MIGRATION TO THE MIDDLE EAST, SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY : CASE STUDIES FROM SRI LANKA

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1. Introduction

Recent history of human society has witnessed numerous instances where people in different parts of the world have resorted to migration, both temporory and permenant, as a way of improving their material and social conditions. The process has involved both international and intra—national mobility.

In many third world countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, rural people have migrated to urban centres in search of better opportunities when the living conditions in the rural hinterland became unattractive or intolerable due to landlessness, unemployment and poverty. In Sri Lanka, rural—urban migration has taken place only to a limited extent and this has resulted in a more balanced population distribution between rural and urban areas.[1] This phenomenon has been attributed to at least two factors, namely, intra—rural migration and relatively more favourable conditions found in the rural areas, the latter largely owing to a comprehensive social welfare programme involving food and other subsidies implemented in the country, particularly after independence. Moreover, living and working conditions the urban economy could offer to the unskilled, unemployed people were not more favourable than what obtained in the rural areas. This compelled many people to have second thoughts before migrating to towns.

So, in Sri Lanka, intra—national migration was more an intra—rural movement of people than a rural—urban one. This has been true for both pre—independence and post—independence periods alike. Newly alienated land in the dry—zone peasant settlements irrigated by the renovated and newly constructed reservoiers attracted many landless peaseants from the densely populated wet—zone districts, both hill—country and low lying coastal areas (cf. Farmer, 1957). Apart from this permenant migration, in recent years, there has emerged a new seasonal migratory flow involving a large mass of agricultural workers who tempororily migrate from the hill—country districts to the North Central Province, particularly to Polonnaruwa District for wage labour during the peak months of the agricultural cycle in the latter.

These workers who are mostly members of poor peasant families from Kandyan villages stay in the host villages and settlements for several weeks and return home when the demand for additional labour is exhausted in the area. Minor migratory flows of the same type can also be observed in the south and south—eastern parts of the country as well (for details see, Hettige, 1988).

Unlike intra—national migration, inter—national migration in Sri Lanka remained a prerogative of the affluent social strata until recently. The people who were involved in the process were mostly professionally qualified persons who migrated to developed, Western countries. When Sinhalese was made the official language in the late 1950's, more and more people, particularly Tamils and Burgers migrated abroad, the former mainly to Malaysia and the latter to Australia. It is only since the mid—seventies, when opportunities for temporary employment in the oil—rich Middle Eastern countries were opened up, that members of lower social strata began to travel abroad in large numbers. The main difference between the two processes is that those involved in the former usually migrated with their families and settled down in the country of destination, while those who go to the Middle East are individual workers, both male and female, who leave the country for a fixed period, usually not more than a few years. In the case of the latter, migration is only a transitory phenomenon leading to a contant reverse flow. Direct and immediate impact of this migration flow on Sri Lankan society emanates from its cyclical nature.

The sheer numbers involved themselves suggest that migration of Sri Lankan workers is a highly significant phenomenon. According to available statistics, during the short period between 1979 and 1981, at least 112,000 workers migrated abroad on temporary employment. It has also been estimated that there are about 200,000 Sri Lankan workers in different Middle East countries at any given point in time in recent years. Even though the flow of migration seems to have slowed down somewhat in the last few years, it estimated that at least 26,000 men and women still migrate annually to different Middle East destinations. This figure is more than one—fifths of the annual addition to the country's labour force (cf. Census Report, 1981).

At the beginning, migrants were mostly from urban areas, mainly from the Capital and its environs. Later, some migrants originated from the rural hinterland as well. While urban migrants were mostly from over—crowded slums and shanties, their rural counterparts were not randomly drawn from the countryside as certain rural areas and certain communities sent more migrants than others. In most cases, the

pattern of spatial distribution of migrants has been a product of the demonstration effect or what has been refered to in this paper as the 'urge to follow the crowd'.

Large—scale, temporary migration of labour has been going on for over a decade now. The subject has understandably attracted the attention of the general public, the policy makers and researchers of diverse persuations. The researchers have focused attention on many aspects of the subject. While some have dealt with the migration process itself, others have sought to examine its diverse implications (cf. Korale 1983, Brockman 1987, Wignaraja 1986, Sarath 1984, Spaan 1988, Marga 1987, Eelens and Schampers 1987).

The impact of temporory labour migration on a sending country can be examined at different levels i.e. national, regional, community, family and individual. The impact can also be examined in different terms. i.e. economic, political, demographic, social, cultural and psychological. Though some studies have already been conducted in Sri Lanka dealing with several of the above aspects, certain aspects have not recieved sufficient attention. The present paper is an attempt to deal with some of these neglected aspects, namely, the implications of migration for the existing patterns of social stratification and social mobility. These aspects are particularly significant in view of the fact that the avowed motive of migration is the improvement of living conditions of the migrants.

The paper is based on fieldwork conducted in three localities in Sri Lanka, a squatter settlement in the city of Colombo, an agricultural village in the central hills and a low—income housing scheme located close to the above village. The main purpose of the field studies has been to ascertain whether the process of migration has had any significant impact on the existing systems of social inequality in the communities surveyed. A particular concern of the study, therefore, was to enquire into the issue of how migrants returning from the Middle East fit into their own society. Given the circulatory nature of the migration process, this can be considered as a highly significant issue.

2. Field research and methodology

The field work upon which the present paper is based was carried out in 1986—87 as part of a larger research project undertaken by a team of researchers from the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka and the Leiden University, the Netherlands with the financial assistance of the

Netherlands Universities Foundation for International Cooperation. The research project consisted of two major components, namely a sample survey of current, returned and non—migrants in the city of Colombo and a series of micro—level community studies covering both rural and urban locations. The present discussion is based primarily on data gathered from three locations, a shanty settlement in Colombo, a village and a semi—urban housing settlement close to Matale town in Central Sri Lanka. After an initial household survey aimed at gathering basic socio—economic data from a purposive sample of migrant and non—migrant families, more detailed qualitative data was gathered through key informant interviews, in—depth interviews with migrants and non—migrants, case studies, and direct observations.

