groups acquire resources and make them available for collective action" (Tilly 1978:7).

Tilly also introduces the concept of **opportunity** as a crucial element in the mobilisation process. Opportunity concerns

"the relationship between a group and the world around it. Changes in the relationship sometimes threaten the group's interests. They sometimes provide new chances to act on those interests" (Tilly 1978:7).

'Opportunity' indicates facilitating as well as limiting factors for mobilisation.

'Opportunity' implies that there are facilitating factors for mobilisation: the group is able to reduce the claims by others on resources of its members and to build a type of organisational structure and a programme which corresponds to the perceived interests of its members. In the process of mobilisation a group can increase its resources for mobilisation such as organisational experience, increase of membership, support from 'outsiders'.

'Opportunity' implies that there are limiting factors for mobilisation: the group is not able to make available more resources for its members and it can even lose resources. A loss of resources is caused by a transfer of resources which are claimed by more powerful groups such as money lenders, landlords, TNCs, husbands. But also by groups within the group which use collective resources for their own particular interest, like the leadership, male members of the group or a particular caste within the group. Resources also get lost due to destruction by, for instance, a drought or neglectance, but also by war or repression. The consequence of loss of resources is demobilisation.

In the case of poor people, i.e. those who have the least resources available, the consequence of loss of resources may imply a direct threat to their subsistence. For poor people are resources for mobilisation in direct competition with their subsistence needs.

For the poor mobilisation is very costly, in material as well as in immaterial sense. Before poor people will employ some of their scarce resources for mobilisation, they will first consider the gains and losses which are acceptable or non-acceptable. Tilly mentions three factors which play a role into this consideration:

1. The extent of shared interests of the group in interactions with other groups (which means a consolidation of resources, but sometimes also more claims, see point 2);
2. The extent to which the group forms a distinct category (common interest) and a dense network (a homogenous and horizontally structured group); and
3. The extent of power from outside which is a threat to the group (its subjection to repression) (Tilly 1978:71).

To identify the opportunity for mobilisation of poor rural women it is important to

1. identify their common interests and in how far they share interests with others (women, poor men); and,
2. examine in how far these poor rural women are able and willing to employ resources for collective action in pursuit of their common interests.

To identify the common interests of poor rural women, I found the distinction of interests in objective and subjective interests made by Balbus (1971) very useful. Balbus makes a distinction between **objective** and **subjective** interests. Balbus defines **subjective interests** as interests which determine a person's perception, what a person feels, thinks, does... (Balbus 1971:153). He defines **objective interests** as interests defined by a standard external to the individual consciousness, "which measure or observe an effect by something on an individual" (normative standards) (Balbus 1971:152).

Balbus argues that the aggregation of objective and subjective interests is a major condition for mobilisation. In his explanation of the distinction between objective and subjective interests, Balbus follows the analysis of Karl Marx, who emphasises the importance of social relations in the society which condition

the life chances of the individual, irrespective of the individual will. This is contrary to the Liberal theoreticians (the classical as well as the pluralists) who define interests purely as a person's or a group's subjective perception and who understand the society as a collection of individuals who are in continuous competition with each other.

Interpreting the analysis of Karl Marx, Balbus explains objective interests as "similar conditions which affect the life chances of individuals, whether they perceive such an interest or not" (Balbus 1971:167). Karl Marx understands the society as a structure of social relations, which imply "a domination-subjection relationship, which produces a conflict of interests, which act as the motor of social change" (Balbus 1971:168).

I.2 Class, Ethnicity and Gender Relations and Interests

Karl Marx identifies class interest as the basic and most fundamental objective interest in the society. Balbus explains Karl Marx' concept of class as an

"aggregate of individuals whose life chances are similarly affected by their common position in the division of labour" (Balbus 1971:168).

Marx analyses that the division of labour, which is the result of an historical process, will lead to the formation of two antagonistic social groups, classes, a class of appropriators ("capitalist class") and a class of appropriated ("proletariat" or "working class"). The group of appropriators is able to extract "surplus-value" (labour) from the group of direct producers for its own accumulation and therefore reduces the capacities of the direct producers to accumulate and reproduce themselves (Fisher 1970:Chapters III, V). Class formation is the necessary condition for the emergence of a class conflict to produce a (the!) major social change, i.e., a change in the society structure. Karl Marx understands that this process is not a sufficient condition. He says that "a class is only born in the class struggle" (Fisher 1970:73). The development of a class conflict requires the emergence of class consciousness. Balbus writes:

"Marx called a class 'an sich', a class-in-itself or a class in the sense of an aggregate of individuals similarly situated in the division of labour and whose life chances are thus similarly affected by similar objective conditions - must be transformed into a class 'fur sich' - a class-for-itself or a community of individuals who are aware of their common interest in opposition to another class. Classes in the full sense then, are manifestly political entities' (Balbus 1971:170, see also Fisher 1970:Chapters III, V).

Paul Brass (1985) in his analysis of ethnic groups as social groups, supports the importance of analysing the society as a structure of social relations and the distinction of 'objective' and 'subjective' interests. Brass says that many ethnic groups would be ignored as potential political entities when interests would be interpreted as subjective perceptions only, like the Liberals understand them. Brass says that classes and ethnic groups

"are unlike concrete membership groups in that they have to be analysed both as 'objective categories' and as 'subjective communities'" (Brass 1985:16).

An ethnic 'category' is defined by Brass as

"any group of people dissimilar from other people in terms of objective cultural criteria, and that contains within its membership either in principle or in practice the elements for a complete division of labour and for reproduction".

He defines an ethnic 'community' as an ethnic category that

"has adopted one or more of its marks of cultural distinctness and used them as symbols to create internal cohesion and to differentiate itself from other ethnic groups" (Brass 1985:17).

To become a political entity, it is necessary that an ethnic category transforms into an ethnic community.

Barbara Rogers (1980) defines gender as a social cultural distinction of two social groups, the feminine gender and the masculine gender (Rogers 1980:12). Gender relations imply an historical grown formation in which the masculine gender is able to subordinate the feminine gender and therefore reduces the

capacity of control by the feminine gender of her own resources and reproduction.

Gender relations are most clearly manifested in the sexual division of labour (SDL) and in the ideology (mythology) around its biological sexuality/sex. The SDL indicates the differential allocation of tasks to men and women in the productive as well as in the reproductive sphere, and the differential valuation of these male and female assigned tasks. It also indicates a differential access to and control over resources (among others: Deere & Leon de Leal 1981; Sen 1982). The feminine gender is surrounded by myths and symbols which justify the sexual division of labour and which, for example, stress 'the home (as the basis of reproduction) as the female domain' and 'special female qualities' like 'spiritual strength', 'moral superunity' and 'emotional sensitivity' as a woman's main social power (among others: Coomaraswamy 1984). Subordination to the masculine gender is, in general, expressed in the symbol of the self-sacrificing woman, sacrificing herself for the needs of her male-headed family (whether nuclear family, community or even state). This is, in most societies, the primal or highest status assigned to the feminine gender. In contrast the prostitute and the 'independent' woman are generally considered to be inferior and are given a very low status in the society. The woman who controls her sexuality is, in general, seen as a threat to the masculine gender (magic power, witch craft, etc.). To suppress woman's sexuality is therefore also seen as the most efficient way to control the feminine gender. The woman's sexuality is suppressed with social sanctions and/or violence (rape, removal of clitoris, etc.) (see among others: Dworking 1987).

The process of transformation of objective interests into subjective interests is difficult, particularly in the case of gender. Historiography reports that, class- and ethnic groups are dynamic. People can experience class mobility and classes also can disappear. Similarly people also can change ethnic groups and ethnic groups can disappear. **But historiography has not reported about people**

that have succeeded in changing their gender (with the exception of transsexuals) or where gender relations have disappeared.*

One of the most well known records from history about an attempt at gender change is the story of Jeanne d'Arc (Joan of Arc) who, by the order of God, gave up her femininity to lead a male army and who routed the English from French territory. She was sentenced to death by the Inquisition for this attempt at gender change. She could only rescue herself from the death penalty by giving up her masculine behaviour. Jeanne d'Arc resisted this till the end. In prison she was raped (after she was forced to wear feminine cloths) loosing her virginity, which was seen as "the key to her strength and power; if she were robbed of it, she would be disarmed, the spell would be broken, she would sink to the common level of women" (Michelet, Jules: Joan of Arc, 1967, quoted from Dworking 1987:122).

Recent historical studies have shown that women have participated in class struggles, nationalist movements and in ethnic conflicts. However, the emergence of a women's (feminist) movement is only a recent phenomenon. This is also the reason that the 'example effect' is slow. There has not been any major successful women's struggle which could give spirit and hope to women to organise themselves and which at the same time has been based on gender interests. Another factor which hinders the growth of a women's (feminist) movement is that it affects the most intimate personal relationships between human beings, such as those between a husband-wife, brother-sister, lovers, friends, which are not necessarily experienced as oppressive and which may even be experienced as stimulating and liberating.

*Hindu mythology reports several events of gender change by divine powers, the Buddhist religion preaches that a human being can change gender through re-birth and the Christian mythology reports about angels, beings without gender. But I consider these features as super-human, beyond the social relations in the society.

The process of transformation of objective interests into subjective interests is, especially in the case of gender, a very complex process. Brass states that there is a multiplicity of ways in which economic and cultural categories became subjective communities and/or concrete membership groups such as unions, parties, movements or even sovereign states (Brass 1985:16). Brass warns for 'reification' or 'objectification' of interest groups. By 'reification' he means "the tendency to attribute to mere categories a reality that they may not have or that may be merely temporary". By 'objectification' he means "the assumption that one or another category, class or ethnic group, represents a primal reality or has a greater significance or is more 'fundamental' than others" (Brass 1985:11). He alludes this warning in particular to the Marxists who argue that 'class' is the most fundamental objective category and that other categories, like ethnic groups, can be only understood in relation to class formation (the so called 'false consciousness') (Brass 1985:10). The feminine gender as an 'objective category' has historically practically been 'invisible' in social analysis. Only recently women have emerged as a separate category in official statistics and as a target group of research. In the analysis of the Liberal (pluralist) theoreticians, women have been ignored as an interest group until they organised themselves as a pressure group. In the Liberal view, women 'are behind' with men and it is considered that to close this gap is the main interest of women. Gender relations are generally not questioned, just as class relations are not. It is observed that it were particularly middle class women who participated in the women's rights movement to advocate for equal rights (Mukherji 1984; Maguire 1984; Keuper & Smetsers 1988). The Marxists were the first analysts, who recognised women as an 'objective category' (Coward 1983). However, they perceived the situation of women as being conditioned by the division of labour in society and the development of capitalism. They considered women as a special category within class and did not question gender relations. Marxists stated that women's liberation from male subordination would be realised with the entrance of women in the public productive sphere, as a result of the development of capitalism and the process of class formation. Women and men, then would fight on an equal (class) basis against capitalism. Among contemporary Marxists there is a tendency to understand domestic and subsistence

work also as contributions to capital accumulation and that therefore, women did not necessarily have to enter the public production sphere to work for and to fight against capitalism. This debate remains controversial among Marxist theoreticians. Most Marxists consider 'class' as the major objective interest of women. And indeed does the working class history report about the active participation of women in the working class struggle. These Marxists, however, do not question the fact that working class based unions and political parties are led by men. They also do not question why women are generally differently affected by the development of capitalism than men. Besides, none of the classless societies, which our history knows, did prove to be free from gender subordination (Coward 1983; Keuper & Smetsers 1988).

The 'visibility' of women as a major objective category, started with the emergence of Feminism. Feminism considers the fundamental change of gender relations as a major objective interest of women. Also among feminists there is a tendency for the 'objectification' or 'reinfication' (Brass 1985), which considers gender as the fundamental objective interest of women. A leading trend among feminist scholars, however, recognises the complexity of women's reality (Mukherji 1984; Maguire 1984; Keuper and Smetsers 1988). One major point of critique of the feminists is the individualistic approach of the Marxists as well as the Liberals: women are approached as individual citizens or as individual producers or as individual sellers of labour power, as individual members of a class or of a subjective interest group. People, however, and women in particular, do primarily act and are esteemed in the context of the world that surrounds them, which exist out of a complex of relationships.

I.3 The Interrelation of Class, Ethnic and Gender Relations and Mobilisation

The complexity of the process of transformation of subjective interests into objective interests is primarily caused by the variations of 'objective interests' within a society and also between societies. It has shown to be difficult to unite all workers (of the world) against the capitalists and all the blacks against the white supremacy and all the women against the male dominance. The objective interests of people in a society (and also between societies) vary because of the different formations of 'class', 'ethnic group' or 'gender' relations and its varying inter-relations. Social relations are not existing independently from each other, neither is one of them the fundamental one, although one can dominate at a certain historical conjunction.

Social relations inter-relate continuously within and with one other and change one other continuously. In different historical development stages of a society, one social relation may dominate another social relation. Brass (1985) describes how an ethnic group can be a class or divide a class and gives the example of ethnic based trade unions or political parties. Kannan (1983) describes how although female workers dominated an industrial sector of the South Indian State of Kerala, the union struggle failed because the union was male oriented and had left out the female workers (and also low-caste workers).

Social groups, i.e. workers, ethnic groups, women, are also not homogenous groups, they are divided due to the different social relations they are part of, but also by their own hierarchical structure (sub-groups). In the fifty-second chapter of Volume III of Capital, Karl Marx recognises that classes are internally divided in a hierarchy of subgroups due "to the multiple aspects of the division of labour and the multitude of 'middle and intermediate strata', which everywhere 'obliterate the lines of demarcation'" (Fisher 1970:69-70). Brass (1985) writes about the power struggles within ethnic groups over its material and symbolic resources. Rogers (1980), Whitehead (1984) and Bardhan (1985), among others, explain about the divisions within the gender group, in particular the divisions connected to life cycle (age, marital status,

motherhood) which give some women power to dominate other women.

In various societies, the rigidity of distinction (antagonism) between social groups or within social groups may vary and different social relations may consolidate each other or they may conflict. So may ethnic groups, caste- or kin-bondages consolidate or increase the ability of the appropriating class to extract more surplus from direct producers or they may disappear as a result of class formation (Huizer 1980; Ghose 1983).

Rachel Kurian (1982) for example, found how among the workers from Indian origin, who work in the tea plantations in Sri Lanka, the caste-system again became to play an important role. These plantation workers came from low castes within the Indian caste-system and were not very concerned with religious rituals and ceremonies as the high castes did. But after having become plantation workers in Sri Lanka, the higher castes among the low castes tried to re-introduce and re-construct the hierarchy of caste power with themselves at the top. The plantation management encouraged this process as a measure of labour control.

Many social scientists have observed a relationship (although "no linear or determinate", Deere & Leon de Leal 1981:87) between class formation and the sexual division of labour (Agarwal 1986; Afshar 1985; Bardhan 1985; Deere 1982; MacKintosh 1981; Dawn 1985; Rajapakse 1988; Sen 1982; Sharma 1985). They show that women are more frequently found in low-valued employment under hard circumstances, that there is a relationship between the sexual division of labour (type of work) in the paid sector and in the non-paid sector (domestic and subsistence work) and that women's work is generally considered as low-valued and supplementary to the family resources, "even if only by releasing some of the male-earnings from having to take care of the subsistence needs" (Bardhan 1985, December 14:2208).

However, Deere & Leon de Leal (1981) also found in their surveys in Peru, that the higher the degree of social differentiation (class formation) and the higher the degree of participation of women in the paid labour sector, the greater was the flexibility of the sexual division of labour (1981:87). But they also observed that the sexual division of labour within the household (the reproductive activities) was the most persistent. Women remained the first

responsible person for domestic work and child care (ibid 1981). Sen (1982) also found that class formation tended to lessen the differences in the rates of women's participation in wage labour across India with markedly different pre-existing gender relations. The same process also results in a tendency towards similarity in the gender based hierarchies among agricultural wage labourers. (Sen also questions how this breaking of traditional patterns of sexual division of labour will affect workers- and peasant organisations and how it will affect women's militancy.).

Afshar (1985), however, found that given the low pay and low status offered to women labourers, many women did not wish to abandon their marriages and their families and become wage labourers. The case studies in various Third World countries in her book show that only extremely poor women with no marital ties broke with tradition and accepted any waged labour that was available (Afshar 1985:XV).

The findings mentioned here, show the complexity of 'objective interests' and explain the difficult process of transformation of objective interests into subjective interests. Here Charles Tilly's (1978) concept of opportunity, as is mentioned earlier, is applicable. Opportunity concerns facilitating factors as well as limiting factors for mobilisation. "The trouble with studying opportunity is that it is hard to reconstruct the opportunities realistically available to the group at the time" (Tilly 1978:7).

I.4 The State, Social Relations and Mobilisation

One important factor is still to be dealt with: the state. What is the role of the state in the formation of 'social groups' like 'class', 'ethnic group' or 'gender'?

Classical theoreticians on the state do analyse the state as an arena for interest group conflicts (the Pluralists) or as an instrument for group (class) domination (the Marxists). Contemporary theoreticians (among others: Brass 1985; Alavi 1972; Clapham 1985; de Janvry 1983; Ghose 1983) accept that the state

plays a major role in distributing privileges and resources and favour some ethnic groups or class or gender group and certain subgroups of these 'elites' (Brass 1985:48-49) at particular points or at particular times. Brass, for example, defines the state as

"a complex set of persisting institutions over which elites in conflict are engaged in a struggle for control"...a struggle for "the legitimate authority of the State" (Brass 1985:25).

These contemporary theoreticians also recognise 'the relative autonomy' of the state. The state also does have an interest of its own, that is the interest to reproduce itself. Particular in the societies of the so-called 'Third World', economic development tends to produce serious disruptions of the indigenous society due to international dependency, inappropriate (foreign) technology, imposition of external cultural norms, which affect existing patterns of distribution. Differences of caste, ethnicity or religion do therefore often play an important role in the politics of Third World societies for the legitimation of the changing social formation as well as to defend the interest of a certain group within the state against another group. Hamza Alavi (1972) states that particularly in the post-colonial societies ('Third World'), there are many interests represented in the state and he mentions the metro-politan elite, the landed class, the industrial class, the military and the bureaucracy (ibid). However, the state may need to remain 'neutral' at times when groups are in conflict, to safeguard its own existence (Brass, 1985:9). De Janvry writes that the state also can be suffering from an 'imperfect formation' and from a limited capacity of the state apparatus to serve certain interest groups. The state itself can also be a source of crises which often originates from the contradiction between the forms of the state and the functions of the state. He gives the example of the state which can have the form of a liberal democracy (for legitimation purposes), but has at the same time kept the wages and prices in check to defend the rate of profit and accumulation (de Janvry :1983:192).

To study the role of the state is perhaps the most complicated aspect in the

study of mobilisation.

The state ideologies of Liberalism and Marxism did generally lead to reforms. In states with a Liberal ideology, women received or won the right of suffrage and other equal rights to men like the right of education or individual property. In states with a Marxist ideology, women even do have official womens' organisations. But both type of state ideologies have^{not} led to structural changes of gender relations. Social reform with regard to women is primary seen in the context of the 'modernisation' of society. In the Marxist ideology 'modernisation' means the integration of women in the labour market ('social production'). The State therefore should take over those reproduction tasks of women, which prevent women from freeing their labour for the labour market. But the inferiority of the feminine gender to the masculine gender did not change. In the Liberal ideology 'modernisation' means in general the 'western' model of equal public rights for men and women as individual citizens and the encouragement of economic growth through primarily western technology and liberalisation of the market. It is generally observed that primarily the 'middle-class' women were able to make use of these rights and benefits from the economic growth (Jayawardene 1986:Introduction; Coomaraswamy 1984; Coward 1983; Sharma 1985).

