

PREFACE

This publication brings together a collection of scholarly research relating to the Empowerment of Women and Villages of Sri Lanka presented at an international symposium hosted by the International Christian University in Tokyo in December 1998. The symposium was an attempt to further our understanding of Sri Lankan society and the developments therein from diverse perspectives.

The material is organized under three substantive themes. The first theme Self-consciousness and self-reliance of women is addressed by three presentations covering social and economic dimensions of female participation, Karunaratne focuses on support from the socio-cultural background, more particularly the influence of Buddhism in early society, and in modern times from the opportunities for educational attainments without gender discrimination, as factors underlying the favourable position that women have continued to enjoy in Sri Lankan Sinhala society. Rodrigo presents a comparative analysis of the labour market participation patterns of females in the two countries, Japan and Sri Lanka with a view to identifying the similarities and contrasts and to gain an understanding of the influences underlying the similarities/dissimilarities so identified. Takakuwa, drawing from her research in a Southern coast fishing village in Sri Lanka, finds a higher and positive level of participation by women (or wives of fishermen) in fishermen's cooperatives and credit associations compared to the male spouses. Factors leading to such gender difference in participation and utilization of the facilities are examined and commented upon.

The second theme, Rural Empowerment and Development, is addressed by three (or four?) authors. Drawing on field research in Southern Sri Lanka, Taniguchi provides insights into how active participation in community development activities by women (e. g. improvement of rural infrastructure such as roads and wells) entailing voluntary labour service inputs have, together with the experience of small scale self-employment projects begun by women's initiative, empowered women to become modernized and enjoy the achievement of self-reliance. Omori's paper brings

out the contribution of Buddhist traditions and values to the process of rural development. The author illustrates how interactions between society and the temple and the prevalent 'merit-making' practices in Buddhism such as participation in the monthly full moon festival (*pooya*), providing alms to monks (*puja*), collaborative voluntary labour services for public welfare (*Sramadana*) etc. help to increase integration and cohesion of the local community by cutting across divisive forces which arise from caste and other clefs in rural society. Shigyo's paper focuses on the broader issue of conflict associated with disturbances to the old social order caused by new strategies of development. The ensuing problems and tensions are portrayed using a case study of a dispute relating to the location of a communal cemetery. Ratnayake documents the experience of a Sri Lankan initiative in rural development through the self-reliance approach-the Export Promotion Village (EPV) experiment. Conceptualised as a trading house of producers at grass roots level to introduce rural export-oriented products to the competitive international market, all responsibility for the operation of the EPV is placed with the producers/villagers based on the internal and external power structures of the village. The performance of the project is traced through the years, along with constraints encountered.

Three papers are presented under the third theme, Identity, conflict and cooperation. Shibuya focuses on a major Buddhist celebration in Sri Lanka-the *Vesak* festival, which celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha. The revitalization of the festival in the 19th Century is depicted as an attempt at strengthening Sinhalese nationalism and identity. Hayashi's paper probes the conflict between the Sinhala and Tamil communities, with an analysis of the post-independence political and policy aspects underlying the strained relationships. The role of India in the conflict is also commented upon. The final paper authored by Nakamura focuses on the dimension of economic cooperation between Japan and Sri Lanka. Tracing the flow of Japanese aid to Sri Lanka over the years, the author comments on the need for change in direction away from its long sustained concentration on constructions and commodities.

The publication is being brought out at a time when interest to catch up on developments elsewhere and to learn from each other's experience is gaining rapidly across

the globe. The current volume will have an appeal to both the academic community as well as the general reading public and constitute a salutary addition to the body of knowledge on the issues covered.

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Note

The papers presented in English are printed in this issue. Other papers are compiled to publish a book (*Suriranka no Josei, Kaihatsu, Minzokuishiki*, Akashi Shoten, Tokyo, March 1999). This preface was contributed originally to an earlier proposed comprehensive publication for the whole papers presented in the 1998 international symposium of which program is attached at the end of this volume. (Omori)