The village selected as a field location for the present study is a Sinhalese community with a handful of Tamils and Muslims. The community has been under urban influences in recent years owing to its close proximity to Matale town. Even though many of the village families have been living there for generations, there is also a significant segment of new comers who have moved into the village over the past 20 years. While some have entered through marital unions, others have acquired land and residential property in the village. Many of the new comers are engaged in white collar employment and commerce. Most of the purana villagers are still engaged in agriculture, either as their main or supplementary source of subsistence. Younger members of these families, however, are increasingly dependent on non—agricultural sources of income and subsistence such as white collar occupations, wage labor and business.

TABLE 1: MODE OF ENTRY INTO VILLAGE

Mode	number of respondents	%
born in village	45	34.62
marriage	30	23.08
built house	24	18.46
bought house	15	11.54
rented house	8	6.15
temple	3	2.30
other	5	3.85
Total	130	100.00

Those who own paddy land in the village do not necessarily cultivate it themselves, some have given their parcels of paddy land on *ande* (share cropping) to landless villagers. A few poor families who are landless derive their subsistence from wage labour; they work both in and outside the village. Many people also have acquired new skills such as masonry, carpentry and driving and are dependent almost entirely on wages and salaries derived from such occupations.

Almost every village family has access to a homestead garden which constitutes a significant source of subsistence and income as many perennial and cash crops are cultivated on such land. While a few highland plots are larger than two acres in evtent, others are below one acre,

Even though a significant percentage of the families have access to paddy land, most of the paddy parcels are very small and therefore do not produce a marketable surplus. Few farmers sell their produce after harvest and the rest keep it for their own consumption.

TABLE 2 : PADDY LAND OWNERSHIP IN BOGOLLAGAMA

	No.*	%
not applicable	87	66.92
owner cultivation	18	13.85
land owner**	8	6.15
tenant	15	11.54
home garden	2	1.54
Total	130	100.00

* Number of families

** The land owned by them are cultivated by tenants on a share cropping basis.

TABLE 3 : SIZE OF PADDY LAND PARCELS IN BOGOLLAGAMA

Extent	No. of parcels	%
less than 1/4 acre	9	29.04
, 1/4 – 1/2 acre	13	41.94
1 acre	2	6.45
1 1/2 acres	5	16.12
2 acres and above	2	6.45
Total	31	100.00

Even though the residents of Bogollagama derive a major part of their subsistence from sources outside the village, the local agrarian resource base is still considerable, at least for some of the *purana* families. The village being situated in the Wet Zone of the island, its homestead gardens, even when they are small, constitute a significant source of subsistence.

TABLE 4 : SIZE OF HOME GARDEN (HIGHLAND) PLOTS OWNED BY RESPONDENT FAMILIES IN BOGOLLAGAMA

Extent	Number of Plots	%
less than 1/4 acre	53	40.77
> 1/4 acre up to 1/2 acre	57	43.84
1 acre	16	12.31
over 1 acre	4	3.08
Total	130	100.00

The owners of larger homestead gardens grew cash crops such as pepper, coffee, cocoa and cloves in the past, these crops provided the villagers with a cash income, while paddy cultivation was the main source of food for them. But, with population growth due to both natural increase and influx of 'outsiders' and the subsequent fragmentation of land holdings, many villagers were forced to look for other sources of subsistence and income. In other words, they had to get involved in wider economic, social and political processes in order to secure resources. In the process, landownership ceased to be the main source of wealth. Land continues to be an important resource in the village, at least for those who own it in significant extents, for others, it is at best a supplementary source of subsistence and prestige. Those who do not own agricultural land depend entirely on external or other internal resources for their subsistence. Their socio—economic standing is dependent on what resources they have access to and in what quantities.

What is evident from the available sources of information is that, as late as two decades back, there had been a close correspondence between the local caste structure and the distribution of landed property. Though this has changed substantially over the years, even today some congruence between the two is evident. The vast majority of the paddy land—owing families come from the Govigama caste.

TABLE 5 : CASTE COMPOSITION IN BOGOLLAGAMA

Major caste	Sub–caste	number of families	%
Govigama (Cultivators)	Brahmin (upcountry)	5	3.85
	Govigama aristocratic (Radala)	5	3.85
	Ranpatti	42	32.31
	Ridi Patti	3	2.31
	Low country Govigama	23	17.69
Dhobi (Washers)		16	12.31
Navandanna (goldsmith)		8	6.15
Panna		3	2.31
Karawa (Fishers)	up country	4	3.08
	low country	5	3.85
Vellala (Tamil farmer caste)		1	0.77
Maravetti Tamil		2	1.54
Durava (Toddy Tappers)		3	2.31
Berawa (Tom Tom Beaters)		1	0.77
Kasavar (Tamil Potters)		3	2.31
Padu (Palanquin Bearers)		1	0.77
Not Known/NA		5	3.85
Total		130	100.00

Note : Traditionally most common callings of castes given within brackets

Bogollagama, being a multi–caste village, is stratified in terms of caste. Most of the villagers have some relationship to purana families and their caste identities are widely known. Since the residents in the village in general are conscious of the caste system, there have been a constant attempt to trace the caste origins of new comers. This has helped sort out caste identities of village families, even of those who moved into the village in recent times. Even when the caste position of a family is ambiguous, the villagers have tended to assign it a position within the local system.

While the majority of the villagers belong to different Govigama sub–castes, the others belong to a number of other low and up–country castes such as Dhobi (Washer), Karawa, both Kandyan and low country, Berawa (tom tom beaters), Navandanna (goldsmith) and Padu (upcountry low caste). Even though the influence of caste is not visible

in day—to—day interactions observed in the market place, paddy fields and on the street, caste nevertheless seems to play a part in guiding social relationships as is evident in instances such as marriage, family functions, rituals and ceremonies. This is particularly so when caste difference involved is perceived to be great. In some cases, caste differences are narrowed down by other factors such as wealth, bureaucratic power and lifestyle.