The 'western' ideology which is found in the official ideology of many Third World States, is the result of the dependency relation created during their colonial domination. And this ideology continues to intrude third world countries through western development aid programmes. These programmes are directed to the head of the household, generally considered to be a male, in the understanding that what is given to the head of the household will 'trickle down' to the other members. These programmes also make a strict distinction between 'productive' (commoditised) and 'reproductive' (non-commoditised) labour and consider productive labour as a male responsibility and reproductive labour as a female responsibility, with the result that mainly the men have access to the new technology and the state subsidies. This has led to a process of what is called 'domestication' or 'marginalisation' of women (Rogers 1980; Sharma 1985).

These programmes contributed also to a further integration of 'Third World' societies in the world capitalist system, which encourages the process of class formation in these countries. For example, Athreya et.al. (1987) write how in Asian countries the so-called 'Green Revolution' has increased the level of commoditisation by breaking down existing forms of farm re-production. Now commodities like fertiliser, pesticides and hybrid seeds have become necessities of production. This process of commoditisation has accelerated the process of social differentiation (class formation), which also lead to an integration of female labour in the labour market. Women find employment primarily in low-valued jobs (among others: Dawn 1985). It is furthermore observed that the right of equal pay for men and women is not implemented, because of reasons of capital accumulation and also of male interests (among others: Sharma 1985). However, development programmes may include reform programmes which benefit poor people, like land reforms, subsidy programmes, welfare programmes. Development programmes may free resources of women, which were claimed by land owners, male relatives or local customary leaders like religious leaders, and community leaders. But the state also claims resources of women by taking away customary rights of women or by pushing her in national service activities and voluntary contributions to the state, like giving her off-spring to serve in the army. Thus the role of the state with regard to the interests of poor rural women depends on what interest groups are represented in the state, on their mutual relation and how they relate to the feminine gender which is generally represented through the masculine gender. It also depends on the capacity of the state to serve the feminine gender as an objective interest groups.

The 'opportunity' for mobilisation of poor rural women as defined by Charles Tilly (1978) is more than others depending on their capacity to free resources from claims by others. Charles Tilly writes:

"the poor has little choice but to compete with daily necessities. The group whose members are powerful can use the other organisations they control, including governments to do some of their work, whereas the powerless must do it on their own. The rich and powerful can forestall claims from other groups and can afford to seize opportunities to make new claims of their own. The poor and powerless often find that the rich, the

powerful and the government oppose or punish their efforts at mobilisation" (Tilly 1978:75).

I.5 Methodology of Studying Facilitating and Limiting Factors for Mobilisation of Poor Rural Women

The reality of poor rural women is observed to be very complicated. Their life is a struggle for survival. Even if they are aware of their objective interests, they may not be able to free resources, because of the many dependency relations which cause their resources to be claimed by many others, such as their employers, husbands, families, money lenders or governments. To study the complexity of objective interests of poor rural women, and to understand how and to what extent their resources are claimed by others, most social scientists consider the (farm)household and its relations with other households to be the best unit of research.

In an article on the Tamil Nadu agrarian class structure, Athreya et.al. (1987) study relations of surplus extraction to classify rural households. They deviate in their approach from conventional Marxists who use ownership of means of production as an instrument for class analysis. For me, the surplus extraction analysis of Athreya et.al. is a more appropriate instrument to study the agrarian class structure in South Asia where the largest category of agricultural producers belongs to the so-called 'peasantry'. Athreya et.al. define 'poor peasants' or 'semi-proletarians' as those farms who are so small that they cannot provide the farmer's family even with its own grain requirement ('below the subsistence level'). They cultivate grain for their own consumption, and to cultivate for sale exclusively is a rarity. The poor peasants are forced to seek additional incomes both to cover their grain deficit and to earn necessary cash for farm expenses and for non-grain consumption. They are a proletarian group, since they are practically always compelled to work as wage labourers in agriculture and in employment when available, in other sectors. Athreya et.al. define 'middle peasants' as those who are able to reproduce their farm as well as their family without the necessity of external income resources ('at subsistence level'). And they define 'rich peasants' as those who, after

reproduction of their farm and their family, do have surplus left for accumulation ('above the subsistence level').

Athreya et.al. consider labour as the essential characteristic of the peasant farm and the 'non commodity' form of labour, in particular family labour, as the most essential of the peasant production. To identify the various forms of surplus extraction, they study the relation between household and the wider society. However, they do not study relations of surplus extraction of the individual members of the household outside as well as within the household. Sharma writes:

"It is known that the intra-household division of labour is based on unequal division of labour where women shoulder the primary responsibility for family survival strategies" (Sharma 1985:47).

Feminist' researchers therefore consider it essential for understanding the situation of poor rural women to study the household not only as unit of production, but primarily as unit of reproduction. From all the confusing discussions around the definition of reproduction (Keuper & Smetsers 1988; Jackson 1978), I want to support the definition of Edholm, Harriss & Young (1977), who explain the three meanings of the term 'reproduction':

1. Social reproduction, which means the reproduction of the whole social formation, of class relations, gender relations, as well as of other social relations;
2. the reproduction of the labour force which means the maintenance of the present labour force, as well as the preparation of the future labour force. This includes physical maintenance, as well as socialisation (labour ethos, sexual division of labour, cultural values, etc.); and,
3. the human reproduction or biological reproduction, which means procreation (Edholm et.al. 1977:101-130).

Kumud Sharma (1985) says in a compact form what various authors write:

"the focus on the 'household', its dynamics, its context and its linkages to wider structures in which it is embedded, has gradually unfolded the ways in which women's experiences are structured within the hierarchical rural social structure. Both inter- and intra-household differences embody relations of dominance and subordination based on caste, class, gender and

age with differential access to resources, skills, authority and power" (1985:45, also Deere 1982; Mackintosh 1981).

To identify the 'common-interests' as motive for mobilisation of poor rural women, we may conclude that we should study the 'objective interests' of poor rural women in the wider society and how these are reflected and inter-related within the household as primary unit of reproduction and between households as primary units of production (relations of surplus extraction). We should also study the internal structure of the social group itself, its hierarchy of subgroups. With regard to the role of the state, we could investigate if and in how far poor rural women are represented in the state. What are the official ideologies with regard to (rural) women. What specific policies does the state make which affect poor rural women.

We then may attempt to connect these to the mobilisation process(es) identified to understand 'the opportunity' for mobilisation of poor rural women, which leads via the transformation of 'objective interest' into 'subjective interest' towards collective action in pursuit of these common interests (case study).

CHAPTER II**POOR RURAL WOMEN IN THE SOCIETY OF SRI LANKA****II.1 Introduction to Sri Lanka: Brief Socio-Economic Overview**

Sri Lanka is the most southern country in the South Asian continent. And although Sri Lanka is a small country, it is characterised by an heterogenous ethnic population (Singalese, Tamil and Moslim) and wide regional differences. Sri Lanka also has a history of 450 years colonial domination, followed by a comparatively long history of parliamentary democracy and a comparatively high record of social development. The latter is the result of four decades of state-sponsored and state-financed welfare services, mainly free education, free medical and health care and subsidised food distribution. The impact of this is reflected in some key indicators related to basic need fulfilment, such as literacy rate, infant mortality, crude birth and death rates and life expectancy, which show favourable records, unmatched by many other LDCs, to which Sri Lanka is counted, even those with higher per capita income levels (Balakrishnan 1985).

The high social welfare spending (increasing from 33 per cent of the total government expenditure in 1955/56 to 40 per cent in 1965/66) had been largely predicted upon the revenue from cash crop export, particularly tea. Sri Lanka inherited from her colonial past an economic structure, which is highly dependent on the world market (export of plantation crops and import of food and industrial products). When rubber and tea prices on the world market dropped in the early 1960s, and the tea production also declined as a result of dis-investments and repatriation of capital by the foreign plantation owners the country saw a drastic decline in the foreign exchange earnings. The ways in which these economic problems have been dealt with has varied according to the economic policies of the post independent governments in power, varying from a liberalised economy to priority for the development of the state sector and import substitution industrialisation. The first leading to higher growth rates and less emphasis on social distribution, the latter leading to stagnating growth rates

and more emphasis on social distribution. Both strategies did not solve the structural economic problems and led to further dependence on foreign aid with an according greater subjection to so-called 'World Bank and IMF prescriptions'.

The deteriorating financial situation put a pressure on the governments welfare spending. After the mid-1960s, the proportion of social welfare spending of the total government expenditure declined, particularly in the period of the 'open economy' policy after 1977 (By 1980, the social welfare expenditure had declined to 18.2 per cent of the total government expenditure; see Balakrishnan 1985). A further dismantling of the welfare system was not made due to the consideration that this is politically not feasible. The rising economic problems and the deteriorated welfare system have direct implications for the life chances of the poor. The increased dependency on foreign loans and domestic borrowings led to high inflation rates which contributed to a rise in domestic prices. Unemployment, particularly among rural youth became a serious problem. Several studies have indicated that, particularly in the post-1977 'open economy' period, both income and regional disparities have grown and that the poorer sections of the population have become worse off (among others: Balakrishnan 1985; Goonaratne & Gunawardena 1984; Gunaratne 1985). More recently, particularly after 1983, general economic problems have been aggravated by the civil war going on in the country, which became a heavy burden on the budget and which has affected levels of investment and prospects of the tourist industry and which, moreover, brought sufferings to many civilians, particularly in the north and east of the country.

II.2 Sri Lanka as an Agrarian Society: Class, Ethnic and Gender Relations

The present Sri Lanka is predominantly an agrarian society which is characterised by a diverse structure. The agrarian society of Sri Lanka has its roots in a long history of civilisation. Historical writings expose that Sri Lanka has an organised agricultural production since at least 500 BC. The centres of the kingdoms of pre-colonial Sri Lanka were built around an expansive irrigation system for paddy cultivation. Class, gender and ethnic relations in the present society of Sri Lanka have developed from this ancient culture which has been interacting with external influences primarily from colonial and neo-colonial interference.

II.2.1 Pre-Colonial Sri Lanka

The production relations in the pre-colonial Sri Lanka were based on a caste hierarchy with the king at the top. Every caste had to perform a labour duty to the king, to the temple and to higher castes in the hierarchy. The paddy farmers caste (goyigame) formed the highest category in the caste hierarchy, they were allocated irrigated paddy land by the king. The lowest castes had no land and sometimes even no dwelling.

Pre-colonial Sri Lanka was a multi-ethnic society. Various ethnic communities had come from the Indian continent and brought their own cultural demarcations. The various kingdoms which Sri Lanka had in the ancient times were primarily based on these ethnic demarcations.

The north and east of Sri Lanka were almost covered by Tamil kingdoms, while the centre, south and west were covered by Singalese kingdoms, each with their own customary laws (CRD 1984:Ch.I.B).

The gender formation of the present Sri Lanka is also rooted in the society of pre-colonial Sri Lanka. The ancient literature of Sri Lanka defined the many "do's" of women, which still prevail today, such as 'chastity, modesty, servility, self-sacrifice, confinement to the home, pre-occupation with children,

husband, relations and husband's friends'. There were also many "don'ts" for women, such as 'loud talk, laughing, running, idling and keeping the company of independent (therefore bad) women' (Jayewardene in CENWOR 1985:173). Motherhood was the primal source of status for women within the gender hierarchy. A mother with sons enjoyed a higher status than women without and barren women had the lowest status and were even unauspicious (Postel & Schrijver (eds.) 1980). The ancient literature also defined the concept of beauty of women, which concerned the shape of her body, the quality of her hair, teeth and flesh and the colour of her skin. Women were also considered as foolish and faithless, as expressed in many sayings carried by generations. For example, the saying: 'a woman's brain cannot perceive anything further than the handle of a kitchen spoon'. And a traditional 'raban' (=drum) song that Singalese peasant women still sing today, says: 'to the man, to the man the choicest rice, with sundried fish and mutton. To the woman the leaves of the wild and the common herbs from the hedges'. In all ethnic communities women were inferior in the gender hierarchy. In the Hindu, as well as in the Buddhist religion in Sri Lanka was to be of the femine gender considered as a consequence of sins in previous life times. So it was traditionally a common aspiration among Buddhist women to become a man in a future birth, for only a man could become a buddha (Jayewardene 1986:114). The status of a woman and the status of her family were interdependent. A woman who performed her gender role well would bring status to her family. A woman who married a man of low caste degraded her family. In contrary had a marriage between a high caste man and a low caste woman no consequences for the status of the man's family. A higher status for a family could be won with a system of 'dowry' (=bride price). Daughters with a big dowry could

be married to men of higher social status (Jayewardene 1986; Wijesekera 1949; Goonasekera 1985; Dias 1985).

Taboo was in all ethnic communities generally applied to everything what was considered to be polluted, unclean, not allowed and hence to be segregated and avoided, because it was surrounded with mystic evils. Many taboo's were centred around the idea of blood. Consequently, the woman had become surrounded with the greatest share of taboo's as a result of her biological qualities like menstruation and child birth. Women who menstruated or gave birth to a child were told to be avoided not to meet evil and unfortune. She was better to be secluded in the house and should especially keep distance at religious ceremonies. During menstruation and pregnancy, certain foods were taboo for women. Also sicknesses which were related to the goddess Pattini and the Seven Mothers, like chicken pox and small pox, were tabooed. Virginity is valued high and virgins were considered to have a fortunate power because of their purity.

All ethnic communities knew a customary sexual division of labour, which made women primarily responsible for the reproduction.

Her primal activities were domestic work, child care and maintenance of the homestead garden, where vegetables and fruits were grown for consumption and various other activities done within the compound of the homestead like mat and basket weaving, rope making, cloth making, post harvest activities. Agriculture (field work) was primarily the responsibility of the masculine gender. Women were not encouraged to work in the fields because of their impurity, but in practice they also worked hard in the fields alongside the men (Wijesekera 1949). However the preparation of the field and the threshing of the paddy, which were activities accompanied by religious ceremonies, remained the specific male-tasks, also today. Customary women's tasks today are weeding, transplanting and post-harvest activities like winnowing and pounding.

The customary sexual division of labour also prevailed in the customary forms of community tasks, such as the customary forms of exchange labour where men help men and women help women. The organisation of cultivation and maintenance of the irrigation system was customarily done by a men's committee and a women's committee was assigned with the welfare of the monks and temple activities.

II.2.2 The Colonial Period

With the arrival of the colonialists (1505) the economy as well as the culture of Sri Lanka underwent a process of change. The economy underwent a process of commoditisation, monetisation and export orientation. This process firstly took place in the coastal areas of the southwest of Sri Lanka, which were occupied by the Portuguese (1505), and later by the Dutch (1658). The dry zone civilisation had collapsed and the area got deserted. The last kingdom of Sri Lanka (Kingdom of Kandy) was conquered in 1815 by the British who ruled the country until 1948. It were the British who introduced the plantation economy to Sri Lanka. The plantation economy had hardly links with the indigenous economy: capital, management and even labour (migrants) came from outside. Food and cloths were imported, tea, rubber and coconut were exported. The local food production got in a depressed state. All British investments went to the development of the plantation industry and its necessary infrastructural development in the southwest and in the Kandyan Hills (the so-called wet zone, which has the highest rainfall). Colombo had become the centre of administration and trade. This process resulted not only in an unbalanced economic structure, it also caused a major regional differentiation. Today, this region is still specialised in export production, and Colombo is the major industrial area and centre of trade.

The presence of the colonial rulers had a major impact on the class formation in Sri Lanka. The policy of the colonial rulers of privatisation of property (based on 'feudal' caste rights), alienation of communal lands and imposing heavy tax systems and trade monopolies, led to an acceleration of the process of commoditisation. As a result of the deterioration of the irrigation system and the spread of malaria epidemics in the dry zone, the wet zone regio became highly densed populated. This all resulted in a high population pressure on land, an oppressive land tenure system (based on 'feudal' practices), indebtness, dependency relations and a depressed food production. There emerged new classes of small plantation owners (export crops), traders and money lenders.

The Sri Lankan Census of Agriculture of 1982 shows that today fragmentation of land is still highest in the wet zone region where the acreage percentage of paddy holdings below one acre is a little more than 60 per cent (the average for the whole country is 44 per cent) (Table 2.17 Small Holder District Reports, Department of Census and Statistics 1985). The problem of (almost) landlessness is most acute in this regio. Most of the rural households in this region are dependent on a range of other economic activities from which they derive their main income (Dunham 1987; Bastian 1985).

The arrival of the colonial rulers also had its **impact on the ethnic relations** in Sri Lanka. The Tamil Kingdom of Jaffna was the first kingdom to be conquered by colonial power (Portuguese) and the early establishment of 'western' education in this area resulted in a large participation of 'Ceylon' Tamil employees in the colonial administration. The early establishment of colonial rule in the coastal areas of the southwest of Sri Lanka (export of gems and spices) caused that the so-called 'low country' population (primarily Singalese of low castes) became much earlier and much more influenced by values and customs of the colonial rulers (Portuguese and Dutch). The Kandyan Kingdom was the last kingdom to be conquered, which was done by the British in 1818 only. The customary Singalese culture is therefore most preserved in this area which covers the heart of the country. The British brought large numbers of pauperised workers from South India to work on their plantations. These so-called 'Indian' Tamils are from very low castes and live rather isolated in the plantation area of the central hill country, and today still belong to the most deprived classes.

Also the customary gender hierarchy underwent changes as a result of the colonial domination: new customs and values with regard to women intruded the indigenous culture. The Dutch first introduced the Roman Dutch Law and enforced new marriage and inheritance laws. When the British conquered the last Kingdom of Kandy they attempted to change the customary marriage and inheritance laws (which expressed a comparatively high level of gender equality), 'basing themselves largely on Victorian moral' (Jayewardene 1986:116).

With the introduction of the export economy, women became a major source

of cheap labour. In 1881 women formed 30 per cent of the labour force in the plantations and by 1911 this figure had risen to 47 per cent. The British plantation owners established a strict sexual division of labour. Women were concentrated in such tasks as the tea plucking and rubber tapping and men in the more mechanised tasks. A 'family wage' was paid to 'the male head of the household'. The wage rate for the women plantation workers became the lowest in the country and their general welfare condition was distressing (Kurian 1982). Women also formed a major part of the labour force in unskilled work and menial occupations in export-oriented industry, like in coffee and tea packing and in coconut mills. There emerged also a large group of domestic servants, mainly rural women, who were treated like semi-slaves (Jayewardene 1986:131).

II.2.3 Post Independent Sri Lanka

After Sri Lanka was granted political independence in 1948, the southwest of the country (wet zone) developed as an export and urban oriented region. The 'dry zone' of Sri Lanka developed as a primary food production (rice) region.

The agricultural policies of successive post-independent governments all showed a great concern for the development and 'modernisation' of the depressed peasant production sector. Concerted efforts have been made to expand the area under food crops, primarily paddy, through land development, the provision of irrigation facilities and the spread of the 'Green Revolution package'. Massive investments have gone to settlement schemes in the dry zone of Sri Lanka. The dry zone once the centre of ancient civilisation, had been almost deserted after the deterioration of the ancient kingdoms and the spread of malaria epidemics. The colonial rulers had hardly paid attention to develop this part of the country. The new settlement schemes ('colonisation' schemes) in the dry zone became now the major food (rice) surplus producing areas. Thousands of people from the over populated wet zone and resettlers from 'old' villages in the dry zone ('purana' villages) have been re-settled in these schemes. Primarily because of these new settlement schemes and the there promoted 'Green Revolution', Sri Lanka achieved today almost self-sufficiency in rice. These agricultural policies, however, also

had an impact on the class formation in Sri Lanka.