As Table 5 indicates, the Govigama caste is segmented into numerous sub—castes. Most of these families belong to two sub—castes, namely Ranpatti and low country Govigama, which are considered by Govigama "Brahmin" and aristocratic families as inferior to them. Nevertheless, families belonging to Govigama sub—castes consider the villagers belonging to other castes to be inferior to them. This claim to superiority is disputed only by those belonging to Karava caste, particularly its Kandyan sub—caste; they believe that they descend from the Kandyan, aristocratic ruling elite *(shastriya)* and therefore, are superior to all the others.[2]

In spite of the fact that the village population is segmented into different caste groups, caste does not interfere in the day to day affairs of the village. This is largely due to the fact that the actual roles and functions of most villagers have very little to do with their caste position. It is only when the whole village is involved in a major event such as weddings, funerals, new year celebrations, religious ceremonies at the village temple that major caste divisions manifest in some form or the other. Even on such occasions, minor caste differences rarely come to the surface. The occasion when caste affiliations get carefully sorted out is at the time of the selection of a marital partner. Even in this case, minor caste differences are often ignored in favor of more tangible gains such as wealth and prestige derived from sources other than caste such as bureaucratic power, political influence and modern life styles. Such compromises are rarely made when the gap between the castes involved is perceived to be great. As will be elaborated later, in a very recent incident, a girl belonging to a higher aristocratic family who eloped with a young migrant with whom she fell in love was expelled from the family and, in order to completely shut the door to her, religious rituals normally performed at funerals were conducted as if she is dead and gone. This kind of extreme intolerance is rarely found among poor villagers in spite of the existence of caste divisions among them.

Villagers in Bogollagama have been receptive to new opportunities in the past as well. Many village families have sent their children to good schools at Matale and Kandy and, today, many of them are

employed outside the village as teachers, technical officers, clerks, electricians, etc. Some have small businesses in Matale town. In the late sixties, some villagers had gone out for 'gemming' in an areas in the adjoining District of Polonnaruwa. They continued to engage in this lucrative activity for several years, till they could no longer find gems frequently enough. During this short period of time, some villagers amassed sufficient wealth not only to build better houses but also to invest in other ventures such as trade and agriculture. In the process, of course, socio-economic differentiation in the village became more visible. While more and more families could adopt modern lifestyles characterized by modern housing, electric lighting and the ownership of television sets, motor bikes and cars, etc., poor families became more and more marginalized.

In the late seventies, some villagers perceived migration to the Middle East as a way of escaping from poverty and stagnation in the face of new wealth acquired by more affluent villagers. They could already observe a flow of migration to the Middle East from a nearby, low income housing settlement located just a few hundred yards away from their own place of residence. Though situated in a rural setting, this settlement displayed many urban features. This seemingly interesting difference between the two communities located in close proximity to each other prompted the researcher to focus attention on this housing settlement also as part of the study.

The housing scheme was established in the early seventies by the then Government in order to provide housing to low income families whose breadwinners were either minor employees attached to public bodies such as the local hospital and the urban council, or self-employed artisans. All the housing units, about 200 in all, were built by the state according to a standard design and were given to selected families on a long-term-lease. The occupants were to pay a nominal monthly rent and were expected to take out-right possession of the houses at the completion of a prescribed period of continuous occupation.

As one would expect, the settlers hailed from diverse origins but shared many socio-economic characteristics. Many of them had come to Matale town from the surrounding and distant villages and had lived in and around Matale town either in their own improvised shelters or rented houses. Unlike Bogollagama, this is not an ethnically homogeneous community. Though the settlers are largely Sinhalese, there are Muslims and Tamil families living there as well.

Even though the housing settlement today consists of over 200 household units, only part of the entire scheme was surveyed for the present study owing to resource, time and other constraints. While a total of 67 households were surveyed, 26 of them reported as having either returned or current migrants or both. Ethnic composition of the households is given in Table 6.

TABLE 6 : ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE RESPONDENTS IN MATALE HOUSING SCHEME (HS)

Nationality of informant	number	%
Sinhalese	39	58.2
Tamil	5	7.5
Moor/Malay	22	32.9
Burger	1	1.5
Total	67	100.0

In several households, members of more than one ethnic group were present. This is mostly due to interracial marriages.

30 Out of 67 informants (59.7%) were females. This indicates a bias towards housewives in the sample of informants interviewed. There were no informants who have gone beyond a secondary school education, yet educational attainment levels were certainly not below the national averages. For instance, only 4.5% of the informants were without any formal education.

TABLE 7 : EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF RESPONDENTS IN HS

Educational attainment	number	%
No schooling	3	4.5
Grade 5 or less	16	23.9
Grade 6 – 9	24	35.8
Grade 10	2	3.0
Ordinary level	18	26.9
Advanced level	3	4.5
Other	1	1.5
Total	76	100.00

As is well known, national illiteracy rate is much higher. Moreover, the bulk of the informants have had at least post primary education, many of whom were with ordinary level and advanced level qualifications.

Majority of the informants were reported to be unemployed (62%). The rest come from as diverse backgrounds as white collar employment, artisans and craftsmen, farm and manual labour and business. (See Table 8).

The above statistics show that the housing scheme is a heterogenous community consisting of families of different ethnic identities and diverse social and economic backgounds. Traditional caste and family origins of the residents are not well demarcated as in the case of Bogollagama, so status stratification here is mostly based on life styles and consumption patterns which are dependent on the extent and sources of income and occupational gradations.

TABLE 8:OCCUPATIONS OF RESPONDENTS IN MATALE HOUSING SCHEME

Employment status	number	frequency (%)
Teacher	3	4.5
business	5	7.6
supervisor	1	1.5
nurse	1	1.5
administrative officer	3	4.5
mason	2	3.0
driver	1	1.5
tailor/dressmaker	1	1.5
farm labour	3	4.5
casual labour	2	3.0
Other skilled labour	1	1.5
unemployed	41	62.0
not stated	1	1.5
Total	67	100.0

Apart from a few families who are dependent on small business such as retail trading, almost all the other families are dependent on wages and salaries from their respective employment. A few families are also engaged in home gardening in addition to wage labour.

Even though most of the respondents had originally moved into housing units built according to a standard plan, the occupants have subbsequently effected structural changes in keeping with their tastes, needs and aspirations. Some units occupied by families of casual labourers and similar categories are run down due to lack of regular repair and maintenance.On the other hand, more affluent residents have introduced many changes that the outward appearance of the houses has changed considerably. They have also incorporated modern interior decor such as wall hangings, expensive drawing room suits, modern lighting fittings rugs, etc. So, on the whole, the respondents, though living next to each other, are divided into two broad groups in terms of their class identity, more affluent people distancing themselves from the poorer families dependent on manual occupations.

Ethnicity is another important aspect of the housing scheme. Even though there exist no significant differences between different ethnic groups in terms of wealth and property, a certain degree of intergroup competition has developed in recent years. This is particularly so between the Sinhalese and the Muslims, the latter perceived by many Sinhalese residents as having expansionary motives. These perceptions are reinforced by the fact that Muslims in the areas (as is often the case elsewhere) have their own community organization focused on the local mosque which also functions as their counselling and welfare center. The above competition has also surfaced in the area of Middle East migration.

The housing scheme, though located within a rural environment has no rural economic base. The residents are dependent on external sources of income. Most parents aspire to give their children a good education thinking that it might help them find more secure and lucrative sources of income, but most of their children have failed to do so due to intensive competition for education and white collar employment. It is in this context that migration to the Middle East was recognized by the residents in the housing scheme as an alternative route.

From the semi-urban Matale housing scheme, we now move into a squatter settlement located in the southwestern part of the city of Colombo. Like most other squatter settlements in Colombo, Siduhath Lane squatter settlemnt has also evolved gradually over the past 30 to 40 years with more and more settlers from the other parts of the city and the country moving in to fill the open space that existed by the side of a main waste water canal. The site was strategically located,

in close proximity to the large roadside market which caters to a large lower middle and middle class population living in the vicinity. Apart from providing personal services to the local population, the residents in the settlement also have easy access to other sources of employment in the city, in both its formal as well as informal sectors.

The settlement area which had been the habitat for a handful of families in the late fifties, had grown into a large shanty community consisting of over 200 families by 1985. Though it is largely inhabited by the Sinhalese, a significant number of Tamil and Muslim families are also living there. In this case also, only a section of the community was surveyed for the purpose of the present study. The section that was covered consisted of 85 families or houshold units. As was the case in Matale Housing scheme, in this community also, there were a number of ethnically mixed families (12), the result of inter-racial marriages.

TABLE 9 : ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE RESPONDENTS IN SIDUHATH LANE

Ethnicity	Number	Relative frequency
Sinhalese	47	55.3
Tamil	24	28.3
Moor	11	12.0
Malay	3	3.5
Total	85	100.0

As one might expect, levels of educational attainment are much lower here. As is well known, the urban poor, though resident in the capital city, are often prevented by many factors from making use of the educational facilities available there. The result is that the highest levels of illiteracy are found in slums and shanties. Moreover, very few, if at all, pass national examinations which function as the mechanisms screening the young for further education, skill training or white collar employment. The result is that very few children from poor urban families living in slums and shanties escape poverty through 'formal' routes, many of them after a few years of schooling in a 'disadvantaged' urban school, enter the labour force early, often as helping hands in the informal sector. Unless they acquire skills or some capital, they continue to be manual labourers or engage in highly competitive trade and other activities in the urban petty commodity sector. They often get

married early, mostly to partners from the same or similar neighbourhoods.

Family life in the urban slums and shanties is different from that in the rural setting. Unlike relatively more stable village communities, slum and shanty communities are in a state of continuous flux owing to the high rate of geographical mobility and widespread family instability, resulting in the constant nucleation of families, separation and desertions. Their attitudes towards family, marriage, sex, virginity, chastity, modesty, etc. are different from those of relatively more traditional rural inhabitants. In very poor urban neighbourhoods, desertion of wives and children by husbands and fathers is widespread. In some cases, both parents have gone in their separate ways, leaving young children with the helpless grandmother who is forced to bring them up.

The traditional notion of housewife - a married woman who looks after the home front while husband is engaged in income generating activities - does not often apply in poor urban communities. Even when their husbands are faithful breadwinners, the wives also have to engage in income generating activities of one kind or another such as self-employment or wage labour in order to supplement meagre income earned by men. There are also instances where husbands have deserted their wives with children and, in these cases, women bear the full responsibility of running their households. So, when the opportunities for migrating to the Middle East on contract employment were opened up in the late seventies, they could not care less about the public opinion about Middle East migration that was building up in the society at large, whether they were favorable, unfavorable or indifferent.

TABLE 10 : EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF INFORMANTS IN SIDUHATH LANE

Level	Number	%
No formal education	18	21.2
Grade 5 or less	34	40.0
Grade 6 – 8	27	31.8
Grade 10	3	3.5
Pass ordinary level	2	2.4
Pass advanced level	1	1.2
Total	85	100.0

TABLE 11 : EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF INFORMANTS IN SIDUHATH LANE

Employment status	Number	%
White collar	2	2.3
Skilled labour (mason, carpenter etc.)	5	5.8
Unskilled labour	13	15.2
Female domestic	3	3.5
Petty trade	12	14.1
Not employed	48	56.4
Other	2	2.3
Total	85	100.0

Shanties in Colombo and elsewhere no doubt accommodate the poorest and the most vulnerable segments of the urban population. Yet they are also characterized by varying degrees of socio-economic differentiation depending on many factors such as the source of income and subsistence available to them and the age of the community. This is also true for the shanty community under consideration.

The internal socio-economic differentiation, no matter how significant it is, is often reduced to a secondary position by the fact that the inhabitants, in spite of their differences share the same habitat which imposes on them a certain common lifestyle characterized by improvised housing, poor and inadequate common amenities, and lack of inadequate access to infrastructure such as postal services, electric lighting, garbage disposal, etc. Living in such a habitat itself imposes a low social status on its inhabitants resulting in a social distance between the shanty dwellers and those who live in more affluent residential areas. These circumstances in turn produce a feeling of deprivation and a sense of community in shanty settlements. Inhabitants in these communities tend to adopt a more egalitarian attitude towards each other often disregarding whatever socio-economic and cultural differences that exist. This is evident not only in the quasi kingship terminologies used in addressing each other but also in the informal forms of cooperation, mutual assistance and exchange between families and households that can be observed in shanty neighbourhoods. This does not mean that there are no factions, disputes and conflicts in such communities.