The development of the dry zone did not occur in a balanced way. Certain regions in the dry zone, particularly in the North Central Province and the south east, had become 'prosperous' paddy areas, others to a lesser extent. This regional variation is also influenced by agro-ecological factors, but uneven technological diffusion had aggravated inter-regional and also intra-regional inequalities (Shanmugaratnam 1980:78). With regard to the latter there is observed a clear disparity in development between the new settlements and the 'purana' (=old) villages. Although modern technology resulted in an increase of production everywhere there is observed a large variation in costs of production even within a single region due to imperfections of the factor market (mainly for working capital and purchased inputs) combined with institutional inadequacies. Some farmers may have had a good harvest, but lost a major part of their harvest as a result of (uncontrolled) rents for agricultural equipments or land and loans from private money lenders (Shanmugaratnam 1980:81). And although the average size of paddy holding in the dry zone is more than one acre (in contrary to the wet zone), there is evidence of a fragmentation of paddy holdings and of a concentration of land with a few, in the 'old' (purana) villages as well as in the new settlement schemes. In the case of the latter despite the legal restrictions to fragmentation (a.o. Siriwardene 1981; Hettige 1984; Dunham 1987:28-35).

In the south east of Sri Lanka, large areas of land were allocated to sugar companies (joint ventures of the state and TNCs) by the post-1977 government ('open-economy') which increased the pressure on land for farmers in this region (Ter Bekke, et.al. 1987).

Supplementary income from various resources became a common feature in Sri Lanka. Many (nearly) landless peasants were dependent on casual labour (see chapter II.3). Except for the state owned plantations, agricultural labour conditions and wages have not been legally regulated and varied per region in the whole country. In the last years real wages in the agricultural sector generally have shown a declining trend. Poor peasants and rural workers who were dependent on income from cottage industry, such as beedi and cigar making, rope making, brick making, cashewnut processing were confronted with imperfections

of the factor market too. Particularly as a result of the post 1977 open market policy, peasants and cottage industry workers were constantly confronted with rising input prices and depressed produce prices (Risseeuw 1980; Siriwardhene 1984, Shanmugaratnam 1980, 1984).

Ethnicity became a dominant factor in the political scenery of post-independent Sri Lanka. After the British left Sri Lanka, there had been an escalating struggle between the various ethnic communities to protect their own identity and to get a share of the state resources. This struggle developed firstly between the Singalese community, which forms the majority of the population (74 per cent) and the 'Ceylon' Tamil community, which is 13 per cent of the population. The Singalese community had become more and more privileged in the Sri Lankan society, while the 'Ceylon' Tamil community (primarily those of the north) lost all privileges it had gained during the colonial period and even more (CRD 1984).

With regard to **gender relations**, did the post-independent welfare policy of successive governments bring social development for both men and women when adult franchise was introduced to Sri Lanka in 1931, women also received their right to vote.** But the employment scenario of today shown by the Census of 1981 shows little differences with the pre-independence period. 52 per cent of the total female employed were found in the agricultural sector, in the plantation sector women between 26-35 years even have an economic activity rate of 95 per cent. The socio-economic survey of 1981/82 also showed that 73 per cent of the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in the private sector were fulfilled by women. These were primarily jobs unprotected by labour legislation and unsupported by technological improvements (CENWOR 1985:91). Field studies done by Lund (1978) and Rajapakse (1988) in the 'modern' commercial

** In 1979 life expectancy for females was 70 years and for males 66 years, the crude death rate was 7.3 for females and 6.5 for males, an infant mortality of 11.4 for females and 10.8 for males and a maternal mortality rate of 0.8. The literacy rate for males was 90.0 and for females 82.0 (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka).

agricultural sector of the Mahaweli Settlement Scheme (dry zone) showed an increased work load for women workers caused by an increased paddy production as a result of double cultivation seasons and green revolution technology. The woman was to perform new functions as a result of new technology, such as weeding as a result of the use of fertiliser and transplanting. Some of her old tasks had disappeared like the hand pounding which is taken over by rice mills. Paddy cultivation remained the first responsibility of men. Women had been practically 'forgotten' in the planning of the settlement schemes. Land had become an individual property of men as the 'head of the household'.

Mechanised implements were also chiefly handled by man, which reiterates the fact that women had a very limited access to innovations. Also the commoditisation of social relations in these new settlements, caused that the workload of women increased. Women worked primarily as unpaid family workers or cheap labourers.

II.2.4 Inter-relation of Class, Ethnic and Gender Relations in the Agrarian Society of Sri Lanka

In Chapter I, I explained how one type of social relation can dominate another and how two types of social relations can either strengthen or weaken each other. Also in Sri Lanka it is obvious, that there is not one single determining social relation, particularly the situations of poor rural women are characterised by a complicated interaction of class, gender, ethnic and caste-relations, which determine to what extent these poor rural women are able to free resources for collective action to achieve their common interests.

It is observed by various social scientists that along with the commercialisation of the production and monetisation of economic transactions there emerged a process of class formation in the agrarian society of Sri Lanka (a.o. Gunasinghe 1975; Shanmugaratnam 1980, Hettige 1984; Perera & Gunawardene 1980; Morrison et.al. 1979; Abeysekera et.al. 1985; Rajapakse 1988). With the exception of certain Buddhist temples and of certain 'backward' areas, 'feudal' production relations (labour relations based on caste duties) have been practically

everywhere replaced by market relations. A general tendency is observed that capitalist farmers and rich peasants (in the definition of Athreya et.al. 1987, see Chapter I), who control land, mechanical equipment, irrigation facilities, means of exchange (trade) and occasionally small rural industrial enterprises, generally preferred to use labour saving technology and to hire labour (table 1) to cultivate their land instead of renting their land out (as previously was the case). It is also observed that middle and poor peasants were to a great extent dependent on these capitalist and rich peasant class to obtain loans, to rent mechanical equipment, to sell their produce etc.

A very important factor in the process of social differentiation was how much 'free' labour (family and exchange labour) is available to the middle and poor peasant farm, their access to state resources, the availability of alternative income resources and the level of technological development (see section 1.2.3). Certainly poor peasants, but also sections of middle peasant farms are generally negatively affected by the 'open-market' policy of the post-1977 government (Shanmugaratnam 1980, 1984; Abeysekera et.al. 1985; Siriwardene 1983, 1984).

Perera & Gunawardene (1980) refer to a survey on labour and land use in the peasant sector by the Bank of Ceylon (1975) which revealed that 45 per cent of those employed in the agricultural sector hired themselves out. Of this group 24 per cent owned land and 20 per cent was landless. Perera & Gunawardene (1980) found that the major reasons for (nearly) landlessness of this group were land fragmentation over generations and selling and mortgaging land due to indebtedness to money lenders-cum-traders-cum-land owners. Poor peasants who cultivated some land did this primarily for their own consumption (subsistence crop). They were not able to reproduce farm and family from farm income. Share cropping and hiring themselves out was therefore a common feature among this group. Perera & Gunawardene observed different forms of hired agricultural labour patterns:

- a. migrant labour and contract labour: Migrant- and contract labourers were primarily found in the surplus paddy regions of the dry zone. They were recruited (from the wet zone) by professional recruiters or by rich peasants themselves. They were also organised in groups who look for contracts by themselves. Particularly the poor bound themselves to professional recruiters or rich peasants by taking credits from these in

advance;

- b. local labour: Local labourers hired themselves out to local rich for all kinds of manual work, primarily based on casual basis. Loans also were repaid in the form of labour. In the paddy seasons middle and poor peasants hired labour as well as hired themselves out (paid exchange labour). Among local labourers there also were organised groups observed, who hired themselves out on contract basis; and,
- c. plantation labour: In the plantation area of the central hill country, villagers worked as casual workers in the tea, but primarily in the rubber and coconut plantations. The tea plantations used in the first instance resident labourers (Perera and Gunawardene 1980; see also Hettige 1984, Morrisson et.al. 1979).

Table 1)

Table 1: Family Labour, Hired Labour and Exchange Labour in Paddy Cultivation in Different Parts of Sri Lanka Based on Samples of Record Keeping Farmers

| Location * | Labour days per acre | Family labour % | Exchange labour % | Hired labour % | Average farm size/acre | Yield per acre (Bushels) |
|----------------|----------------------|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Hambantota | 52.1 | 13.8 | nil | 86.2 | 3.85 | 56.15 |
| b. Polonnaruwa | 70.2 | 22.2 | 8.4 | 77.8 | 4.03 | 81.20 |
| c. Kurunegala | 65.6 | 28.4 | 9.0 | 62.6 | 2.75 | 53.35 |
| d. Kandy | 96.3 | 29.1 | 11.9 | 59.0 | 1.27 | 68.30 |
| e. Colombo | 61.6 | 34.1 | 9.9 | 56.0 | 1.28 | 44.55 |

Source: based on Izumi, K. and Ranatunga A.S.
 Cost of production of Paddy, Maha 1972/73
 A study based on record keeping farmers in five selected districts, ARTI, 1974

* a + b : Dry zone (new settlement schemes)
 c: Wet-dry zone
 d + e: Wet zone

It is generally observed that **caste and ethnic relations** are today superseded by impersonal market relations and that class is the major status determinant. Today the nuclear family had practically replaced the extended family (Hettige 1984; Gunasinghe 1979; Lund 1978; Risseuw 1980). However, caste and ethnic relations still continued to play a role especially in situations where people feel the need to demarcate themselves from others. Although caste endogamy remained a phenomenon among all classes, it is observed that caste generally played a more important role in demarcation for the poorer classes than for the rich ones (Morrisson et.al. 1979; Kurian 1982; Skjonsberg 1982; Gunasinghe 1975, 1985). As a result of escalating ethnic confrontations in the society of Sri Lanka, people tended to preserve their ethnic identities. Therefore were customary laws and values given more importance among certain groups (those who felt their identity threatened). Certain Sri Lankan social scientists who studied ethnicity in their country pointed out to me that these ethnic based values and laws were products of an interaction of endogenous and exogenous (western) values and that ethnic groups today particularly claimed those values and laws which were most supportive to their ethnic based interests, but also to their class and gender based interests. Women in particular seemed to suffer from this tendency because it were especially feminine gender restrictive laws which were preserved.

Caste, ethnicity and gender today play an important role in patronage relationships between the poor and the rich, between the powerless and powerful, which allow the latter for a better control of their labour force. So do kin, caste and ethnicity play a role in the recruitment of agricultural labourers. It was observed that farmers of the Tamil community preferred to employ Tamil workers of low castes and farmers of the Singalese community preferred to employ Singalese workers which are recruited through relatives (Perera & Gunawardene 1980; Hettige 1984; Morrisson et.al. 1979). Perera & Gunawardene write:

'Subjectively, both groups (employers and employees) look at their relationship as a patron-client relationship, where subsistence ethics predominate. Our experience is, however, that the lower groups (i.e. employees) are distinctly aware of their lower status and the exploitation by their employers. From the employers' point of view, the moral grounds which lead them to employ friends and relatives are often mentioned but their objective is the maximisation of profit and the efficiency of the operations of cultivation through primordial relations' (1980:133).

And Morrisson et.al. (1979) observed that those families who both lost land and customary patronage and who have not required any other resources in its place have become the most marginalised in the village society (Morrisson et.al. 1979:22). Also gender relations play a role in the recruitment of labourers. Swarna Jayaweera (1985) found in a survey on the Status of Women that employers tended to assess women exclusively as human resources for economic production. They felt that women are useful as docile, pliable labour resource (Status of Women Study 1979, in: CENWOR 1985:96). Carla Risseuw (1980) observed in a survey among (almost) landless women workers in the coir-industry of a village in the south west of Sri Lanka, that the women were employed in the most degrading and lowest paid jobs and furthermore that they still performed customary 'free' services (caste) to land owners-cum-traders to guarantee their employment opportunities, the supply of coconut husk and credit. That the land owners were rather successful in dividing these women in garish competition by exploiting their dependency relationship on them (Risseuw 1980:87).

However, it is also observed that as a result of the process of class formation there is a tendency towards dissolution of customary gender values and sexual division of labour among poor peasants and rural workers particularly in areas with a far developed process of commoditisation. Darsini Rajapakse (1988) for instance observed that due to scarcity of family and customary exchange labour with the pioneer peasants in the Mahaweli Settlement (table 1), both rich and middle peasants employed low paid local female casual labour and low paid migrant labour, resulting in a growing 'feminisation' of customary male tasks and the dissolution of customary female tasks. In rich and middle peasant households, domestic tasks were also done by resident male migrant workers and women workers performed typical men's tasks in the field work. A survey in seven villages on

hired agricultural labourers in peasant agriculture by Perera & Gunawardene (1980) confirmed this tendency. However, this dissolution of the sexual division of labour in the fieldwork was only observed with other crops than paddy (paddy is a customary high social status crop). In the paddy sector hardly any changes in the sexual division of labour were observed (Perera & Gunawardene 1980:82,83). Rajapakse (1988) also observed the emergence of the nuclear family in the new settlement schemes and that, in contrary to rich and middle peasant households, men and women in poor households shared domestic tasks. Rajapakse also observed a considerable pooling of income resources with poorer households. In contrary to women of rich and middle class households, women of poorer households had much more say about how the household income was spent. Carla Risseuw (1980), who did a survey in a village in southwest Sri Lanka, is less optimistic about changes in the gender relations as a result of the process of class formation. Risseuw observed that indeed there took place a pooling of income resources in the poor rural workers households of her sample, but she also observed that husbands and wives did not know each other's income. She observed that in these poor households women (mothers) spent most of their income on the expenditure of the household needs, but that the men (father/husband) took the freedom to decide on how much money they would give for the household needs. Men often used the excuse that they needed money to buy cigarettes and treat friends. It was observed that pooling of resources within the household was one of the major problematic areas, leading to tensions among household members. Risseuw observed that in poor rural households the sexual division of labour in domestic activities appeared to have weakened. Men do help the women with domestic activities, however principally in crisis situation, when the woman was absent or sick. Domestic work remains the woman's first responsibility. Risseuw observed furthermore that certain customary gender values were still prevailing among the women of her sample: they still considered virginity, motherhood and self-sacrifice as status symbols for women. And that when a woman fails to perform her gender role, the blame and consequent loss of reputation was to fall largely on her. The women considered the house and the compound as the woman's domain, while they saw the public world as the man's domain. Daughters and sons were still socialised with these values. The first

menstruation purification ceremony was still practiced. Women also consumed less nutritious food, partly because of customary food taboos, partly because husbands and children were given priority. All the women questioned in the sample, preferred to be a man in their next lives (reincarnation) and so avoid the woman associated suffering connected with giving birth, tending small children and the household in general.

Also Else Skjonsberg (1982) and Rachel Kurian (1982) recorded that class formation had been weakening customary gender role restrictions, however to a far greater extent for men than for women.

From this section we may conclude that the process of commoditisation and of class formation had a dissolving effect on caste and gender relations to a certain extent. On the other hand did the interaction of caste, ethnic, gender and class relations also lead to a consolidation of relations of surplus labour extraction. Particularly women workers became the most exploited group in the society, they not only performed the lowest valued and physically hard jobs, their work load was also increased as a result of the commoditisation of village and kin relationships. And although the welfare state of Sri Lanka gave equal access to social development for men and women, there had not been a major change in the employment scenario of Sri Lanka, neither in the sexual division of labour at home.

Furthermore, the escalating conflict among the major ethnic communities in Sri Lanka led to a consolidation of ethnic based values and laws among certain groups which in some cases bring along more social restrictions for the poor and especially for the women.

This process had major consequences for the capacity of poor rural women to 'free' resources for mobilisation on class and gender based interests.

II.3 Women and Rural Poverty in Sri Lanka

From the previous part we can understand the complex interaction of social relations in the agrarian society of Sri Lanka. This is important to understand the situation of poor rural women and its consequences for mobilisation of poor

rural women on class and gender based interests. This section will explore who are these poor rural women concretely, what characteristics do they have and how do their interests look like in concrete.

Poverty in Sri Lanka is a rural phenomenon and primarily found among those households engaged in agriculture or allied occupations. This is one of the major findings of a recent study of Leslie Gunaratne (1985), who examined the trends in the incidence and distribution of the poor over the period 1978/79 to 1981/82. He used the per capita food expenditure as welfare ranking variable to define a poverty threshold ('incidence') in Sri Lanka, which he found to be the most solid variable. The threshold had been set at Rs.69 per capita food expenditure in 1978/79 prices. The factors or economically relevant characteristics that Gunaratne (1985b) found to have a bearing on poverty, were economic activity status, socio-economic group, status of employment, educational attainment, age and sex of main income earner, household size, dependency burden and locational characteristics (sector and region) of the households.

Gunaratne makes a distinction between urban sector, rural sector and plantation sector and I will follow this line and only refer to poor women in the non-plantation rural sector or the so-called peasant agricultural sector. Gunaratne found that 83 per cent of all households in poverty, lived in the rural areas in 1981/82, which was as compared to 1978/79 an increase from 78 per cent in 1978/79. Of the total rural population lived 22.5 per cent in 1981/82 below the poverty threshold ('incidence'), this was compared to 1978/79 an increase from 21 per cent (period of post 1977 "open economy").

Table 2 shows that the poor in the rural sector were primarily found in the socio economic category of casual agricultural workers. A close examination of the category of poor farmers and production related workers (i.e. non-cultivators) shows that the incidence of poverty was highest among those who 'supply' their income with casual work (respectively 34 per cent and 32 per cent). Gunaratne also found that the incidence of poverty and educational level were inversely related. 70 per cent of the poor households had no formal education or had only

primary education. Of the poor households headed by agricultural labourers 30 per cent was illiterate. This counted 32 per cent for poor households headed by farmers. Another study by Perera and Gunewardene (1980) gives a clearer picture about the characteristics of this category of casual agricultural labourers in the rural areas.

Table 2: Incidence of Poverty by Economic Activity Status of Main Income Earner in the Rural Sector 1981/82

| Socio-economic group of main income earner | As percentage of total poor households | Percentage in poverty ('incidence') | Mean household size | Dependency burden* |
|--|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Agricultural labourers (including forestry & fisheries workers) | 29 | 35 | 6 | 3 |
| Casual agricultural labourers | 25 | 38 | | |
| 2. Production & related workers (i.e. non-cultivators) | 23 | 26 | 6 | 3 |
| 3. Farmers | 17 | 19 | 7 | 4 |
| 4. Clerical, sales & service workers | 8 | 14 | 6 | 3 |
| 5. Professional, technical, admin. managerial staff | 1 | 5 | 6 | 3 |

* Dependency burden is ratio of dependent persons to income earners. The average number of income earners in the rural areas was about 1.5

Source: based on L. Gunaratne 1985b

Perera and Gunawardene (1980) did a survey of hired labourers in peasant agriculture (=non plantation) in nine villages in different parts of the country. The main characteristics of this category which they found were: That these households owned a very little or no land or that they were small tenants; That although hiring out of their labour was not their only income source (they generally also generated income from livestock rearing, cultivation or petty production) it was a necessary part of their reproduction; That the casual character of their labour opportunities caused an unguaranteed income and that unemployment formed a serious problem. That the percentage of no formal schooling among the agricultural labour households of the sample was higher than among non-agricultural labour households; That the health condition of the households of the sample was generally bad. The agricultural labour households had in general no access to good drinking water and laboratory facilities. It was observed during the survey that many children of the agricultural labour households were malnourished. During income deficit periods, the agricultural labour households took loans (from informal resources), in the first instance for basic needs like food and clothing. The dwellings of the agricultural labour households were generally of low quality and compared to the non-agricultural households was the majority of the houses in a bad state of repair.