3. Social Stratification and Social Mobility

In this last section of the paper, an attempt is made to (a) examine the process of migration in the three locations briefly and (b) explore how the process affects the patterns of stratification prevailing there with particular reference to its implications for social mobility.

a. The case of Bogollagama

As mentioned before, it was in the early 1980's that people from Bogollagama began to migrate to the Middle East. Ever since, 26 persons from 19 households have migrated. Of these, 14 migrants had been females. Since there are certain significant differences between the two categories of migrants, their background date are given in two separate tables below.

First to look at female migrants; all those who have migrated to the Middle East had gone as housemaids* (*One unmarried girl has migrated to the Maladives and she is employed as a machinist there). Almost all of them are from poor village families. Table 13 gives some background data about these migrants.

Almost all the female migrants from the village had been either unemployed or housewives before they magrated. There is no doubt that most of them at least engaged in home gardening and domestic work before they left. Most of them are from non-farming families. Except one family which owned a small parcel of paddy land, all the others did not possess any paddy land. The breadwinners in most families had been casual labourers, artisans, minor employees in state organizations, pensioners and drivers. In other words, all of them come from lower social strata. These families also occupy positions at the lower end of the local status hierarchy. While many of the families hail from lower caste backgrounds, this position is further reinforced by their poor economic backgrounds. The few poor Govigama families involved have very little to do with their more affluent caste fellows owing to their economic misfortunes.

On the other hand, male migrants in general come from more affluent backgrounds. Moreover, they have also gone for skilled occupations. It is significant to note that, except in one case, all the other migrants come from non-farming backgrounds. Even this family does not own any paddy fields. Only one migrant claims to own any paddy land at all. Even he is a government servant who had taken leave to go to the Middle East.

TABLE 12 : SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS OF FEMALE MIGRANTS IN BOGOLLAGAMA

Case no.	Occupation prior to migration	Marital status	Father/Husbands' main source of income	Paddy land ownership	Caste
F 1	unemployed	Single	retired hotel worker/now tenant farmer	no	Dhobi
F 2	home gardening	married	carpenter/ agricultural laborer	no	Dhobi
F 3	unemployed	single	agricultural laborer	no	Dhobi
F 4	unemployed	single	retired lorry driver	no	Navandanna
F 5	unemployed	single	survey dept. laborer	no	Kandyan/ Karawa
F 6	unemployed	single	mason/farm laborer	no no	Kandyan/ Karawa
F 7	unemployed	separated now married to case M11	Katcheri Peon's daughter	no	mixed, Gov./Karawa
F 8	housewife	married	poor farmer (1/4 acre)	yes	Govigama
F 9	housewife	remarried	carpenter	no	Govigama
F 10	housewife	married	postman	no	Govigama
F 11	unemployed	single	pavement hawker	no	Govigama
F 12	unemployed	separated	retired driver	no	mixed, Padu/Govigama
F 13	unemployed	single	retired driver	no	mixed, Padu/ Govigama
F 14	unemployed	single	retired driver	no	mixed, Padu/ Govigama

TABLE 13 : SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS OF MALE MIGRANTS IN BOGOLLAGAMA

Case no.	Marital status	Occupation prior to migration	Fathers/ spous.occup.+	Paddy-land owner-ship	Caste	Job in M.E.
M 1	single	unemployed	cycle shop-owner	no	not clear	house driver
M 2	married	administra-tive officer	housewife	yes	Govigama	not known
M 3	married	plumber	farmer/ laborer	no	Govigama	plumber
M 4	married	unemployed*	housewife	no	Govigama	driver
M 5	single	unemployed*	mechanic	no	Govigams	driver
M 6	single	unemployed*	mechanic	no	Govigama	mechanic
M 7	single	unemployed*	mechanic	no	Govigama	heavy vehicle driver
M 8	single	business	retired driver	no	not clear	not known
M 9	married	Asst. Prod. manager	housewife	no	mixed G/K	production manager
M10	single	hotel worker	business	no	not known	hotel steward
M11	married	unemployed	ME migrant (case F7)	no	Karawa	cleaner
M12	single	driver	hiring car driver	no	Karawa	driver

* All from the same family
Based on the information given by the informant
\+ In cases of married - migrants, spouse's occupation is given

Many of the male migrants have also been unemployed before they migrated. Of the others, only two had held permanent positions in the formal sector. Both of them had gone to the Middle East on no-pay leave, retaining their jobs while they were away. Others had been either self-employed, i.e. small business, or had held casual positions in private sector establishments. Given their background, most of the male migrants belong to lower middle or middle layers of the social hierarchy of the village. It should also be noted that most of them also belong to Govigama and Karawa castes. These castes occupy higher positions within the local caste hierarchy. So, it can be concluded that compared to most female migrants, with a few exceptions, the male migrants in general come from more affluent backgrounds.

As mentioned before, most of the male migrants had held skilled jobs in the Middle East. This means that they were paid much higher wages than female migrants who had held lowly paid positions such as domestic service. These wage differentials invariably mean that male migrants in general could send or bring more money back to Sri Lanka than their female counterparts.

Middle East migration in Bogollagama has no doubt drawn the attention of every villager for various reasons. Firstly, it has already enhanced the economic position of a considerable number of families; new houses have been built;existing houses have been either renovated or extended; many have adopted new lifestyles; at least a few started new businesses; some are going back again; etc. Secondly, many young women,both married and unmarried, have gone away, into an unknown world, for long periods of time, leaving their families behind. And thirdly, the stroies about migrant women, their position and behaviour in various Middle Eastern countries spread like wildfire in the village (and in the country at large) that they have become a popular subject of gossip among both men and women, and young and old alike. Finally, migration, particularly of women, has had a significant impact on the family life of some of the people involved. Some men had established extra-marital relationships while their wives were away. These had created intra-family tension which no doubt had some impact on children.

The impact that migration had on the village community has not resulted in the formation of an altogether negative attitude toward it among the villagers. When asked whether they wished to have a family member in the Middle East, 94% of the respondents answered in the affirmative. However, when aked, whether they like to have male

member or a female member in the Middle East, the vast majority wanted a male member, 27% of them wanted either, male or female. Most of those who wanted either male or female came from poor village families. As we have already seen, actual migrant statistics from Bogollagama are very much in keeping with these attitudes.

How does the migration process relate to the prevailing patterns of social stratification? Some aspects of this issue were already dealt with in passing in the discussion so far. In the next few paragraphs, an attempt is made to identify some of the salient features of the relationship between the two phenomena with particular reference to social mobility.

Migration to the Middle East is essentially an attempt to improve one's life chances. This is exactly why people in the lower rungs of society are more interested in, and enthusiastic about migration. Their immediate goal is to better their material circumstances thinking that, in the long run, this would pave the way for improved social status.

In absolute terms, there has undoubtedly been an improvement in their material circumstances. They now have improved housing, more household possessions, some savings, or at least no longer indebted, wear jewelry and better clothing, and so on. Whether they could sustain these conditions without resorting to repeated migration is dependent on many factors. At least now, they appear to be relatively better off.

It was mentioned earlier that the poor migrants have already become a reference group for the prospective migrants coming from similar social backgrounds. This indicates that there has been a differntiation between migrants and others who belong to the same social layer. Yet it is not clear whether there has been a significant improvement in the life chances of the migrants vis—a—vis those who were left behind. Perhaps, it is more a feeling of relative deprivation than a real social differentiation for many poor migrant families are forced to revert back to their old functional roles when they return home. Unless, of course they resort to repeat migration and venture into new spheres of activity. As is well known, the latter is certainly true for more affluent migrants, but not necessarily for the poor ones such as housemaids and unskilled labourers.

In the context of Bogollagama, the migrants from poor village families have certainly not moved up within the class structure of the village. They have not been able to move away from their func-

tional roles within the local system of production and exchange relations. This is exactly why they have not been able to sustain the newly adopted consumption patterns without resorting to repeat migration. For most unskilled labourers, repeat migration would not permit more than the sustenance of their slightly elevated consumption pattern. But, even for repeat migration, there are built-in limitations such as inability to find work after a certain age, difficulty to secure employment at one's own will, difficulties associated with the management of tension within the family over extended periods of time, etc. Even if one manages to rely on repeat migration, the maintenance of such an artificially elevated life style is dependent on the continuous injection of resources into the family budget that it can hardly be stable, certain and predictable. So, even though many migrants resort to repeat migration, it can never be considered as a realistic and a viable alternative for the vast majority of the migrants.

So, is social mobility possible in the context of migration ? If so, for whom ? Several migrant families in Bogollagama have actually put together sufficient resources to open up new avenues of income for them. They have bought agricultural land, opened retail shops, bought commercial vehicles such as motor coaches, etc. They also have long term savings deposits which generate a regular income. These families, however are the exception rather than the rule. In almost all these cases, they have been repeat migrants, multiple migrants from the same family and migrants with skills which could be marketed for higher salaries and wages. They in fact have not only improved their present material circumstances but also have established sources of income within the local system of production and exchange relations so that they could sustain their newly acquired life chances independent of the external source from which they derived their working capital. It should be noted that most of these migrants are skilled male migrants. Many of them also come from relatively well—to—do families.

As mentioned before, male migration, unlike female migration does not denote any negative connotations. So, even if migration does not help one to promote one's social esteem, it can hardly lead to a devaluation of migrant's position in the system of status stratification.

One's social status in the local context is dependent on many factors, some deriving from primordial affiliations, and others from one's present mode of existence defined by level of education, occupation, consumption patterns, social influence, institutional affiliations and so on. Though caste and birth status in general are still important

in the village, their actual influence in determining the distribution of social honor within the village society has been cushioned by other factors to a considerable extent i.e. wealth and social prestige derived from other sources.

The local population is not divided into clearly identifiable status layers. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to identify the most visible divisions within the local status hierarchy. While the two extremes of the hierarchy are occupied by two mutually exclusive groups, each defined by the opposite characteristics of the other, those who lie in between tend to be in a state of continuous flux at least in the long run in the sense that there has been a lot of inter—mixing— a process which has been guided by non—traditional factors such as lifestyle, social influence and wealth. The upper end of the hierarchy is represented by the few Govigama aristocratic (radala) families which by and large remain relatively more affluent not only owing to the ownership of landed property but owing to modern status symbols they have acquired such as education, public offices and modern lifestyles. The lower end of the hierarchy is occupied by the Dobi (washer) caste families, most of whom also happened to be impoverished and landless. Others occupy different positions in between depending on their 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' in terms of both traditional and modern criteria.

Since this region within the hierarchy is more flexible, the chances for individuals and families to move up or down are greater here. It should be noted that there have been many intercaste marriages among them. Almost all the male migrants, also occupy different positions in this middle zone of the hierarchy. Unlike the female migrants coming from the lower end, some of these migrants have been so dynamic and aggressive in terms of adopting new life styles, venturing into new areas of economic activity and asserting themselves that they seem to pose a threat to the existing hierarchy, at least in the long run. This is particularly significant in view of the fact that the local aristocratic families in general have not been able to consolidate their economic position in the face of the diversification of sources of wealth. Some of them have already realized that they have no time to lose. One family has already sent a son to the to the Middle East. No doubt the others are seriously considering to follow suit. The aristocratic families perhaps began to worry about this threat when a migrant family of lowly origins which became affluent in the recent past owing to the migration of some of its members to the Middle East virtually asserted that they are now on par with even the local aristocrats. Even

though these moves were strongly countered by the latter, it indicates the general trend.[3]

So far an attempt has been made to examine the process of migration in Bogollagama and its implications for social stratification there in very general terms. In the next few pages, an attempt is made to look at the process in the other two locations introduced earlier. After a brief discussion on the background of the migrants in these locations, attention would be focussed on how these locations deviate from Bogollagama.

b. Housing settlement in Matale

As mentioned earlier, both Matale housing scheme as well as Siduhath lane, Colombo are very different from Bogollagama. While the latter is placed within a rural setting in terms of its recent history, social structure, economy, ideological base, values and norms, etc., the former are two dense clusters of families who are by and large "uprooted" from the places of "origin", they have come from different villages and areas. A majority of the inhabitants in both communities have lived in the settlements for several decades, but they have not been able to piece together their diverse primordial affiliations in any meaningful way. So, in both communities, families hardly make any attempt to trace their roots and therefore, "the origins" by and large have little relevance in the sphere of social interaction between individuals and families. This does not mean that there are no differences between the two communities.