Gunaratne (1985b) provides figures to show that the sex of the main income earner also had a bearing on poverty. Female headed households formed 19 per cent of the total number of poor households in Sri Lanka while they only formed 17 percent of the total households in Sri Lanka (Census of Population and Housing 1981). Female headed households were primarily found among the agricultural labour category. And within this category again was the incidence of poverty among female headed households higher (32 per cent) than among male headed households in this category (21 per cent). The latter was also the case for the incidence of poverty among the

female headed households in the farmers category: 27 per cent for the female headed households and 17 percent for the male headed households. Gunaratne also found that among the category of farmers, the incidence of poverty was particularly high among the unpaid family workers (25 per cent). The latter most probably are women, for the census of 1971 showed that 51 per cent of the female labour force in the non-plantation agricultural sector were categorised as unpaid family workers. In many poor rural households there is more than one income earner. For instance, a survey by Carla Risseeuw (1980) in a coir producing village in southwest of Sri Lanka showed that 51 per cent of the poor rural households of her sample depended both on male and female income. She found that the wages for female workers were lower than for the men. This difference is also shown in the table of the All Island Daily Average Wage Rates in Paddy Farming of the Bank of Ceylon (table 3).

Rajapakse (1988) found in a survey in a village in one of the major settlement schemes in the dry zone (H-settlement Mahaweli) that male migrant workers also received payment in the form of small proportions of cultivable land. Female migrant workers, however, did not receive such a payment.

It is therefore also important to examine the income distribution within the family of poor households. Risseeuw (1980), and Siriwardhene (1983) observed that pooling of finances within the household was a problematic area. The female income earners generally spent their income for the household needs, while men generally kept a deal for their private expenditure, at least to buy cigarettes, liquor and to treat their friends. The study on agricultural hired labourers of Perera and Gunawardene (1980) as referred to earlier, also revealed that a major part of the household income was spend on these 'male items'. Risseeuw (1980), moreover observed that women of her sample of poor rural households consume the least nutritious food in the family. The best food was generally given to the children and the husband.

Table 3: All Island Daily Average Wage Rates in Paddy Farming

In Rupees

| Activity | Type of Labour | 1983 | | 1984 | | Percentage Change 1984 over 1983 | |
|--------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|----------------|
| | | Nominal Wage Rate | Real Wage* Rate | Nominal Wage Rate | Real Wage* Rate | Nominal Wage Rate | Real Wage Rate |
| Ploughing (with ploughs) | Male | 41.77 | 28.03 | 44.41 | 25.55 | 6 | - 9 |
| Sowing | Male | 36.01 | 24.16 | 37.27 | 21.44 | 3 | -11 |
| Transplanting | Male | 34.41 | 23.09 | 34.86 | 20.06 | 1 | -13 |
| | Female | 25.75 | 17.28 | 26.62 | 15.31 | 3 | -11 |
| Manuring | Male | 35.35 | 23.72 | 36.91 | 21.23 | 4 | -10 |
| Spraying | Male | 38.59 | 25.89 | 41.75 | 24.02 | 8 | - 7 |
| Weeding | Female | 25.13 | 16.86 | 26.59 | 15.30 | 6 | - 9 |
| Harvesting | Male | 34.97 | 23.47 | 37.31 | 21.46 | 7 | - 9 |
| | Female | 28.48 | 19.11 | 28.39 | 16.33 | -0.3 | -15 |
| Threshing | Male | 41.02 | 27.52 | 41.26 | 23.74 | 0.6 | -14 |
| Winnowing | Male | 34.27 | 23.00 | 37.19 | 21.40 | 9 | 7 |

* The year 1980 was taken as the base year for computation

Source: Central Bank of Ceylon, Country Wide Data Collection System .

The foregoing pages show that the women of poor rural households share interests with the other segments of poor rural households as far as class is concerned, for instance low incomes, unguaranteed work, harmful working conditions, no legal wage regulations, indebtedness, bad living conditions, etc. However, it also can be stated that the women of poor rural households have distinct interests with regard to gender, they suffer for instance the lowest wages, the most degrading jobs, the worst malnutrition, an unequal distribution and of resources within the household, etc.

CHAPTER III

THE STATE AND POOR RURAL WOMEN IN SRI LANKA: CLASS, ETHNIC AND GENDER BASED INTERESTS

In this chapter the role of the State of Sri Lanka in relation to the formation and realisation of class, ethnic and gender based interests in the agrarian society will be dealt with. As is explained in Chapter I it depends on the nature of the state and its capacity to execute its development policy whether the state policy will favour the interests of poor rural women and to what extent. This chapter will explore the role of the state of Sri Lanka in the opportunity of poor rural women to free resources for mobilisation on class and gender based interests.

III.1 The Nature of the State

The indigenous society of Sri Lanka had been seriously disrupted as a result of 450 years of colonial domination. From this period Sri Lanka not only inherited its structurally imbalanced economy (export orientation) and its dependency on foreign technology, but also the rise of new interest groups which were able to become dominant as a result of their close relation with the colonial interest. These groups, primarily of urban and non-Buddhists origin were: the bureaucracy created under the colonial administration, the Sri Lankan plantation owners and the British educated intelligentsia. Other interest groups had lost privileges. These primarily rural based groups, whose interests had been dominant in the pre-colonial state were: the Buddhist clergy, the aryuvedic physicians (indigenous medicines), and the 'feudal' type of high caste landlords. Other interests could only partly rise, like the local merchants-cum-money lenders. These had been able to emerge as a result of the process of commoditisation and commercialisation and they had made wealth in liquor renting, mining, coconut, cinnamon and rubber planting. However, they had been confronted with a British monopoly on trade, banking and manufacturing. A national bourgeois had (therefore) not emerged. The peasantry had fallen into an economically and culturally distressed

situation. The working class was primarily formed by the plantation labourers, who were generally of Indian-Tamil origin and a small group of wage workers in the public utilities and in numerous enterprises servicing the urban sector (Jayewardene 1984; Gunasinghe 1988; Sathananthan 1987; Ponnambalam 1980).

In the beginning of this century resistance to the foreign domination began to take the form of a religious cultural revival. This movement was led by Buddhist monks who were in the forefront of the struggle 'to rescue Buddhism from the degeneration, it was seen to have suffered due to the loss of state patronage from the Buddhist kings and the colonial state's support of Christian missionary activities' (Jayewardene 1984:57; see also Kodikara 1970). They were supported by wealthy buddhists who did not find their interest represented in the colonial administration. These wealthy Buddhists supported the revival movement by financing their propaganda and they gave generously to Buddhist temples and Singalese schools (Jayewardene 1984:57). Many rural middle class Buddhists sent their sons and daughters to these schools. The girl's schools were initiated and led by women from the British educated intelligentsia who were inspired by the Buddhist revivalist movement, but who were also conscious about the importance of education for women. Kumari Jayewardene (1986) who studied 'women and nationalism' in Sri Lanka writes about this initiative of buddhist education for girls:

'the content and purpose of education in these schools was the subject of much debate, the protagonists seeing in education the means of achieving goals relative to their conception of the role of women in society. A large group of Sinhala Buddhist leaders of the time argued that education should be geared as to produce good Buddhist wives, but with the modicum of modern knowledge necessary for the times. Others saw Buddhist women's education as an essential part of a national and political awakening and a means of emancipating women. Since the girls who attended Buddhist schools were given more nationalist- biased education, which included stress not only on Sri Lankan and Indian history and culture, but also on democratic and anti-colonial movements elsewhere, such students were also receptive to movements for social and political reform' (Jayewardene 1986:125).

In 1927, the Women's Franchise Union was formed by women who primarily had been teachers and students of these Buddhist schools. In 1931, the Sri Lankan

population was granted universal franchise and women in Sri Lanka were one of the first in Asia (and Africa) to receive suffrage too.

In 1948 the British granted independence to Sri Lanka and left the country a Westminster model of parliamentary democracy and a constitution in which the representation of all ethnic minorities was guaranteed. The latter was the achievement of the bargaining of groups of the Ceylon-Tamil community which had been participating in the colonial administration to a great extent.

The first Sri Lankan national government was formed by the United National Party which was formed by a small circle of influential families, who derived power from caste hierarchy, land ownership and from a close relationship with the British colonial ruler.

Kumari Jayewardene (1984) describes these families as follows: 'they were feudal in their life style and remained faithful to the British, many being converts to Christianity' (1984:52). This small circle of influential families in government, despite that they shared class and social status interest, was divided by family rivalry. Both competing families tried hard to bind the dominant interest groups in the rural areas as client intermediaries between them and the population (Morrisson et.al. 1979; Jayewardene 1984, 1985; Sathananthan 1986; Gunasinghe 1988).

In the early fifties, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike broke away from the United National Party (UNP) and formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) after he had been successful in cohering various social strata, class fractions, castes and some ethnic communities against the then ruling Senanayake family clan. This enabled him to lead the SLFP to victory. The electoral victory of the SLFP in 1956 was generally perceived to be a victory of the 'common man' over the Westernised 'elite' group which was seen to be represented in the UNP (Gunasinghe 1988:6). The victory of the SLFP was the start of an accelerating process of 'Singalisation of the Sri Lankan society'. First the Singalese language was made the only official language in the country (1956). And in 1972, when the SLFP was re-elected in coalition with two Marxist parties, the constitution was changed in favour of the Singalese majority: Buddhism became the official state religion and articles to safeguard ethnic minority rights were removed. Foreign owned plantations were nationalised (1975). The colonial name 'Ceylon' was

changed in the 'Socialist Democratic Republic of Sri Lanka'. The adjective 'socialist' came from the influence of the Marxist parties, which took part in several SLFP led governments. Singalese nationalism and Marxist anti imperialism seemed to have met each other. The ideology of SLFP led governments therefore, could be seen as a mixture of Singalese nationalism and socialist populism.

The UNP had always been a close ally of 'Western' capitalist interests. Particularly after 1977, the UNP 'open economy' policy shook the Sri Lankan society and gave a strong push to further the integration of the Sri Lankan economy in the world capitalist economic system. However, its endeavour to bind the electoral base made it to adopt also a strong Singalese nationalist posture. Therefore the UNP ideology could be seen as a mixture of Singalese nationalism and Western economic liberalism.

The nature of the state may also explain why the post-independence policy of Sri Lanka is characterised by a concerted welfarism and a 'paternalistic' attitude of the state towards the population and the peasantry in particular. The state always has claimed to be the guardian of the peasant interest, converting the rural population into objects of social welfare and controlling them through clientalist linkages between the state and intermediating rural classes. Mick Moore who did a profound study on the relation of the state and the peasantry writes in the introduction of his book:

'Newspaper reports of political speeches, the records of parliamentary debates and the official documents, all conveyed the same impression: a sense of obligation on the part of the elite to use State power on behalf of the "peasantry", which was combined with a reluctance to trust "peasants" to manage their own personal and household affairs. In their own best interests "peasants" were expected to submit to public programmes to uplift their morals; restrict their freedom to their being cheated by speculators or "capitalists"; enforce correct cultivation practices and prevent the dissipation of harvest earnings on alcohol. The symbolic primacy of the "peasantry" in national and nationalist myth^{***} co-existed with an implicit or derogation of "peasant" culture, life styles and personal capacities' (Moore, 1985:3)

"Peasantry" is to be understood as "paddy-cultivators", who were the highest caste in the pre-colonial society which was built around an organised system of paddy agriculture.

The gender interests of rural women had been practically absent in the state policy of Sri Lanka. And although there have always been women represented in the national and local legislatures, these primarily came from the dominating classes and have never been more than around 4 per cent of the representation. Kumari Jayewardene (1986) writes:

'The few women who have successfully contested and made a name for themselves in the political process have generally entered politics as the result of the death of a father or a husband, inheriting as it were the male's mantle of power, as did Sirimavo Bandaranaike who entered politics after the assassination of her husband who was prime minister at the time' (Jayewardene 1986:129; see also Wimala de Silva 1985:125).

Like men, women were also perceived as 'objects of social welfare'. Women's interest was perceived in terms of peasant or ethnic or national interest. Speeches by ministers on a symposium in 1982 on the role of women reveal how the state perceived the gender

interest of women. So did Prime Minister Premadasa (UNP) stress the important contribution of women to the national economy. In the same time he spoke about:

"the essential characteristics" of women, "her charm and feminity, which would remain always her"...."that would nourish and enrich any activity she involved herself in"

He also praised women 'for having used their vote wisely'. Other ministers also spoke about the important contribution of women to the national economy of Sri Lanka, but also stressed that 'her traditional role as wife and mother needed to be safeguarded'. 'Population' and 'nutrition' were seen as the two specific areas where women had a specific role to play in the society (Source: Report of the National Symposium on 'New Dimensions in the Role of Women', 8-11 November 1982, organised by the Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka).

II.2 State Development Policies

Because there had developed only a very weak national bourgeois in Sri Lanka, the state took the leading role in the development of Sri Lanka's economy. At independence food, drinks and tobacco had taken a vast share of more than 50 per cent of the total imports. A major concern of the post-independence governments was therefore to increase the food production. The creation of a 'peasant proprietors class' was considered to be the logic strategy against further pauperisation of the rural areas and to promote the paddy production, but also to suppress social unrest (Sathananthan 1986; Moore 1985).

Two strategies of agrarian policy were consistently followed:

- a. the establishment of an infrastructural network of production and at the level of utilities necessary for the social development of the villagers; and,
- b. the resettling of farmer's families in (very costly) large

scale irrigation and settlement schemes ('colonisation') in the dry zone.

A 'modern' type of administrative machinery through which government resources were channeled, entered the villages. These new village institutions were aimed to encourage popular participation ('self help') and carried the ideology to revive the ideal of the village society from the pre-colonial times (!), which was pictured as egalitarian, democratic, self-governing and self-sufficient. Independent peasant unions, and by the late 1940s an estimate of 200 to 300 of these had emerged, were denied official recognition and support. Only rural organisations established on the 'right lines' were allowed (Sathananthan 1986:6,7).

In fact these new rural institutions became a reflection of already existing rural power relations. The dominant groups who became the client intermediaries of the State were considered to be the leading and dynamic factor in innovations and investments and as a result the community as a whole was expected to benefit through the mechanism of a 'trickle down' effect (Sathananthan 1986:6). Old patronage systems became increasingly replaced by modern political patronage linkages (Morrisson et.al. 1979; Ponnambalam 1980; Moore 1985; Sathananthan 1986; Economic Review February 1987). Shanmugaratnam (1986) speaks about this as the 'symbiotic relationship between village rich farmers and politico-bureaucratic organisations' (1980:86).

Women producers were conceptualised as farmer's wives. In consequence they had been practically invisible in agricultural development planning. Since 1947, there had been established 'Kantha Samithies' (women's rural development societies) by the government. These women's societies, however, were generally allotted a social servicing and social welfare role. The women who dominated these societies were primarily the wives and daughters of men who dominated other rural institutions and they functioned also

as client intermediaries between the state and the villagers (Malsiri Dias 1985).

The 'colonisation' of the dry zone and other programmes to distribute State land among villagers, such as 'village expansion schemes' and 'youth settlement schemes' had permitted the governments not to intervene in the existing land distribution pattern. For land reform measures were generally not in favour of the interest of the client intermediaries. The participation of Marxists in the SLFP led governments played an important role in the initiation of tenure reform legislation. However, landed groups in the SLFP were powerful enough to whittle down both its scope as well as its effective implementation. The main effect of the measures were adverse: a large number of tenants were evicted (Shanmugaratnam 1980, Ponnambalam 1980, Morrisson et.al. 1979; Moore 1985). The Marxist parties which allied with the SLFP had hardly any base among the poor rural classes and they were not able to mobilise support for their land reform initiatives. Their major concern to initiate these attempts at reforms had been their endeavour to wipe out 'feudal remnants' from the society which they saw as the main obstruction to the development of a 'proletariat' in the rural areas (Moore 1985 Chapter V; Jayewardene 1971).

The motivation of these Marxists had been their utopianism rather than their practical involvement with the struggle of the poor rural classes. Practically these Marxists 'had no different attitude than the SLFP and UNP who held up the myth of an homogenous peasantry whose main interest was the assailment by various external forces' (Moore 1985:63).

The first 'serious' land reform legislation appeared in 1972 followed by one in 1975. Although 'nationalisation' had been a political slogan since a long time, the decision to implement had been made rather rigorously. Main reason for this was the Youth Insurrection of 1971. The growth of unemployment among the in singalese medium educated rural youth ('free' education) had become a serious problem. Youth settlement schemes initiated in the 1960s as a response to this problem had hardly served the purpose. For the aspiration of the Singalese educated rural youth was not land but white collar employment which was mainly a privilege to the urban (english) educated middle classes. Sections of the unemployed and under-employed rural youth, mostly belonging to the poor and the

lower middle classes of the Singalese community, had undergone a political radicalisation through the activities of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). The JVP had worked hard for the electoral victory in 1970 of the United Left Front, (the alliance of the SLFP and two Marxist parties, the SLCP and LSSP). Disappointment with the newly elected government's passive attitude to implement radical change, resulted in that they took up arms. The insurrectionists had no explicitly articulated agrarian demands. Their main objective was to overthrow the state (Houtart 1974; Samaranayake 1987:272; Jayewardene 1985; Moore 1985). The political leaders of the United Left Front government, however, were consistent in their analysis to see landlessness as the main cause of the insurrection. Land reform laws were initiated as a 'concession' to the insurgents (who had been suppressed violently). Nationalisation of the foreign owned plantations and distributing these among the peasantry had been a popular demand since a long time. The nationalist leaders had encouraged the myth that 'the problems of the Singalese peasantry' were caused by the plantation economy introduced by the colonial rulers who also had brought foreign workers (Tamils from India) to work on the land that historically belonged to the (Kandyan) Singalese peasantry (Jayewardene 1985; Moore 1985). The Land Reform Act of 1972 which nationalised all private lands over 50 acres high land and 25 acres irrigated paddy lands and the Land Reform Act of 1975 which nationalised the foreign owned plantations, actually had no major effect for the peasantry. Only 1.3 per cent of all the paddy lands and 10.5 per cent of all the coconut lands were covered by the land reform. The dominant rural classes were hardly effected because the land ceiling was too high. Buddhist temples, moreover, were exempted from the land reform. Most of the foreign plantation owners had already anticipated nationalisation and had transferred most of their capital out of the country. Only 14 per cent of all nationalised lands were distributed among villagers. Most of these lands, however, were marginal lands. The only group which was really affected by these land reform measures showed to be the opponents of the SLFP supporters. The UNP supporting landlords lost most of their lands while land owners who supported the governing SLFP were privileged by leaving them the good lands and/or by giving them management positions in the state owned plantations (Moore 1985; Shanmugaratnam 1980; Ponnambalam 1980).

After the UNP came in power again in 1977, measures like the privatisation of state owned plantations and the establishment of an Agricultural Promotion Zone (tax concessions for private (foreign) investors in agro-business), could be considered as a reversal to the land reform measures of 1972 and 1975.

The youth insurrection of 1971 in which also many rural girls had participated led for the first time to reforms with regard to gender. The Constitution of 1972 articulated the fundamental right for women to employment in the public sector. From the mid 1970s onwards the UN- decade for women gave international focus to the fact that women did not benefit automatically or equally from state development programmes. This led to reforms also in Sri Lanka with regard to the gender based interests of women. However, it is observed that these reforms were more a manifestation of commitment to Liberal values ('modern') in general, rather than the result of a conscious commitment to the interest of the feminine gender (Goonesekera 1985:21/22).

The Constitution of 1978 contained a definite reference to gender equality in the section on fundamental rights. The lawyer Savithra Goonesekera (1985) remarks about this:

'In enacting this provision, however, somewhat ironically the constitution refers to women, children and "disabled persons" as one category (1985:23).

In 1978 the Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka was established (for which certain urban middle class women had been lobbying since 1975). Swarna Jayaweera writes in her review of women and development planning (1986):

'It was intended that the Bureau should play a catalytic role in accelerating women's progress and operate as a coordinating agency and a "watchdog" of women's interests. It was expected to identify plans and monitor programmes to increase the participation of women, raise consciousness and promote research and data collection pertaining to women' (1986:6).