The families who moved into Matale housing scheme were from similar socio—economic backgrounds. They included occupational categories such as masons, carpenters, minor employees of state organizations such as hospital attendants, labourers, peons and municipality workers, self—employed groups such as street vendors and tailors, and so on. The residents there, however belonged to different ethnic groups, though the Sinhalese constituted the largest group, followed by Muslims and Tamils.

Since its establishment, the resident population has increased, and as mentioned earlier, some of the offsprings of the original allottees have in fact spilled over into the surrounding state land which they encroached onto. Newly constructed houses have become part of the original settlement.

Levels of educational attainment among the second generation children in most households are much higher than those of their parents. While this has raised their aspirations, a few have in fact found more prestigious white collar jobs such as teaching, clerical and technical positions. On the other hand, many have remained unemployed as they are not prepared to take up blue collar jobs. When opportunities for migrating to the Middle East were opened up in the late 70's, Matale housing settlement turned out to be a highly fertile around for recruiting both male as well as female workers. Many of those who were employed were also available for migration as they were not linked to the local economy through strong structural relationships owing to the nature of their employment, they were either self employed in the 'informal' economy of Matale town or engaged in irregular wage labour in the area.

Living in the housing scheme was not prestigious. Quite contrarily, those who live outside it, particualrly the villagers of Bogollagama, consider the inhabitants there as 'lowly' as the latter in general hail from 'unknown' backgrounds, do not have much respect for local traditions and are considered more prone to immoral behaviour! In spite of the fact that many families have moved up in terms of educational and occupational achievement, this general impression still persists. Moreover, the families in the settlement in general are more independent of each other than in Bogollagama and social control through kinship and neighbourhood ties is weak. These circumstances in turn meant that the prospective migrants there were much less culturally constrained than those in Bogollagama. So, unlike in the latter, female migrants in the housing scheme did not necessarily come from poor families. They in fact emerged from a variety of family backgrounds.

Female migrants have far outnumbered male migrants in the housing scheme. While there were 26 migrants from 16 families out of 61 households covered by the present study, 19 of them were females (73%). Tables 14—18 provide some basic information about the migrants.

TABLE 14 : MIGRANTS BY AGE IN HOUSING SCHEME

Age (years)	Number	%
18—30	14	53.8
31—40	10	38.4
over 40	2	7.6
Total	26	100.00

TABLE 15 : MIGRANTS BY MARITAL STATUS IN HOUSING SCHEME

Marital Status	Number	%
Single	6	23.0
Married	12	46.1
Separated	1	3.8
Other (divorced, etc)	7	26.9
Total	26	100.00

TABLE 16 : EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF MIGRANTS IN HOUSING SCHEME

Educational attainment	Number	%
No schooling	2	7.6
Grade 5 or less	4	15.2
Grade 6–9	2	7.6
Grade 10	13	50.0
A/L passed	2	7.6
Other	1	3.8
Total	26	100.00

TABLE 17 : EMPLOYMENT OF INFORMANT AND SEX OF MIGRANT IN HOUSING SCHEME

Employment of Informant	Number of Migrants	
	Male	Female
Teaching	1	
Business	–	2
Supervisor	1	
Admin. officer	–	1
Driver	–	1
Laborer	–	2
Casual laborer	1	
Skilled laborer	–	1
No employment	4	12
Total	7	19

TABLE 18 : ETHNICITY OF MIGRANT FAMILIES IN HOUSING SCHEME

Ethnicity	Number	%
Sinhalese	13	50.0
Moor	2	7.6
Tamil	7	26.9
Mixed	4	15.2
Total	26	100.00

Matale Housing scheme did not have an economic base of its own. Most families do not posses land which could be used for agricultural purposes. So, they are almost entirely dependent on monetary incomes from various sources to meet their subsistence and other needs. This situation made Middle East migration all the more attractive to them. When the first few migrants returned home with their savings and other valuable household durables, others got the urge to follow the growing social current. By the mid 80's, many families had their daughters and sons working in the Middle East and sending money home. Most of these families are either totally or partially dependent on these remittances for their daily upkeep. Moreover, they have also adopted new consumption patterns the maintenance of which requires higher incomes than what these families had at their disposal prior to migration.

Consumerism is far more widespread in the housing scheme than in Bogollagama. While most of them have incurred some expenditure to renovate, modernize or extend their housing units, the rest of the savings is usually spent on consumption. It should also be noted that most people borrow money before they migrate either by mortagaging the house or pawning their jewelry. Some of those who mortgaged their houses could not get their houses released either because they failed to secure employment even after paying recruitment fees or could not pay back the mortagage before the deadline, as a result some of them have become tenants in their own houses.

Only a very few families in the Housing Scheme have made any significant investment of their savings. Others do not usually have substantial savings when they return after a spell of employment abroad. Once they return they usually run out of their remaining savings in a short while and are therefore forced to seek oversess employment again. This is particularly so because they can rarely find employment back in Sri Lanka in keeping with their income and other expectations.

The absence of married female migrants for extended periods of time has had a considerable impact on familial relations back home. Husbands of many female migrants are alleged to have wasted money on alcohol, neglected their children and established extra-marital relations with other women in the area. When the wives return home, in spite of strained relationship, family members usually reunite, unless the husband continues with his newly established relationship. On the other hand, it is also alleged that some married female migrants use their newly acquired 'wealth' as a bait to attract unmarried young men for sexual purposes. It is alleged that these young men are usually given valuable presents and pocket money. Pointing to these incidents, those who live outside the housing scheme tend to conclude that there has been a general 'moral decline' in the housing settlement as a result of Middle East migration. The ultimate outcome of all these is that prospective migrants there become less and less sensitive to cultural restrictions, not more, because now they have virtually nothing to lose by virtue of migration.