In 1983 this Women's Bureau came under the authority of a newly created Ministry of Women's Affairs and Teaching Hospitals(!). By 1986 the Bureau had become a state implementation agency of a relatively isolated "women's sector" programme.

The Bureau itself had been kept outside the mainstream of policy planning at national and district levels. Women's groups who had bargained for the establishment of the Women's Bureau have no official representation at its decision making level.

In the mainstream development policy no changes with regard to gender occurred. The UN-decade for women coincided partly with the introduction of the 'open economy' policy in Sri Lanka. In the 'Three Lead Projects' of the post-1977 UNP government, women were incorporated primarily as human resource (cheap labour) in the export oriented industry (FTZ), in the tourist industry and as migrant workers to the Middle East (Bandaraga 1988).

The concept of equal pay for equal work was until recently not accepted in laws regulating manual work. The law on wages in the plantation sector now has equalised wages for men and women, but this is rather the result of trade union struggle than a sensitiveness to gender equality in general. In other sectors of agricultural labour, women's wages remained considerable lower than their male colleagues (table 3, pg 52).

Only one of the three agricultural schools (Kundasale) admits women students. The proportion of women students at the Kundasala school had been marginal: 22 per cent in 1973, 16 per cent in 1978 and 22.5 per cent in 1984. Furthermore, did the provision of farm management courses and home management as alternative courses for men and women, reinforce the role differentiation of men as farmers and women as housewives (Jayeweera 1985:54).

There is observed an increase in the participation of rural women in vocational training in the last few years. Figures from the Department of Labour and the National Apprenticeship Board, however revealed that women were concentrated in stereotype women's skills like sewing, mat weaving, handicraft and home gardening, which are also skills that hardly enhance women's capabilities or that promote an upward career mobility (Jayeweera 1985). Swarna Jayeweera remarks furthermore about the scope of the vocational education:

'non-formal training programmes for women are very much in vogue. While such programmes are necessary to complement the facilities offered in formal institutions in low-income countries, they tend to suffer from a "second class" status that may reinforce the perceived secondary status of women' (1985:56).

Recently the government initiated the Seva Vanitha Movement. Wives of officials in various government departments and offices have been organised in hierarchical built groups, parallel to the status and position of their husbands. The minister's wives became the president of the Seva Vanitha in each ministry. This movement is officially a non-governmental organisation and it is said to be modeled after the Indonesian Dharma Vanitha which aims to mobilise women for nationalist purposes and to strengthen state patronage (Voice of Women 1986:4,15; Economic Review January 1986:18).

With regard to the state and the interest of poor rural women in Sri Lanka, it can be concluded that the welfare character of the state brought a comparatively high level of social development for men as well as for women, but that any reform legislation, irrespective which party was the initiator, had more to do with concepts of "modernisation" such as "efficient production" and "western Liberal values" and with ethnic and national based interests than that it was really concerned with class and gender based interest conflicts in the rural society.

Moreover, initiatives of agrarian reform legislation were more a reflection of a political competition between two "elite" parties and their client intermediaries than that they served the interest of the poor rural classes. The state had been successful in binding the rural electorate in a clientalist relationship and was therefore able to define the "peasant interest" as an homogenous interest which rooted in a collective ethnic (Singalese) identity which was to be protected by the State against the external enemies as it had done in the pre-colonial kingdoms. This process had deeply drawn the peasantry into the electoral politics and had mobilised the rural population along ethnic, national and nationalist interests. At local level political patronage created competition among the (poor) rural population for the distribution of state resources (welfare).

Recent autonomous initiatives of peasant interest based organisations, which emerged as a result of the increased problems for peasants caused by the 'open-market' policy, were confronted with resistance from the side of the state.

A peaceful protest demonstration against the government's agricultural policy by six peasant unions in 1982 was rudely dispersed by the police (Fernando 1987; Quist 1986). Also the International Women's Day celebration in 1985 organised by autonomous women's groups, among which also organisations of poor rural women, was violently dispersed by the police. Like peasant mobilisation, also mobilisation of women on gender based interests is only allowed within the state defined margins.

One of the organisers reported about this event:

'On the one hand there are state sponsored Women's Day meetings, where the rulers pontificate one's feminity while "participating in development" and other similar sentiments, while on the other hand police men and women are given orders to baton charge, tear gas, assault and arrest other women from non-governmental organisations who are likewise celebrating Women's Day' (Sunila Abeysekera in: Lanka Guardian, Vol.7, No.22, March 15:2).

CHAPTER IV**NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND THE INTEREST OF POOR RURAL WOMEN**

There are numerous non-governmental initiatives in Sri Lanka which are concerned with the plight of poor rural women. Particularly the UN-Decade for women gave impetus to the emergence of women's programmes in Sri Lanka, which were claimed to represent the interest of poor rural women. Do these women's programmes indeed serve the class and gender based interests of poor rural women?

In this chapter I will deal with:

1. customary women's societies;
2. developmentalist non-governmental organisations;
3. workers and peasant unions and political parties; and,
4. women's movement.

IV.1 Customary Women's Societies

There exist customary forms of community organisation which are organised according to the customary sexual division of labour. So is the women's temple society (Kulangana Samithi) in the Singalese Buddhist village, which is concerned with the welfare of the monks and with the organisation of temple activities, an important meeting place for women. These customary societies, however, reflect and reproduce existing power relations and the interest representation of poor rural women will be minimum.

There are also various local initiatives of women who organise on a common interest to strengthen their bargaining position. Examples of these are rural contract workers groups and informal credit and saving's groups. These NGOs may challenge external power relations (such as employers or money lenders) but at the same time they are likely to reproduce internal power relations such as caste and intra gender hierarchies.

IV.2 Developmentalist NGOs

The oldest existing developmentalist-NGOs which were concerned with the situation of poor rural women trace their origins in the end of the previous or the beginning of this century. These earliest NGOs were of foreign origin and largely mission-oriented, with an urban bias and with strong affiliations to their international parent bodies (Wanigasekera 1979:1). These NGOs were male dominated with the exception of the YWCA (Christian), the YWBA (Buddhist) and the Lanka Mahila Samithi (Singalese). The latter two found their origin in the buddhist singalese revival movement (see Chapter III). After the independence of Sri Lanka, these NGOs directed themselves to the pauperised rural areas with all kinds of social and economical development programmes.

The oldest NGO working among women in the rural areas is the Lanka Mahila Samithi (LMS) or Federation of Rural Women's Associations. The LMS was established in 1930 by middle class women of the Singalese community and was therefore basically oriented towards the Singalese community. The LMS aimed at "the upliftment of the social, economical and moral standards of rural women and their families" (CENWOR 1985:159). The LMS developed a wide network in the Singalese rural areas and works in close cooperation with the Ministry of Rural Development and the Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka (CENWOR 1985:159; Wanigasekera 1979:4/5). Another large scale developmentalist NGO working among the rural population is the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (SSM). The SSM was established in 1958 and was basically oriented towards the Singalese community. The SSM aimed at moral awareness building, at encouraging popular participation ("self help") and at reviving the ideal of the self sufficient and democratic village societies as are believed to have been the basis of the ancient Singalese civilisation (Mul 1985:37). At the national symposium on "New Dimensions in the Role of Women" in 1982, organised by the Women's Bureau, Dr A.T. Ariyaratne, founder and president of the SSM, heightened the importance of women referring to her as being the most powerful power that exists in the world, which is the power of the Mother. And he mentioned three famous mothers of kings from the ancient chronicals. He emphasised the role of the mother in helping to mould the future society.

Since January 1988, the SSM also has a women's branch, the Sarvodaya Kulangana Sansadaya. The aims of the SKS as were stated in their constitution were totally in the light of the SSM ideology, which implied that gender and class based interests of rural women were perceived as defined by their ethnic and national based interests. The SKS received support from the government and foreign donors. These resources, however were all channeled through the central (male dominated) SSM organisation.

Both Lanka Mahila Samithi and Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement were obviously part of the "Singalisation" movement (see Chapter III) as a reaction to the westernised Christian NGOs which started to spread their activities to the rural areas. They therefore perceived women's interests as defined by ethnic and national based interests.

Both organisations always worked in close cooperation with the governments of Sri Lanka and they therefore also played to a certain extent the role of client intermediairy between the state and the rural population. Several studies show that local leaders of these organisations revived or strengthened patron-client relationships with the rural poor (women) (a.o. Mul 1985).

The UN-Decade for women led to the "visibility" of women in most developmentalist NGOs in Sri Lanka, which in some cases led to programmes for poor rural women. These programmes sometimes 'touched' class and gender based interest conflicts in the rural society, but hardly challenged these conflicts. Therefore these programmes might have negative effects with regard to class and gender based interests. To illustrate the last, I refer to the report of S.S.A.L. Siriwardhene (1983) about an experiment to organise poor rural worker women to escape from their plight as hired labourer.

'When they (the women) worked as hired labourers, the average quantity of raw cashew nuts processed was about 2000 per day and they worked six days a week. Most of those women set up their own processing units after the Gam Pubuduwa Village Society had given its assistance and were able to process 2000 to 3000 nuts, sometimes working only four days a week because of the help of other family members and the additional hours of work they put in per day...Earlier when the women worked as hired labourers there was detachment from the family (1983:30-31).

and

'When the men realise that the women are capable of managing both economic and domestic activities they tend to enjoy the relief with less work and less responsibilities. Neglegence of families and the lack of cooperation in economic activities appear to be one of the reactions of men towards progressive women' (1983:45) (emphasis mine, c.q.).

There were only very few developmentalist NGOs which supported poor rural women with resources to enable them to participate in a (nation-wide) women's movement to challenge gender relations at macro level and/or in a nation wide peasant/rural workers movement to challenge class relations (at macro level). Examples of NGOs which were committed to the last objective are the Devasarana Development Centre, the Christian Workers Fellowship, the Malabe Centre for Education, the Gandiyam Society Vavuniya (an organisation of 'Indian' Tamil encroachers which was destroyed by the Government in 1983), the Network of Rural Women's Organisations. All these NGOs, however were relatively small and increasingly faced measures by the government which obstructed these activities and forced these NGOs to limit to socio economic and welfare type of activities only. (In the north and east of Sri Lanka were practically no developmentalist NGOs functioning anymore as a result of the civil war, with the exception of NGOs for rehabilitation and relief work.)

IV.3 Workers and Peasant Unions and Political Parties

Political parties as well as trade unions in Sri Lanka are highly segmented along ethnic lines. From the 1930s onwards political parties had already split up along ethnic lines when no agreement could be achieved on the number of seats allocated to ethnic minority groups in the state councils as a guarantee for the interests of ethnic minority groups. From 1956 onwards, with the acceleration of the "Singalisation" of the society, most of the trade unions also splitted up along ethnic lines.

In 1927, the Women's Franchise Union was formed by women who were mostly wives of nationalist and Marxist foremen, which resulted in the equal franchise for men and women. This also led to the formation of women's branches of political parties and most of the trade unions. The primal aim of these women's branches, however, was to mobilise women's support for class and nationalist struggles and

for election campaigns (Jayewardene 1986). These women's branches enabled women certainly to strengthen their organisation and to develop a greater insight of their position in the society. However, because the leadership of these organisations was male-dominated, gender interests have been subordinated to class and ethnic interest. Moreover, when particular campaigns and struggles lost their momentum, women generally faced problems of reversion to subordinated roles again (Coomaraswamy 1984). Class based organisations in the rural areas of Sri Lanka have been practically absent. The major Marxist parties in Sri Lanka, the Trotskyist LSSP and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka developed their base primarily among the urban working class. With regard to the interests of the rural population, they perceived the elimination of "feudal remnants" as the primal interest of the peasantry, because these "feudal remnants" were the main obstruction to the development of a 'proletariat' in the rural areas and therefore were these the main obstruction for their liberation (Moore 1985:V & Jayewardene 1971).

In 1943, the Communist Party of Sri Lanka linked up with two Singalese peasant leaders who led the resistance against local 'feudal' landlords, which resulted in the formation of the All Lanka Peasant's Congress. The ALPC found her support among the Singalese peasantry in many areas of the dry zone. However it lost again this support when the ideological break up of the Communist Party in a "Moscow" and a "Peking" wing pushed the peasant demands to the background. The Youth Insurrection led by the JVP in 1971 (see Chapter III) appeared to give the final blow to the ALPC. Most leaders of the ALPC were arrested too, although it is said that they had no involvement in the insurrection (Fernando 1987). In the late seventies, leaders of the Nava Lanka Communist Party (a recent break-away group of the Communist Party) took up the reorganisation of the ALPC. They invited several individuals (among them local peasant leaders and ex-JVP activists) and developmentalist NGOs which worked in the rural areas, to support this reorganisation. This led to the re-emergence of the ALPC, this time as an "independent" peasant union. The diverse nature of the "new" ALPC led to a rather local and issue oriented strategy to organise peasants (Quist 1986). Although the ALPC had its major basis among the Singalese peasantry of the dry zone, it developed this time also contacts with peasant's and rural worker's organisations among the Tamil ethnic minority.

Also among the agricultural workers of the northern Tamil population (Jaffna) an agricultural workers' struggle had been developed under the leadership of the Communist Party (Shanmugathan). And similarly this Jaffna Rural Labourers Union lost its impetus as a result of the ideological split in the Communist Party. However, this union too was re-animated in the 1970s, initiated by local leaders and youth (Quist 1986).

Contrary to the Jaffna Rural Labourers Union, which had its base among (nearly) landless agricultural labourers only, the ALPC had its support among all layers of the peasantry, although primarily among the poor sections. This also may explain the lack of intra-class analysis of the peasantry by the ALPC. The ALPC directed its struggle primarily against the government, against international agencies (e.g. the World Bank) and against TNCs. The ALPC had not supported agricultural workers' struggles against peasant employers (Quist 1986).

Both organisations, the ALPC and Jaffna Rural Labourers Union as well as smaller peasant organisations united in 1979 in a Joint Peasant Congress Committee to strengthen their demands to the government. However they were thereafter confronted with an increasing repression by the state and an escalated ethnic conflict which tore apart the emerging peasant movement of Sri Lanka (Quist 1986; Fernando 1987). (See note (1) at end Chapter IV).

The gender interest had been practically absent in the peasant and rural worker based organisations, although there is evidence of active participation of women in agrarian class struggles (Kurian 1982; Quist 1986; Hoytink 1987). However from the early 1980s onwards with the strengthening of a feminist consciousness during the UN-Decade for Women, the tendency appeared among women's groups and branches of worker's and peasant's unions to form autonomous women's organisations to organise women on gender based interests too (Jayewardene in: Voice of Women 1986).

The Pragathaseeli Kantha Peramuna (PKP) is born from the ALPC and was formed in 1981 as an autonomous rural women's organisation. The PKP organised women on class and gender based interests. The PKP found her support primarily in areas where the ALPC had its basis. The PKP, by 1986, had twenty branches and about 175 activists at the central level (Hoytink 1987). It is striking that poor rural households were more represented among the PKP than among the ALPC. It

is observed that the cause for this is related to the fact that women of poor rural households were more class conscious. Moreover women of middle class peasant households were more reluctant to participate in social activism as a result of gender subordination (personal observation by the author during her work with the PKP in 1986, see also Hoytink 1987). However, it should be stressed, that most PKP-activists were the wife, sister or daughter of male ALPC-activists, who encouraged the women to get involved in activism (Ibid). Poor women who did not have such a support also found many restrictions due to gender subordination.

The PKP was one of the founder members of the Joint Women's Action Committee, which was formed by autonomous women's organisations among peasant, urban worker and urban middle class women. The inclination of the PKP towards feminism was not always received enthusiastically by the male activists. Accusations by some men that the women had come under the influence of the values of 'westernised' middle class women caused confusion among the young PKP activists who were dependent on the ALPC men with regard to organisational experience and intimate relationship. However, being an autonomous organisation had helped the PKP to develop a constructive dialogue with the ALPC male activists. Recently, a PKP woman was elected in the central board of the ALPC.

IV.4 The Women's Movement

The UN-Decade for Women witnessed the emergence and strengthening of autonomous women's organisations in Sri Lanka. Two trends are observed within this movement. Kumari Jayewardene calls these the "liberal" trend and the "socialist-feminist" trend (Jayewardene in: Voice of Women 1986). The liberal trend lobbies for equal political, legal and economic rights - which include equal access to education, employment and political decision making - and for "integration of women into development" by bringing women new avenues of employment and income generating projects. The second trend that Jayewardene identified is the socialist feminist trend. In her article on Feminism in Sri Lanka (Voice of Women-March 1986), Kumari Jayewardene explains the ideology of this trend.

'the socialist feminists basically go beyond liberal developmentalists in that

their agitation is defined in terms of liberation rather than emancipation. Unlike the developmentalists, who accept the system as given, the socialist feminists are for changing the system, believing that women's exploitation and oppression are not "social evils" (to be eradicated by legislation), but are part of the whole exploitative economic system which depends for its survival on the continuing oppression and exploitation of both men and women. The women's movement, they argue is therefore not only a democratic struggle for equal rights, but is also part of the struggle for radical social change' (1986:23).

The first socialist feminist group in Sri Lanka, Voice of Women, was formed in 1978. This group derived her members primarily from the urban middle class of all ethnic communities and many of its members had a background in Marxist political parties. In the subsequent years other 'socialist-feminist' groups emerged. Among these were the "Women's Liberation Movement" in Ja-Ela, which had her basis among export garment workers around the Free Trade Zone and the Pragathaseeli Kantha Peramuna (Progressive Women's Front) which had her basis among peasants and rural workers (see previous section). These two organisations were the largest among the socialist feminist groups.

These last two organisations were rather dependent on their urban middle class socialist feminist sisters with regard to analysis and knowledge. Both organisations therefore faced many problems as a result of their inclination to feminism. On one side they were a direct part of the worker's and peasant's struggle and therefore they were confronted with criticism by several of their gender role conservative male comrades who thought the gender based interest to be subordinated to the class interest. On the other hand they often felt "pushed" by their urban middle class feminist sisters to take a more radical feminist stand, while they were working among women in a generally conservative social surrounding. A passage from the editorial of the Kantha Maga magazine of the PKP of April 1984, clearly expressed the dilemma of PKP activists:

'When we first heard of the concept of domestic slavery it impressed us greatly. We realised how unjust it was that all domestic responsibilities be placed on the shoulders of us women. Yet we did not realise how difficult it would be to change this situation; nor did we see how limited were the "solutions" possible within the present context".....

'Because we started off at a very primary level, we had to learn everything anew with every step we took forwards.....At the initial stage we turned to many people in our search for a right ideology. Yet the ideas we received were mostly confused and incomplete'.....

'We clearly see three obstacles to overcome in our attempt to seek the right path. The first is the fact that we make mistakes due to our lack of experiences. The second is the tendency which seeks to isolate the women's movement in an extremist fashion instead of making it a part of the general people's movement. The third is the discouragement we feel due to the sarcasm and insults levelled at us intentionally and unintentionally... "comrades" succeeded in creating among us the same feelings of fear and shame that are usually created in us by the jibes of young crowdies who harrass us when we walk along a lonely road' (Kantha Maga editorial, April 1984:3).

The recent formation of the Joint Women's Action Committee by various autonomous socialist feminist groups, among which is the PKP, had led to the development of a lively dialogue among the women from the various backgrounds. The campaigns organised by the WAC at nation-wide level, such as the yearly organisation of International Women's Day, involved issues which concerned both (peasant)class and gender based interests (a.o. violence against women, women worker's exploitation, the eviction of peasants from their lands).

However, also the WAC organisations were confronted with an increased repression by the state (Chapter III) and with the escalating ethnic conflict. Feminism and the women's movement were increasingly publicly ridiculed and attacked 'by religious fundamentalists and nationalists as foreign import and by liberals as a passing fad' (Bandaraga 1988:80; also Jayewardene in Voice of Women 1986). This resulted in that most of the women activists of the PKP have withdrawn to their villages and families and many faced problems of reversion to subordinated roles again. However, gender solidarity linkages among the women at local level had certainly strengthened and the impression could not be avoided that the PKP was not dead, but dormant. The PKP activists tried to find the margins, how small even, to continue their struggle.

With regard to NGOs and the interests of poor rural women in Sri Lanka, the following can be concluded. As a result of the universal franchise women had been organised mainly on political party basis, which represented different ethnic communities and classes. Other NGOs were able to mobilise women, but within the margins defined by the state, which means mainly for national developmentalist purpose.

However, in all NGOs, the gender and class based interests of poor rural women were practically absent or they had been made subordinated to other more powerful

interests, such as those of the masculine gender, the middle class, the ethnic community or the urban 'proletariat'. The UN-Decade for Women has given support to women to organise themselves (autonomously) on gender based interests. The emergence of an autonomous poor rural women's organisation like the Pragathaseeli Kantha Peramuna enabled poor rural women to mobilise themselves on gender and class based interests. As is shown in Chapter II.2 poor rural women belong to the poorest category of the poor, which means that they have the least resources

The support of the Women's Action Committee and the All Lanka Peasants Congress have shown to be of an enormous importance for the strengthening of the PKP, although the PKP had to struggle hard to maintain her autonomy. The PKP met a lot of resistance from more powerful interests in the society and unfortunately does the present situation in Sri Lanka show that the margins for an autonomous rural women's organisation are very small.

However, once being mobilised the PKP shows that they are not willing to give up the struggle. Even when a lot of her resources are demobilised, the PKP continues to look for margins for mobilisation by joining with other organisations with which she shares interests.

Note 1.

In 1979 the ALPC took the initiative to join six peasant organisations in a Joint Peasant Congress Committee to launch a campaign on several peasant demands and to hand over a petition to the President of Sri Lanka. The demands were:

- to stop the allocation of lands to TNCs (Agricultural Promotion Zone);
- to stop eviction of encroachers from their lands and to give them land title deeds;
- to decrease the prices of agricultural inputs and to fix the produce prices;
- to give subsidies for food crops and not only for export crops;
- to give access to credit facilities for small farmers; and,
- to undertake measures against disasters suffered by small farmers and rural workers as a result of unplanned mechanisation of agriculture.

In September 1982, a demonstration was organised with the support of Buddhist monks and Christian clergy, of certain Marxist parties and trade unions of women's organisations and of various other NGOs. The demonstration was rudely dispersed by the police (Fernando 1987; Quist 1986). Thereafter as a result of the sharpening ethnic conflict and the increasing repression by the State, the Joint Peasant Congress Committee had fallen apart. Peasant and rural worker unions in the Tamil populated areas at the north and east have been either destroyed by the Sri Lankan government, or they have been 'taken over' by the 'Tamil Liberation Movement'. The ALPC had to withdraw from several areas as a result of murder campaigns of the newly emerged JVP and other terror groups which experienced the ALPC as a major rival. The JVP had been able to emerge again as a result of the sharpening ethnic conflict and the increasing economic crisis in the country, appealing to the problems of the singalese educated unemployed rural youth. Its ideology today is an extreme Singalese nationalism with vague Marxist overtones. Its murder campaigns are directed to all parties and organisers which supported the Peace Accord of 1987 to end the civil war between Sri Lankan government and Tamil Liberation Movement. They are portrayed by the JVP as 'traitors of the motherland' The ALPC and also the PKP were among the organisations which publicly supported the right of self determination of all ethnic communities in Sri Lanka (Samaranayake 1987; see also the Sri Lankan Situation Reports of 1988/89, published by the South Asia Bureau, in FRG).

CHAPTER V

THE PRAGATHASEELI KANTHA SAMVEDANIYA

(PROGRESSIVE WOMEN'S ORGANISATION)

A CASE STUDY OF THE PROCESS OF MOBILISATION OF
POOR RURAL WOMEN ON CLASS AND GENDER BASED INTERESTS

In this chapter I analyse the process of mobilisation on class and gender based interests of a group of poor rural women of village M, which is one of the oldest branches of the PKP (Chapter IV.4). Some women of the women's society of village M became also activists at the central level of the PKP. This analysis is based on the information that I collected from a socio-economic survey which is made in 1981 by a group of villagers, most of them were women, and myself, on my personal diaries which record observations, discussions and interviews during the period 1980-1986 and on the continuing correspondence with the women's group during times of my absence. I was involved with the women's group from its initial stage.

In this last chapter I try to close the circle of theory and practice.

For the purpose of protecting the anonymity of the women, I refer to the village as village M.

V.1 Introduction to Village M: economy and social development

Case village M is situated in the district of Kurunagala, in the North Western Province and on the border of the dry and wet zone (semi dry zone).

The Kurunagala district is a typical rural district, about 96% of its population lives in the rural areas. The Kurunagala district area had been part of the last kingdom of Kandy and its agricultural system is inherited from those days and is based on an irrigation system of reservoirs ('wewa') and a network of canals. Today the 'Green Revolution package' has been widespread over the district. The main crops cultivated are paddy and coconut. Its population belongs mainly to the Singalese ('Kandyan') ethnic community (Chapter II.2.1).

The Kurunagala district is one of the most densely populated districts of Sri Lanka. 48 per cent of the paddy holdings of the Kurunagala district are below 1 acre of which 19 per cent is below 0.5 acres. This is the reason that only a small percentage of the population is able to earn its livelihood from cultivation (see table 4).

Village M consists of an 'old' part and a 'new' part. The latter is an extension of the 'old' part, where offspring of the villagers and 'outsiders' have settled down.

V.1.1. The Economy of Village M.

Village M could be considered to be a poor village. Particularly the 75 per cent of the households that lived in the 'new' part of the village expressed that they suffered problems like insufficient land, problems related to irrigation and high input costs and low incomes (see tables 6 & 7).

Most of the households produced paddy only for their own consumption and they derived income from various other resources like vegetables, coconuts, carpentry, brick making, beedi making, coolie work.

In the time of the village survey in 1981, 75 per cent of the households had a monthly money income of less than 500 rupees (which was the official poverty line in 1981). The rate of indebtedness was high in village M. In 1981, 67 per cent of all households were in continuous debt. 50 per cent of the indebted households borrowed from two coconut traders in a neighbouring village and they repayed their loans through obligatory sale bondage. As a result these villages received depressed prices for their coconuts.

Table 4: Economic Categories in the Kurunagala District, 1980

| Category of households | Number of Households | |
|--|----------------------|------------|
| | Number | Percentage |
| 1. Landless, casual and permanent labourers in agriculture | 40,000 | 17.5 |
| 2. Farmers with insufficient land | 55,000 | 24.0 |
| 3. Farmers with adequate land | 60,000 | 26.0 |
| 4. Non-agricultural | 75,000 | 32.0 |
| Total | 230,000 | 100.0 |

Source: Kurunegala District Integrated Rural Development Project: A Critical Analysis of Project Formulation. Report No.4 in regional planning for agricultural Development in Sri Lanka ARTI/Wageningen University, July 1982.

Table 5: Distribution of Land Ownership in Village M, 1981

| | (coconut) | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| | Paddy holders: 62% | Highland holders: 53% | Landless: 22% |
| Less than 2 acres | 49% | 31% | - |
| 2-5 acres | 45% | 66% | - |
| 5-10 acres | 3% | 3% | - |
| More than 10 acres | 3% | - | - |

Note: 67% of the paddy land holders and 50% of the highland holders with a land property of more than 2 acres, lived in the 'old' part of the village. Most of the landless 22% lived in the 'new' part of the village

Source: Survey of Village M, 1981

Table 6: The Major Economical Difficulties Mentioned in the Survey of 1981 in Village M

| Problem | Number of Households |
|------------------------------------|----------------------|
| No sufficient irrigation | 48% |
| No sufficient land and capital | 35% |
| Too high agricultural input prices | 23% |
| Too low produce prices | 20% |
| Exploitation by middlemen | 17% |

Source: Survey Village M, 1981

Table 7: Proportion of Households in Village M, which derive Income from (1981)

| Resource | Percentage of Households |
|--|--------------------------|
| 1. Vegetables (Chilies, bringols, pumpkin) | 65% |
| 2. Betel leaf | 13% |
| 3. Fruits (lime) | 28% |
| 4. Coconut | 75% |
| 5. Paddy | 28% |
| 6. Other products (Carpentry, bricks) | 3% |
| 7. Agricultural wage labour | 32% |

Note: Items 1, 2 & 3 are sold at the fair
 Item 4 is sold to middlemen
 Item 5 is sold to middlemen and government cooperative
 Item 6 is sold to individuals and shops

Source: Survey Village M, 1981

The infrastructure of the village was of low quality; The school, the cooperative store and other shops, a bus service and a post office were all situated in the neighbouring village. The village was not supplied with electricity and firewood and kerosine oil were two types of fuel used by the villagers. Most villagers lived not more than 3 miles from the Puttalam main road. A single gravel road led from the neighbouring village and ended in the 'old' part of village M. But only recently, after persistent lobbying of the villagers, this road was extended via the 'new' part up to the Puttalam main road along which regular public transport exists. Other parts of village M were serviced with food paths.

People (men and women) went by bus to the markets in a area of 6 by 6 miles in the surroundings. However, coconuts and paddy were sold to the middle men, because most households had no transport facilities of their own; 87 per cent of the households complained about the bus fares which were higher than most people could afford.

V.1.2 Social Development of Village M

The level of education in the village was relatively high, especially among the younger generation.

Tables 8 & 9 show that the younger generation had been more keen on obtaining a higher degree of education. The tables also show a shift in educational level by sex. As an explanation for the latter it is argued that there was less necessity for the males to qualify higher because their fathers gave them a piece of land as soon as they were old enough to cultivate it. Today, with the emergence of the nuclear family and the increased land scarcity, the children, particularly daughters, were pushed to leave home. For the women, however, it was more difficult to find regularly paid work than for the men. Therefore the girls preferred to study as far as possible, if their parents allowed them, to increase their opportunity to find a (white collar) job. However it was observed that the eldest daughter was often kept at home at an early age to help her mother in the domestic work.

Table 8: Educational Level by Grade and Sex in Village M, 1981

| Level of education | Proportion (Percentage) | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|------|
| | | |
| Passed grade 1-5 | Total | 30.6 |
| | Male | 32.5 |
| | Female | 28.6 |
| Passed grade 6-10 | Total | 64.6 |
| | Male | 64.9 |
| | Female | 64.3 |
| Passed GCE (OL) | Total | 0.7 |
| | Male | 0.0 |
| | Female | 1.4 |
| Passed GCE (AL) | Total | 4.1 |
| | Male | 2.6 |
| | Female | 5.7 |

Source: Survey Village M, 1981

Table 9: Educational Level by Sex, by Parents/Children Group and by Part of the Village M, 1981

| | <u>'old' part</u> | | <u>Parents</u> | <u>'new' part</u> | |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------|----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| | <u>male</u> | <u>female</u> | | <u>male</u> | <u>female</u> |
| Primary education | 19% | 45% | | 43% | 38% |
| Secondary education | 81% | 55% | | 57% | 62% |
| | 100% | 100% | | 100% | 100% |

| | <u>'old' part</u> | | <u>Children</u> | <u>'new' part</u> | |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| | <u>male</u> | <u>female</u> | | <u>male</u> | <u>female</u> |
| Primary education | 29% | 12% | | 27% | - |
| Secondary education | 71% | 88% | | 73% | 100% |
| | 100% | 100% | | 100% | 100% |

Note: Only children who finalised their education have been recorded

Source: Survey Village M, 1981

The survey of 1981 revealed that 41 per cent of the mothers and 48 per cent of the fathers read books. The books that were read are novels, short stories, political books (men) and religious books (women). Women more often complained to have no time for reading. The younger generation, regardless sex, was more keen on reading books and magazines on social issues. Most households had a radio, and they listened to the news and story tellings.

In the 'old' part of village M, largely 50 per cent of the households lived in brick houses, often inherited from their parents, and owned a well. In the 'new' part the people generally lived in mud-huts with cadjan roof and the women often had to walk far to fetch water. The staple food in the village was rice and vegetables. Most of the households were beneficiaries of the government food stamp scheme for poor households (in 1981 below 500 rupees income). The rice they purchased on these food stamps was complementary to their own stock which was generally exhausted within a few months. However, for several reasons, not all the poor households received the food stamps from the government. The net result was that it was not uncommon to find a breakfast and sometimes a dinner could consist of nothing more than a cup of tea to a considerable number of poor households.

V.2 The Society of Village M

Village M is an homogenous community with regard to ethnicity, caste, and also class to a great extent. The village consisted out of around 65 households (Survey 1981) and most of the people were relatives, although often of a far degree. Actually, village M is a part of a greater administrative unit which included also villages of different caste, class and ethnic groups. However, the villagers experienced the total village M as their demarcation from the outside. The major distinction in the village is that between the 'old' part and the 'new' part of the village.

V.2.1 Class Relations in Village M

There were no typically rich peasants (in the definition of Athreya et.al., Chapter I) in village M. The few richest people were all resided in the 'old' part of the village. They owned around 10 acres of paddy land and 10 acres of coconut land, but they derived a major part of their income from government employment ('white collar') and hiring out agricultural equipment.

The majority of the households belonged to the category of **poor peasants and rural workers**. They were mainly found in the 'new' part of the village. The villagers of the 'new' part themselves generally owned little plots of land or were landless. Reason for landlessness were explained to be a fragmentation of land as a result of population increase or sale because of indebtedness. Most of the lands in the 'new' part of the village were owned by landlords from a neighbouring village, by the Buddhist temple and to a lesser extent by the state. Most of the villagers of the 'new' part of the village therefore leased land, in particular from the Buddhist temple and the state. The rich landowners from the neighbouring village preferred to cultivate the land by themselves with the use of hired labourers (Chapter II.2.4). The land leased from the state was practically free of rent. Those who leased land from the temple payed a produce rent of 0.25 per cent of the harvest (which is the legal rate). However those who leased land from the temple were also expected to do free labour duties for the residing monks.

Poor peasant households used primarily family labour and exchange labour ('attam'). However, most of the exchange labour was paid in the form of rice or money wage (as a result of the process of commoditisation; see Chapter II.2.4). Sharecropping was also a common feature among the poor peasant households. For them paddy was primarily a subsistence crop and most of the households derived income from various other resources (table 7). Coconuts were bought by middlemen who were often also moneylenders.

Indebtness to the middlemen generally resulted in bonded sale for depressed prices.

The adult male as well as the female members and often also the children, had their own income resources. Women mostly derived income from vegetables growing and selling and casual agricultural labour. They also derived income from home craft like beedi and cigar making, rope and broom making, but they received depressed prices for these due to marketing problems ('open economy'). Men also derived income from vegetables (members of the household often have their separate cultivation), agricultural wage labour and craft work like brick making, masoning and carpentry. Both men and women worked in local governmental construction programmes like road building and irrigation repair.

32 per cent of the households of village M derived an income from agricultural wage labour. They worked in the paddy season peaks for farmers in the surroundings, but also in the village. Outside the season peaks they tried to find work in the coconut plantations of rich farmers outside the village. Some also went as migrant worker to the new settlement schemes in the dry zone (Chapter II.2.4). Particularly the women workers worked in contract groups (Ibid). An informal leader organised the contracts for her group with farmers to do a particular job. Many of the women workers of the contract group of village M came from female headed households, where agricultural labour was the main income resource.

The survey of 1981 revealed that most of the poor households perceived 'the rich' as 'selfish people, who want to keep the poor under their control'. And that 'the poor always work for the rich while the rich never work for the poor'.

V.2.2 Gender relations in Village M

The sexual division of labour in village M was similar as observed by scientists quoted in Chapter II.2.4. Although men of poor households were also engaged in 'women's tasks' in agriculture like planting and harvesting paddy (the dissolving effect of class formation on gender relations), this was only in the case of a lack of female labour (see also Rajapakse 1988; Risseeuw 1980). Women were hardly seen engaged in 'men's tasks'. Particularly tasks which involved machines were assigned to men only (with the exception of sewing machines, although I witnessed several men operating the sewing machine for their own purpose). However, home gardening (=non-paddy) was done by both sexes. The women agricultural labourers complained about the hard labour conditions. They had to work in the hot sun and in endless showers and they had to make long working days. They were only given a cup of tea and they had to look after their own meals. Their wages were about 30 per cent less than their male colleagues (see also Perera & Gunawardene 1980). I inquired with the women whether they knew about the existence of paddy planting machines. Most of them were not aware of these, but one of them said that she had seen such a machine on TV. When I explained to them the functions which could be performed by these machines, they felt that such machines would probably be used by the rich farmers and in general would ease the workload; but they would not like to see these machines deployed in the area because they would stand to lose employment and incomes. The women elaborated further that the work in the paddy fields was one of the few opportunities for them to come out of their homes and to get together as women.

It was observed that women (mothers and eldest daughters) were firstly responsible for the domestic work and therewith for the basic needs expenses of the household. The male members had a larger income margin to spend for their private purposes (see also Risseeuw 1980). In the poor households, where both parents work, at least one daughter was kept at home to do the domestic work (often the eldest daughter). It was not a rarity to see girls of around 10 years old who cooked for the whole family. The 'double-burden' was of high weight for the women of poor households who also had to go far to fetch water or collect firewood ('new' part of the village).

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However, it was also observed that men of poor households felt less restrictions to assist in the domestic work than men from richer households, because, as the women explained to me, the latter were more concerned about their status (see also Rajapakse 1988). The women said also that in their opinion a marriage was successful when the man shows his responsibility for the family and permits the woman to have her private life. However, most of them did not believe that there existed such men, although the younger women were more optimistic.

Although the women of poor households generally had more freedom of movement than the women of better-off households, this freedom was **only allowed for legitimate purposes** such as going to the market, to the working place or bringing a child to the hospital. In the period that I stayed in the village, I also observed that the women of the poor households adhered stronger to customary values which express gender subordination. The women from better off households were more often inclined to 'new' gender values of the 'modern housewife' and spent much time for sewing dresses according to the latest design in vogue, to decorative handicraft and cooking new recipes, etc. things which were out of reach for the poor.

Customary rituals like the 'coming-of-age' ceremony (first menstruation), exorcism (which is more frequently identified with women) and food taboos were more frequently observed with women of poor households (although not with the very poor, because these rituals cost a lot of money). I witnessed several cases where young women from poor households who had a love affair with a boy of low status (which means a combination of a low caste and a low class) and who refused to break this relationship, were considered to be possessed by devils and had to undergo these exorcist rituals. It was observed that customary rights for women to inherit land equal to her brother ('Kandyan' law) were not practiced anymore. It was quite normal, the women explained to me, that the brothers would occupy their sisters' part of the inheritance immediately after their father's death.

When the men mistreated their wives, which was not uncommon in village M, the women would leave the house and went back to their parents. However, most of them returned to their husbands because they felt they were an economical

burden to their parents. And they had no other place to go.

The women told me that it was very difficult for a woman to live on her own, because she always must live with the threat of violence from men. The women of the poor female headed households were generally considered 'easy to take', as the women put it, and particularly those without grown-up sons at home suffered from the unwanted visits of men, which in some cases led to rape.

Most women expressed that they would like to educate their sons in a different way and teach them to have another attitude towards women, but that they were unable to resist the influence of their sons' fathers and friends ('Boys just want to behave like other men do').

The women were of the opinion that there was more freedom for women today, which they approved. In earlier days the parents thought it was enough for a girl when she could read, and they only thought about to get her married. Now they allow the girls to study, but in times of economical constraints priority will be given to the education of the boys.

The question 'whether men are more important than women' of the survey of 1981, was positively answered by 28 per cent of the men and 50 per cent of the women. Several women explained that although they considered men and women as equal, the men had more privileges in the society.

I observed among the women of the younger generation, especially those with a secondary school education, a relatively strong feeling of dissatisfaction with their present condition. They experienced the village life as very limited and they endeavoured to obtain a white collar employment outside the village or to go as a migrant worker to the Middle East, or to go to Colombo to find a job in the export garment factories (Chapter III.2).

Many of them, however, became actively involved in the women's group and in the PKP, which they also saw as a way to break the barriers of their village life.

Many of them also wished not to marry until they found a partner with whom they could share and discuss everything.

Younger people, much more often than the older generation, answered the question in the survey of 1981 of 'why they thought that poor people are poor' with 'because they are the have nots and the rich will not share with the poor'.

From the older generation, the answer was often heard 'because the poor are lazy and because it is their fate'.

There was a much higher willingness among the younger generation, the men as well as the women, to involve themselves in political activities, although they were very critical about the major political parties.

The aspirations of the youth were not always appreciated by the older generation. As a result, conflicts arose between the generations and the girls in particular frequently had to face such conflicts with their parents.

V.3 The Women of Village M and the State

The Kurunagala district has the highest number of registered rural institutions (governmental and non-governmental) of all districts in the country. For village M, practically all these rural institutions were established in the neighbouring village (which is said to be a village of the rich), such as the village development council (gramodaya mandalaya), the cooperative society, the rural development society (gramasanwardene samitiya), the cultivation officer and the national youth council (Chapter III.2).

The fact that village M had not actively supported the member of parliament of the area was the major reason cited by the villagers which explains the relatively low level of benefits received under the decentralised budget. The participation in the Rural Development Society of village M was very low. The survey of 1981 revealed that the main reasons for poor participation were that:

1. the villagers of the outskirts of the village were not invited for meetings;
2. the RDS was dominated by a small clique which actively supported the ruling party; and,

3. most of the villagers did not expect to benefit from the activities of the RDS.

The participation of the women in the rural institutions was practically nihil. There had been a Women's Rural Development Society where sewing classes were organised and sewing machines were supplied by the rural development officer. However, not many women of village M participated in this society, because as they cited:

1. they did not have money to pay the teacher and the materials;

2. they had no time; and,
 3. they could not afford to be interested in sewing and decorative handicrafts.
 The women's RDS experienced a short life.

The women of village M expressed not to have much confidence in the government programmes. For instance they told me that women of a neighbouring village had received young chickens from the Women's Bureau Programme (Chapter III.2), which later all appeared to be cocks. They also told me that one woman was assaulted by an officer of this programme (who appeared to be a man). The women's group of village M had visited the officer in charge of the women's programme in the region to ask for assistance for their programme. However they got a negative reply, because village M was not covered by the in Colombo planned programme of the Women's Bureau (see also Chapter III.2).

The proportion of villagers who made use of the government agricultural extension services was very low. It appeared that most provisions were only for farmers with an agricultural identity card, which is issued to bonafide farmers. Most farmers of village M did not have such a card (for instance, of the 400 landowning households in the cultivation officer's division only 25 had applied for a loan). The C.O. told me that practically no women make use of the agricultural extension services. And an agricultural extension officer of the regional office explained to me that women do not attend seminars and courses 'because they are not engaged in paddy cultivation' (Chapter III.2).

Village M is covered by the World Bank sponsored Integrated Rural Development Programme for the Kurunagala district. The only benefit from this programme which the villagers experienced is the repair of one of the irrigation reservoirs, which created (temporary) employment for the men as well as the women. I was told that the repair was only finished half way because the money had already disappeared in the pockets of the local contractors and responsible politicians. A delegation of the village M to make a complaint at the World Bank office did not change anything.

The survey of 1981 revealed that 77 per cent of the households were not satisfied with the government institutions. As major reasons were cited:
 1. an unwillingness of the government to assist the villagers to solve their problems;

2. political and personal corruption; and,
3. they divide the people.

However, in 65 per cent of the households the men as well as the women had a membership of one of the major political parties, the UNP and the SLFP. Major reasons for this was, as explained to me, that party affiliation was necessary to receive any benefit from the government resources (see conclusion Chapter III). It was also not exceptional to find in one household members of both parties (UNP, SLFP) to safeguard access to government resources regardless party in power. Only a few villagers, practically all men, were actively involved in party politics. Most of them belonged to the younger generation and most of them came from families who had been actively supporting the United Left Front Government (SLFP, LSSP and CPSL) of 1970-77 (chapter III.2).

Since 1977 no general elections had taken place. There was an increased repression from the side of the government as well as from fast emerging terror groups. A very few youngsters of the village developed sympathies with the JVP which had emerged again in the economical and political crisis of the country (Chapter III.2, note at end of Chapter IV).

When in 1988 and 1989 presidential and general elections were held, some villagers had become active campaigners for a populist Marxist split-away from the SLFP, the Sri Lanka Mahajana Pakshaya which had a close relationship with the All Lanka Peasants Congress. The SLMP, however, experienced only a relatively short period of growth because the SLMP-supporters became a major target of the terror campaign of the JVP, which saw the SLMP as a serious rival. Only a very few villagers actively participated in the UNP and SLFP and those came primarily from the traditional political leading families (often the better-off households) (Chapter III.1).

During the last few years, the police had come to the village regularly to search for youth who were suspected of 'subversive' activities. During the periods of martial law, villagers were not allowed to meet in groups of more than five persons. The women of village M who were active in the PKP at central level had to stop these activities to a great extent because of the increasing repression by the state and the JVP.

This all led to an increased frustration with the villagers, particularly

the younger generation (as I learned from the letters I received from several villagers).

V.4 The Mobilisation Process of the Women of Village M

V.4.1 The Initiative to Organise the Village

In 1980, a group of young villagers (around ten) made an attempt to mobilise the villagers for collective action. These young people all came from poor households and most of them had finished their secondary school education. Some of them had been participating in a youth farm under the rural youth employment programme of the United Left Front Government (1970-77) (Chapter III.2). The major reason for these young people to undertake this initiative was a general dissatisfaction. They had failed to find themselves a regular job, partly due to political discrimination, partly due to scarcity of jobs. Furthermore did their families face severe economic problems. They were not satisfied with the government which had promised an abundance of jobs and consumer goods ('open-economy') but which were out of reach for the poor. These young people were all actively involved in community work in the village, particularly in the Buddhist Sunday school. Especially the young Buddhist monk (a university student of political science) and a woman who was the eldest and most experienced of the group, inspired the group with ideas. The group visited regularly the homes in the village and had long discussions about the problems experienced by the villagers. Their enthusiasm and genuinity to the problems of the people awakened a hope for change with the people. The group contacted some developmentalist NGOs in the surroundings to assist them in training and material support (the Kurunagala district has the largest number of registered NGOs). I, who was working with a local NGO and had become friendly with the group, assisted the group in making a social survey, which gave the group as well as the villagers much more insight in their problems. The presentation of the survey-outcome to the villagers was taken as the occasion to found an independent villagers organisation in 1981. The chief monk gave his permission to build a meeting shed in the temple premise. Also government officers were contacted to conduct

education on issues like health and agriculture and some of them reacted positively. During 1981-1983 activities pointed out by the villagers as the most needed, were organised, such as the building of a road, common wells, village health posts, a library, a pre-school, a credit society, etc. The participation of the villagers in the new village organisation was good.

The women also participated in great number, which was the result of the encouragement by the young women activists of the initiators group. The strength of the organisation was that they succeeded to keep their autonomy. No political party neither any (developmentalist) NGO was able to get the organisation under their control. The weakness however, was that all the management and development of ideas was dependent on the young initiators group. The approach of the villagers to participation very much mimicked their earlier approach to the institutionalised village organisations which can be described as 'asking and expecting assistance from a benefactor'.

However, the group could discuss this problem openly with the villagers at the bi-monthly village meetings. I, myself, came regularly to the village to support the group in evaluation, strategy planning and to expand their contact network. Our mutual enthusiasm and close friendship strengthened our commitment.

V.4.2 The Struggle with Opposing Interests

The problems with opposing interests that arose were mainly related to the type of NGOs with which the group developed a relationship and the increasing repression by the state (Chapters III & IV). Two NGOs which supported the group in social work and health training had a Christian background. A third NGO with which the group developed a close relationship supported the All Lanka Peasant Congress (ALPC) and the Pragathaseeli Kantha Peramuna (PKP) (Chapter IV.3 & .4). The center place of this NGO was at travel distance from the village M. The introduction of the ALPC and the PKP to village M received a lot of interest from the poor households. The papers of these organisations were widely read and awakened discussions. Seminars by both groups were well attended.

And although Singalese Buddhist NGOs like the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement

(Chapter IV.2) were also present in the district, the young group did not feel attracted to these NGOs because they believed that these were establishment organisations which did not support 'the liberation of the people'.

The relationship with the above mentioned NGOs were used by the opponents of the group, particularly after 1983 when the ethnic based conflict began to escalate. The opposition was led by the Buddhist chief monk, the local leader of the ruling political party and later also the JVP. (The latter began its terror campaign in the country after being banned by the government in 1983.) Rumours were spread that the involvement with the Christian NGOs and their foreign sponsors were a threat to the Singalese Buddhist culture. After a visit in 1983 of a group of Tamil plantation labourers on an exchange programme with the village, obscene and anti-Tamil slogans were painted on the meeting shed. The villagers were very angry about this deed. The suspicion of this deed felt on some people closely associated with the above mentioned opponents, some even did not live in the village. In 1985, after a meeting in the meeting shed of the village M by ALPC activists and some student activists who were involved in a student protest campaign against the government, the chief monk closed the meeting shed. He also prohibited the young monk to associate himself further with the group. Major reason for the grievance of the chief monk, however was the increasing public criticism on him. The poor villagers openly criticised the chief monk for asking too much money and free labour from the poor households to build new monk quarters which they considered to be too luxurious for the village. Moreover, did they complain that the chief monk was always in the company of the rich land owners and that he hardly visited the houses of the poor. Villagers showed their disapproval by staying away from temple ceremonies led by the chief monk, while they attended those led by the young monk whom they considered to be on their side. On the other hand was the chief monk confronted with an increased pressure from the local leader of the government party and other powerfull interest groups. Both were his main supplier of resources (governmental and financial), who critisised the chief monk of being too tolerant with the rebellious attitude of the other villagers.

The attacks on the group young initiators had been bitterly, from anonymous letters about sex scandals and corruption to anonymous tips to the

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police about association of the group with the banned JVP. By 1986 the village was divided into two camps: those who believed the rumours and those who did not. Among the believers were particularly families who had a relative strong dependency relationship with the temple and/or with the political leader. Those families hoped to get land (on lease) and welfare facilities if they gave their support to these.

Villagers meetings were stopped, partly because of these problems, partly because of the state of emergency in the country, which made people cautious to gather for any purpose which could be associated with 'subversive activities'. Therefore the problems could not be discussed openly and thoroughly. The group of young initiators had split up. They had not been able to withstand the attacks by the opponents and their friendship relationship had broken as a result of the rumours and gossips. Particularly the young monk, who was isolated from the group by the chief monk, turned his frustrations against the others of the group. When I returned to the village by the end of 1985 there was nothing I could do to turn this situation.

And although the central village organisation stopped to function, some activities were continued. This had been able because of the decentralised organisation structure. These activities were the credit and saving society and the marketing society, as well as the women's society.

The credit and saving society formed in 1985 and the marketing society formed in 1987 were aimed at elimination of the dependency of money lenders and middle men. Both societies were successful because:

1. they answered to an urgent need of the poor; and,
2. they were supported by some young men from better-off families who not only had a good relationship with the temple (for which their families were a major financial resource) but also had enjoyed the privileges of an university education. They had become friends with some of the young initiators group. These young men had been active in community activities in the neighbouring village, but had left because of disagreement (compared to the rich peasants of that village, these young men came from middle peasant households). The men told me that they felt more attracted to the ideas and aspirations of the young initiators group of village M.

Two families had gifted a piece of waste land where a new meeting hall and a marketing centre were built. To shift from the temple premise was by all sides seen as a wise step.

The credit and savings society was democratical, but purely functionally organised. Discussions about the problems of the poor farmers and the rural workers and mobilisation to challenge class conflicts were absent. The board of the society was dominated by men, most of them were from better-off families and their leadership was unquestionable in the village in contrary to that of members from the poor households. The only board member of a poor household was a woman of the women's society. The women had the best record of repaying their loans.

The marketing centre is still in an experimental stage and has suffered financial problems. It appeared that without external assistance the marketing centre may not succeed to break the monopoly of the middle men. Both managers of the cooperative came from the young initiators group and are a man and a woman.

The women's society also survived. In contrary to the other two societies, the women's society was dominated by women from the poorest households in village M.

V.4.3 The Women's Society of Village M

From the very beginning (1980), women had been actively involved in the new organisation activities. Many of the young initiators group had been women who had assisted the young monk with the Buddhist classes. Three of these young women assisted me to make the social survey in 1981 in order to collect answers from the women too. The women's society was formed in 1983 by some of the most active women in the village organisation. Their first motive had been their dissatisfaction with the women's rural development society (chapter II.2), whose members were mainly daughters of well-off households, mainly from the neighbouring village, who had no interest to get involved in the new organisation of village M.

The customary temple society for women (Chapter IV.1) was also very

restricted and dominated by older women (those whose menstruation had stopped and therefore could not pollute), who had generally conservative ideas. The new women's society aimed to be only for the women of village M, for women of all marital status and only for the women who were active in the new organisation. The objectives of the women's society were initially to uplift the economic conditions of the women, to increase the active participation of the women in the village organisation and to enhance their general knowledge. Particularly women from the agricultural worker's households and unemployed women with secondary school education from poor households felt attracted to the organisation, partly because they wanted to improve their situation, partly because they were friends. And although there was a gap between practically uneducated rural workers and educated unemployed young women, they both were not satisfied with the present situation. Both women groups had different knowledge which showed to be supplementary: the rural workers women had various artisanal skills and organisational experience (contract worker's group) and the educated women were good in analysis, planning and finding the way to the bureaucracy and various NGOs. All women were active in the village organisational activities because of material and immaterial benefits. It helped them to enhance their relatively low status. My role in the women's society was less intensive than it had been in the young initiators group. One reason was that I was less needed because some women had become very experienced and because of other commitments I had as a result of my work with the PKP.

From 1983 onwards the women initiated several collective economical projects. Some of them failed, mainly because of marketing problems, others were successful like the rice retail 'shop'. And the agricultural labourer women who were a member of the women's society had been very successful in getting their wages increased. These women worked in the same contract group and they decided to organise a strike during the peak season of paddy harvesting. All the women (and children) had helped to spread messages to all women workers in the area to call for the strike. In some cases it took a lot of convincing because many women were afraid to lose their income and employment, particularly the women with small children had felt reluctant to participate.

The strike became a great success and the wages of the women were increased

from Rs15 to Rs20 per day (Rs1=approx. Df1.0,06). The women experienced this as a great triumph, but were indignant at the fact that the employers automatically also had increased the wages of the men, who had not participated in the strike at all!

Not all the women participated regularly in the women's society, which made a long term planning difficult. Some women were temporarily out of the village because of employment, some had no time, some stayed away because of some minor conflicts, some because of the threat of repression etc. However there developed a strong nucleus in the society of the most committed women (around twenty). These women felt particularly attracted by the new experiences, the new knowledge and the feeling of togetherness. This helped them to feel more self confident. Particularly women from poor female headed households felt safe in the group and not looked upon as 'bad' women anymore. The warm friendship which I developed with this group helped me to learn about these experiences of the women.

The women told me that they felt proud that this was the only village in the surroundings where the women actively participated in various village societies. They told me that in other villages the women only participated in the temple society. As a reason for this they explained that generally most of the village level organisational work is done by men who automatically only contact the male villagers. Women always had been left out. The women also explained to me that they often have no chance to participate in meetings because of the domestic work. Only an increased solidarity among themselves and support from their husbands or parents would enable them to participate in the full sense. The women's society helped them a lot in regard to the latter.

Solidarity links among the women had not only improved with regard to mutual support in matters like looking after each other's children, general domestic activities or borrowing cloths or money from each other. Also solidarity links with regard to intimate matters increased. In cases where women were not allowed by their parents or husbands to participate in some activity, other women of the society went to speak to them to convince them to let their wife or daughter come. Some women developed such an intimate friendship that they also discussed problems of their sexuality and of the mistreatment by their

fathers, husbands or brothers. Most women felt reluctant to speak out these kinds of intimate problems, because they feared to become a subject of gossip. And not without reason: gossip was the major threat to the women's society. The women were very tough in judging the gender role performance of each other, which I observed to be aimed at creating or maintaining an inter-gender hierarchy. However, with the increased participation of the women's society in the activities of the PKP, there emerged an awareness about concepts like gender subordination. Problems related to gender oppression became more and more discussed in the women's society, besides the discussions about economical programmes.

V.4.4 The Women's Society of Village M and the Women's Movement

In 1981, women of the young initiators group in Village M had met some women activists of the ALPC, who at that time were discussing to initiate an autonomous women's organisation to enable more women to get involved in social activism (Hoytink 1987). These women of village M therefore got involved in these discussions. They also belonged to the first members of the new Pragathaseeli Kantha Peramuna, which was formed in 1981. They also participated actively in the discussions, the seminars, the activist training and the programme planning of the PKP (Chapter IV.4). Later, after the women's society of village M was formed in 1983, these first women also brought other women from their village to these discussions, seminars and activist training of the PKP. In this way the women met other women from all over the country and they learned about the different and similar problems of these women. In the early years of the PKP there had not always been an harmonious relationship between the women of the villages and the activists of the central PKP. Both had a different motivation to participate in the PKP. The women of the village branches were mainly interested in the support of the PKP for their activities at village level (such as local peasant protests, economical programmes and pre-schools) and they were not very keen on going to other villages to win new members for the PKP. Furthermore were most of the PKP activists at central level married to ALPC-activists who supported their wives to commit themselves to social activism.

The women of the village branches did not always have such supportive husbands or parents and particularly women from the backward areas in the south east were even not allowed to travel without male guidance. The women of the village branches were very keen to attend the seminars and training programmes of the PKP to broaden their horizons. However, in the first years these were dominated by 'lectures' about theoretical concepts, which often were too difficult to understand. However both groups needed each other. The central level needed the village branches to strengthen their autonomous strategy and the village branches needed the central level to mobilise support for their activities.

The women of village M played an important role as 'intermediator'. They were not only involved in the PKP from its initial stage onwards (1981), their women's society (1983) provided also a good feedback to develop a strategy to translate difficult theoretical concepts like patriarchy, gender oppression and class struggle for poor village women. At first the awareness building work had been verbal and frontal to the group, later much more use was made of group discussions and of role plays, drama, songs and audio-visuals like posters and slides. The gatherings of the PKP became more and more dominated by discussions among the women themselves from different villages about their problems, personal as well as organisational and village problems. Active women of the women's society of village M visited far-distance villages, with the financial support of the PKP, to meet the women's societies which were the most isolated to share their experiences (see also Hoytink 1987).

The PKP-central also mobilised resources from a developmentalist NGO to support the programmes at village level and for their publications. The PKP decided to stop the support the economical programmes at village level because these projects required a continuous input of capital from outside due to marketing problems. Furthermore, the economic projects had confused a lot of women about the aims of the PKP. A lot of them stayed back when the PKP did not continue to give financial support, because they had not understood that the PKP's objectives were to mobilise poor rural women on class and gender based interests (see also Hoytink 1987).

Since 1983, the women's society of village M participated in several public activities of the central PKP such as the organisation of a public seminar on

'Rape and sexual harrashment' in the Kurunagala district at which 400 people attended. The women also participated in solidarity campaigns with the struggles of other women, like the workers strike in a rubber plantation and the struggle of peasants against the eviction from their lands by sugar companies (TNCs) in the Moneragala district (Chapter IV.3). Every year a group of women of village M came to Colombo to participate in the International Women's Day celebration organised by the Women's Action Committee (Chapter IV.4). However, the violent disperge of their yearly protest demonstration in 1985 by the police, was the reason that the number of women who came in the following years reduced. The women also distributed publications of the Women for Peace Committee which appealed for the termination of the ethnic violence and they sang peace songs in the village. Also this they had to stop as a result of the increased repression by the state (police) and the JVP, particularly after the Peace Accord of 1987 (see note at end of Chapter IV).

V.4.5 The Women's Society and Social Change

In 1986, when the women felt that their society was really established, the women's society formulated her constitution. The objectives of the Pragathaseeli Kantha Samvedaniya (Progressive Women's Organisation) were summarised: 'to organise the oppressed women to build a just and egalitarian society'; therefore are needed that the women educate themselves permanently, that their economical independence is guaranteed and that they link up with other people's organisations/mass movements aimed at an egalitarian society.

Most of the men in the village had supported the women's society because the women organised activities in the common interests of the villagers, like a petition against discrimination in the distribution of food stamps, a pre-school, a health programme and the women had good credentials in the credit and savings society. Their support, however, had been basically passive.

The women's magazines distributed by the PKP were also given to the men to read and the articles were regularly item of serious discussions between men and women. Particularly the men who symphatised with the ALPC and whose sisters or wives were active in the women's society, were interested to discuss gender

relations and some of them really took effort to change their attitude. Their wives and sisters therefore enjoyed most opportunity to involve themselves in activism. However, not all of them reacted positively on the changing attitude of their wives and sisters. Some men prohibited the women sometimes to participate in the women's society. In one case a woman activist was treated very badly by her brothers (both activists too) and locked up in the house because she had a love affair with a low caste boy from outside the village (a peasant activist). Another member of the women's society was so badly mistreated by her husband who accused her of moving too freely with other men, that she committed suicide. In both cases other women of the society and even some of their related men had failed to intermeditate in support of the women concerned. Both women victims had not been able to leave their family or husband, because they had no place to go.

However, there are also cases of successful interference by the women of the women's society. An example is the case of a young widow of an agricultural labour household. One day, she was confronted with a man whom she only knew briefly, but who settled down in her house. He ill-treated her and spent all her money. He also prohibited her often to attend the women's society meetings. And although the women warned her for the man, who had a bad reputation, she hanged on telling that the man was good and that she just had no time to come to the meetings. One day, when the man molested her sister, she took the step to go to the police to make a complaint against the man and she left the village for some time. She wrote a letter to one of the women of the women's society to explain her problem. The woman supported her and promised her protection. She also encouraged her to attend PKP meetings and training camps. The woman became a committed activist of the PKP and worked herself up to a member of the executive committee of the PKP. At that stage, she told me

'I was really a woman who lived alone in the land of the dead. I had nobody, no one to call my own. In order to go on living, I was forced to become strong and determined. I joined the women's organisation and from that time onwards I made a tremendous progress. I gained a lot of strength from being a member of the women's society and I got the opportunity to learn a lot about women's oppression and about other women's lives. I think all of us women gained a lot. We also hope to give our support to all other women who are suffering from oppression'.

However, as a result of the increased repression by the state and the JVP, some of the women of the women's society who were also an active member of the PKP-central, sometimes had to leave the village. After they received letters with death threats they were forced to hide themselves. PKP activists and also myself were not able to come to the village anymore. The women also increasingly had got criticised by other villagers (men and older women) for irresponsible behaviour in these times of increased repression. This has given a major drawback to the mobilisation process of the women of village M. The women's society reduced her activities to the economical programme, the pre-school and the self-educational programme. They remained nevertheless, discussing problems with regard to class- and gender relations (and also ethnic relations). A few of the most active women continued their activities with the PKP central. They were not willing to give up what they had struggled for so hard. Those women had also the most supportive husbands/brothers or came from a female headed household. They worked hard to support the PKP to widen her margins for mobilisation again and they did this at high risks.

V.4.6.

Conclusion: Facilitating and Limiting Factors in the Mobilisation Process of the Women of Village M

To conclude I want to summarise the major facilitating and limiting factors in the mobilisation process of the women of village M, using Tilly's concept of 'opportunity' as explained in Chapter I. Tilly writes: "the trouble with 'opportunity' is that it is hard to construct the opportunities realistically available to the group at the time" (Tilly 1978:7). To identify the opportunity is particularly difficult for an 'outsider' like me. Nevertheless, while having become more and more a part of the mobilisation process myself, I was able to overcome this 'trouble' to a far extent.

In the period 1980-1981 there had appeared several facilitating factors for mobilisation of the villagers and the women in particular. There was a young Buddhist monk (a university student of political science) and a woman who was

experienced with mobilisation activities. These had developed an awareness about the need for mobilisation of the villagers on their interests and they succeeded to motivate a group of young villagers, men and women, to commit themselves to work for the interests of the villagers.

There was a general dissatisfaction in the village about the government and the major political parties and the increasing economical problems of the villagers had deepened their dissatisfaction. The outcome of the social survey of Village M enabled the villagers to have better insight in their situation and this became their direct motive to form an independent village organisation. The material and immaterial support of the Buddhist chief monk, certain NGOs in the surrounding and myself increased the hope and belief with the villagers of the viability of their organisation.

The fact that the organisation was homogenous with regard to ethnic group, caste and (to a great extent) class and kin, facilitated the identification process of the villagers with their organisation. The fact that also women took part in the initiators group gave a chance to the women of village M to be invited and to participate in the organisational activities too (the women themselves indicated this as one of the main chances that had appeared). The fact that the activities organised by the new village organisation were considered as legitimate (which means in the common interests of the group/village), the men allowed and supported the women to participate. The participation of the women in the organisational activities gave them a chance to have new experiences, develop a better insight in their situation and to learn new skills.

During the period 1982-1983 the following facilitating and limiting factors for mobilisation had appeared. The visible results of the organisational activities (roads, wells, library, etc.) increased the mobilisation willingness of the people. The introduction of the ALPC and PKP to the village was well received by the villagers and it encouraged them to challenge power interests in the village and to a certain extent also at nation wide level. The relationship of the PKP with some of the active women of village M contributed to the initiative of the last to set up their own women's society in the village, which answered

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better to their interests than the women's rural development society of the government. The new independent women's organisation of village M enabled women to form an homogenous interest group with regard to class, commitment to the new village organisation, friendship and felt needs. The combination of practically uneducated rural worker women and secondary school educated unemployed women from poor households meant a pooling of resources which were complementary. The first group was experienced in organisation (contract workers group) and had some artisanal skills. The last group had skills to analyse and plan and to find the way to various NGOs and the bureaucracy.

The new women's organisation and its relationship with the PKP gave the women a chance to deepen their insight in their situation (class and gender based interests), to widen their experiences and develop their skills. It also gave women a chance to improve their situation in material as well as immaterial aspects. They succeeded to improve solidarity links among themselves which led to mutual support in their daily problems. Some women succeeded to get the support of male relatives to share the domestic work and to get more (or an equal) space for their private activities. And most of these women had become active to challenge class and gender relations at nation wide level too.

The major limiting factors during this period were related to scarcity of resources as a result of poverty: the resources available to the women (and men) were in direct competition with their daily subsistence requirements (time, money, labour, etc.). Another major limiting factors was that the villagers had no experience with (nation wide) peasant's class and gender based interest organisations. Their experience was limited to customary societies, government institutions and political parties. A third limiting factor was that although the men supported the women's society, this support was only for the activities in the common interest of men and women and, with the exception of a few men, not for activities which were in the gender interest of women only (e.g. to stop sexual violence against women, to better the sexual division of labour for women).

During the period 1984-1987 again changes occurred in the mobilisation process of the women of village M. The increased repression by the state and ethnic

based interest groups were a major threat to the organisation. Although this threat first had led to an increased militancy with the villagers, did the forced separation of the Buddhist young monk from the organisation, the closure of the meeting shed, the spread of negative rumours and the repression by the police, have a major demobilising effect on the villagers.

However, notwithstanding the fact that the central village organisational body had stopped to function, some of the activities continued to function independently. This could happen because of the decentralised structure of the central village organisation from its beginning onwards. The surviving activities were the credit and saving society, the marketing society and the women's society. The first two remained to receive the support of the villagers because they answered to an urgent need. The view and target of the credit and saving society, however, was limited to the technical aspects of crediting and saving and not aimed at challenging power relations which affected the villagers. The marketing society got stuck as a result of a lack of capital.

The women's society, however, continued to be committed to challenge class and gender based relations. Some women indeed decreased their activity rate as a result of the increased repression. Some women also had to stop participation because their husbands or brothers had sanctioned their challenging attitude with regard to gender relations. However, there was a nucleus which developed strong solidarity links (about 20 women). Many of the women of this nucleus were also active at the PKP central level. The PKP continued to give support to the women material as well as immaterial. And the fact that the PKP central developed an open two-ways relationship with the village branches, made that the women felt that they could use the PKP for their interests and that they could identify themselves with this organisation. The PKP was able to strengthen itself because of this support from her branches (although all village branches could not give equal support, because of different 'opportunity').

The signing of the Peace Accord in 1987 between the government of Sri Lanka and India to end the war with the Tamil Militant groups, gave a major push forwards to the emergence of singalese ethnic based interest groups (primarily the JVP). Because of their support to regional autonomy for all ethnic communities, the ALPC and PKP also became a target of repression by these

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singalese ethnic based interest groups. This had a major demobilising effect on the women's society of village M, particularly with regard to her contribution to the PKP central.

The strategy of the women's society became a strategy for survival. The activities of the women's society of village M reduced to village level activities only, such as the pre-school, their economical programme and their self-educational programme. However, problems with regard to gender and class relations (and also ethnic relations) remained discussed in the women's society. A few women continued to contribute to the PKP central level (where the PKP attempted to widen her margins for mobilisation again). Those women who remained to contribute had gained most of their participation in the PKP and they had the highest identification degree with the PKP. They insisted to defend what they had gained through hard struggle. These women had the most supportive male relatives or came from female headed households.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study is an analysis of the opportunities for mobilisation on class and gender based interests for poor rural women in Sri Lanka.

In Chapter I it was explained that the 'objective interests' of poor rural women were defined by a complex interaction of social relations. Social relations, that affect poor rural women, such as class, gender and ethnic relations, did not exist independently from each other and were in a constant interaction with each other. No type of social relation was fundamental, although at a certain historical conjunction one type of social relation could dominate. It was explained that the theoretical analysis of regarding one type of social relation as the fundamental one, had caused that certain 'objective interests' had been 'invisible'. Particularly the gender based interests of women had been 'invisible' or considered conditioned by class and/or ethnic based interests. Gender based interests of women had been practically 'invisible' in planning, policy and research until recently. And women had been mobilised on class and ethnic based interests, but only recently with the emergence of Feminism as social analysis, women were also mobilised on gender based interests at broad scale.

The situation of poor rural women was most complex, because they were subordinated in various types of social relations and their resources were claimed by many powerful interests. They therefore had little facilitating and many limiting factors for mobilisation on their class and gender based interests.

In Chapter II it was shown how the situation of poor rural women in Sri Lanka was defined by their position in a complex structure of class, ethnic and gender relations (and to a lesser extent caste relations). At a certain stage in the history of the social formation of Sri Lanka (colonial period) the process of class formation had begun to dominate caste relations. However, caste relations remained to play a role in the formation of class relations and low caste people

were more frequently found among the lowest sections of the labouring class (low valued jobs).

It was observed that the process of class formation had a dissolving effect on the customary sexual division of labour, but for men more than for women. Furthermore, were women more frequently found in the lowest valued and physically harmful types of employment. Women also had remained the first responsible for the domestic work and the childcare. Particularly in the case of poor women, their workload had increased as a result of commoditisation of customary village and kin relations. However, class and gender formation did not develop in a similar pattern all over Sri Lanka.

Ethnic relations played an important role in the class and gender formation of Sri Lanka. Ethnicity was a major factor in the differences of social formation in various parts of Sri Lanka. Particularly today ethnic communities had begun to distinct themselves through regional demarcations.

The complexity of the situation of poor rural women in Sri Lanka caused that:

1. They shared certain interests with other groups, but these also had different interests than the poor rural women. For instance, they shared their gender based interests with other women with whom they might not share class and ethnic based interests. And they shared class based interests with poor rural men with whom they did not share gender based interests and perhaps also not ethnic based interests. The same counted for the ethnic based interests of poor rural women.
2. Their resources were claimed by various more powerful interests, such as money lenders, traders, landlords, husbands and at present also certain ethnic based interests groups.
3. The 'subjective interests' (consciously experienced) of poor rural women differed regionally and even locally.

This complexity of the situation of poor rural women had major implications for opportunities for mobilisation of poor rural women on class and gender based interests. Opportunities indicate the facilitating and limiting factors for mobilisation (Tilly 1978):

1. This complex situation made the transformation of 'objective interests'

- into 'subjective interests', being a major condition for mobilisation (Balbus 1971), a complex process.
2. Poor rural women had the least resources available and moreover were these resources for mobilisation in a direct competition with the subsistence needs of the women (see Chapter III.3).
 3. Their resources also had been claimed by various other more powerful interests, which made it difficult to free resources for mobilisation on their own interests.

The state played a very important role in the social formation of Sri Lanka and in the realisation of class, ethnic and gender based interests (Chapter III). The state played an important role in the creation of opportunities for mobilisation of poor rural women on class and gender based interests. The post independent state of Sri Lanka was dominated by certain competing influential families who had derived power from caste hierarchy, landownership and from a close relationship with the British colonial ruler. The state, which had taken up the leading role in the national development of Sri Lanka, had converted the rural population, men as well as women, into objects of social welfare and 'modernisation' (i.e. 'efficient production', 'western' 'liberal' values etc.). The state had succeeded to bind the rural electorate in a clientalist relationship. It had been the rural dominating classes, and particularly those among the singalese Buddhist community, which had become the client intermediaries and which had been able to realise a major claim on the state resources that were distributed to the rural population. This had deeply drawn the rural population in the electoral politics and had mobilised them along ethnic and nationalist based interests. At local level political patronage had created a competition among the (poor) rural population for the distribution of the (during the years shrinking) state resources. Class and gender based interest organisation of the poor population in the rural society had therefore not emerged. Initiatives to such type of organisation had been confronted with repression by the state.

Non governmental organisations also played an important role in the opportunities

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for mobilisation of poor rural women (Chapter IV). It was found that the gender and class based interests of poor rural women had been practically absent in most NGOs. These NGOs were generally dominated by other more powerful interests such as those of an ethnic community, of the middle class, of the masculine gender, of the urban 'proletariat' or of the national government.

Customary societies for women which mobilised women at local level might have challenged external power relations, but at the same time they were most likely to reproduce existing power relations such as caste, ethnic and customary gender relations.

Developmentalist NGOs had been able to mobilise women but within the margins defined by the state, which ment mainly for national developmental purposes. Many of these NGOs had also been dominated by other than class and gender based interests of poor rural women, such as interests of the masculine gender, of ethnic based interest groups and of rural dominating classes.

The same counted for political parties and peasants and workers unions. These were mainly organised along ethnic lines. Marxist parties which had participated in certain SLFP-led governments had been able to realise some reforms which affected the poor rural classes. However, these reforms had been easily seized by the rural ruling classes, because the Marxist parties had not mobilised the poor rural classes in support of these reforms. Their main basis remained (semi-)urban based 'proletariat'. The All Lanka Peasants Congress, which had re-emerged again, had been confronted (as before) with the margins for mobilisation in the rural society.

Political parties and unions had not mobilised women on gender based interests. The Franchise Union of 1927 and various other women's rights organisations had mobilised women to achieve equal rights with men, but they had not mobilised poor rural women. The UN Decade for Women had supported the process of mobilisation of women on gender based interests. This had been a facilitating factor for many women's organisations to emerge. Among these organisations was the Pragathaseeli Kantha Peramuna (1981), one of the first poor rural women's interests based organisations and also the largest. The PKP mobilised rural women on class and gender based interests.

The PKP found her support primarily in areas where the All Lanka Peasants Congress had its basis. Her members belonged generally to the poor rural classes, which meant that they had very little resources for mobilisation. The PKP therefore needed the support of the ALPC and the Women's Action Committee (WAC). The latter was formed by urban middle class socialist feminist groups, urban worker women's organisations and the PKP-herself. With the ALPC the PKP primarily shared her class based interests and with the WAC her gender based interests. This support enabled the PKP to strengthen her organisation for the interests of poor rural women. On the other side did this relationship with the ALPC and the WAC cause that the PKP had to be cautious not to loose resources to other interests (represented in the ALPC and WAC) and to keep her own independent strategy in order to represent the interests of her members at her best.

The two-ways relationship of the PKP central and her branches in the villages had been of enormous importance to strengthen the interest representation of poor rural women and had been a major facilitating factor in the mobilisation process of poor rural women. The PKP had worked hard to develop an own identity as a class and gender based interest organisation, by means of a continuous dialogue among her women members. However the PKP faced many problems in mobilising poor rural women as a result of the complex situation of these women. The women of some PKP branches came from villages where the social infrastructure was better developed, where the commoditisation of social relations had developed to a far degree, and where there was a degree of dissolvment of the customary sexual division of labour. Other women came from branches in villages from so-called 'backward' areas with a low level of infrastructure and where customary gender values prevailed strongly. Or the women members came from a different ethnic group or a different economic category. The (local) problems experienced by the women therefore were most likely different. This had been a barrier for the transformation of 'objective' into 'subjective' interests.

The opportunities for mobilisation were therefore also different. The women of some branches experienced more facilitating factors than others. The case study

of the women's society of village M in Chapter V is an example. Particularly the support of husbands, fathers, brothers had been an important facilitating factor, as well as the quantity and quality of resources available to the women for mobilisation, such as school education, organisational experience, various skills, membership, support from outsiders and analytical tools to understand their situation. Homogeneity and identification had shown to be important facilitating factors too. Repression had been the greatest limiting factor. The repression came from more powerful interests, in particular from husbands, fathers and brothers, from certain ethnic based groups and from the state. Repression had been the major demobilising factor for the PKP.

It had been of enormous importance to improve the communication among the women of the various branches to improve their mutual support and self learning. The support of the PKP for the problems of the women of the branches increased the willingness and capacity of these women to free resources for the interest struggle at nation wide level too. Unfortunately had the young PKP not been successful to withstand the repression from the state and certain ethnic based interest groups like the JVP. But the PKP had existed long enough to build a strong nucleus which was prepared to defend what it had gained with regard to class and gender based interests. Also at village level the PKP had not completely been suppressed. Although most activities of the village branches had been reduced, there still existed an organisational structure.

The PKP continued to struggle for her own existence within the margins defined by the state and certain ethnic based interest groups. At present the PKP had joined with various other interest groups which suffered similar repression by the state and by certain ethnic based interest groups. This of course might be a limiting factor for the PKP in her search for her own independent strategy, but on the other hand this might also support her to widen her margins for mobilisation and to resist further repression.

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Film

"Twee Werelden, één leven" ("Loka dekai, eka jeevithayayi"), vrouwen van het platteland van Sri Lanka, 1987 (video).

A film of: Daya Ariyawathie, Sriyani Perera, Sunila Abeysekera, Marga Hoytink and Cornelia Quist.

Production: USVA Groningen, Netherlands, Women and Media Collective Sri Lanka

Map of Sri Lanka