Even though the housing scheme originally accommodated low income, working class families, over the years, certain degree of social differentiation has taken place there due to a number of reasons. Firstly, some residents who had small businesses have over the years expanded their operations so that they now have higher incomes and an improved standard of living than many others in the settlement. Secondly, the second generation children belonging to some working class families have acquired educational qualifications to be eligible for white collar employment. Though only a few have managed to obtain public sector employment, many others have found employment in the private sector: these jobs are obviously more prestigious than those held by their parents. These young people have also adopted modern life styles. Thirdly, in recent years, a few lower middle class families have moved into the housing scheme. While some of them have purchased housing units from original allotteess, others are living in rented houses. These people consider themselves as "middle class" and do not freely associate other residents. And finally, many families who have returned migrants or current migrants in the Middle East also assert themselves by adopting more aggressive consumption patterns which most non-migrants families are unable to follow, the old transistor radios possessed by the latter can hardly match the vibrating sounds emanating from the stereo sound systems installed in some migrant houses. It is not necessary to mention that non-migrant women can rarely match their migrant counterparts who move about in the neighbourhood in most glamourous costumes wearing tantalizing imported cosmetics!

So, Middle East migration has contributed to the process of social differentiation that was already underway in the housing scheme. It should, however, be noted that its contribution has not gone so far as to alter the existing structural relationships in most cases. As mentioned before, most migrant families either did not have adequate capital to invest in productive ventures or spent all their savings on consumption and therefore did not become independent of their old sources of subsistence. Yet, it should be pointed out that, today they are less dependent on the old sources on income. This is particularly so in the case of those families who have resorted to repeat migration, when they run out of resources, they tend to remigrate than to revert back to their old sources of subsistence.

So the contribution of migration to social mobility has been primarily within the sphere of status stratification. Most migrant families who were poor prior to migration, in both appearance and reality do no longer appear to be so. Their houses are no longer in a state of disrepair; they are renovated, modernized or even newly built. The houses are no longer empty there are many household goods, furniture, electric appliances, curtains, curios, rugs, etc., family members are well dressed and as mentioned before the migrants are more so. They also seem to eat better. It is not necessary to mention that these material changes invariably help improve their social standing, at least within their own community. Whether they could sustain these improvements in the long run is questionable particularly in view of the fact that those who continue to maintain do so by resorting to repeat migration. Some migrant families who fail to return to the Middle East have in fact virtually returned to where they started; they have already disposed of their hard-earned status symbols such as cassette recorders and gold jewelry. Their position might even be worse now than before, particularly if they are female migrants, because outsiders have already passed their judgement on their moral character. Yet, as mentioned before, the urge to migrate among non-migrants in the locality particularly unemployed young men and women from the poor families has increased, not decreased. This is not surprising because the other most likely option is to remain poor and unemployed, positions which carry little social prestige and material rewards.

c. Siduhath Lane

The growth-oriented, liberalized economic policies of the post-1977 Government of Sri Lanka substantially contributed to the expansion of the 'informal' sector of the country's urban economy (Hettige,

1986). This was the direct result of increased private sector commercial activity in the urban areas involving both imported and locally produced consumer goods. Due to high rate of inflation and increased money supply, partly owing to the devaluation of the rupee, the growth of service activities such as tourism and private passenger transport, the increased availability of foreign capital through official and private transfers increased the demand for consumer goods and services creating more opportunities for those who were dependent on the urban informal economy for their sustenance. The urban slums and shanties, particularly those in and around Colombo, were directly affected by this expansionary process because most of those who 'belonged' to the informal urban economy happened to live in slums and shanties. This new expansionary process had at least two consequences. On one hand, it substantially contributed to socilal differentiation in the seemingly homogeneous communities of the urban poor widening the gap between those gained from the expansion of the urban informal economy and those who did not, owing to their structural position within the urban economy. The latter included marginally employed men and women, such as casual labourers, those engaged in personal services such as domestic workers and persons engaged in some cottage industries which were virtually wiped out by cheap imported substitutes, i.e. paper bag making. Their living conditions deteriorated as their earnings could buy very little in the open market because, despite increased wages, their meagre earnings could buy very little due to high rate of inflation. However, some of those who were living in their midst managed to earn enough at least to keep pase with rising inflation. They included those engaged in small businesses such as retail trade, passenger and goods transport and mechanical repairwork. With the spread of consumerism that accompanied the liberalization of the economy, increased earnings of these groups were spent on new consumer goods such as imported food, clothing, motor bikes, cassettes and TV's. These new consumption patterns found their way into urban slums and shanties. TV commercials promoting consumer goods, usually set in middle and upper middle class surroundings have created new wants at least among relatively well-to-do familes. Those who already retumed from the Middle East often have no difficulty in adopting some of these new consumption patterns.

It is in the above context that the migration of workers to the Middle East from Siduhath Lane has to be examined. In other words, the expansion of economic opportunities in the late seventies, spread of consumerism and Middle East migration are processes which were interwined, one often influencing the other. While some of those who made use of the new economic opportunities earned enough to pay

their way into the Middle East, those who return with some savings may expect to start new businesses using such capital. It is also often observed that newly accumulated wealth, either locally or overseas, is freely spent on consumption.

As mentioned earlier, only part of the larger shanty garden at Siduhath lane was coverd by the present study for the sake of convenience. 85 households out of over 200 units spread over a physically contiguous area were investigated. Of these, 30 households reported as having migrants, either currently in the Middle East or already returned to Sri Lanka. In other words, 35% of the households had 'migrants' in them.

Most of the migrants from Siduhath Lane were young, married females. While nearly 75% of the migrants were female, about 83% of all migrants were married or separated. Over 80% of the migrants were reported to be between 21 and 39 year of age. While 10% of the migrants had no formal schooling, 80% had an education below grade 10. Only 6% of the migrants had passed any national level examinations such as G.C.E. (ordinary level). Moreover, given the nature of the occupational structure of the settlement, it is not surprising that the migrants came largely from such employment catogories as petty trade, unskilled and skilled labour. A large number of migrants were also unemployed before migration.

The circumstances described elsewhere in the present publication facilitated the migration of a large number of persons from Siduhath Lane to the Middle East. Since most of them were unskilled workers, they did not return with large sums of money after a spell of employment abroad. In many cases, part of the earnings is sent home to meet day to day family needs while the migrant is still away, so the actual net savings at the end of the contract do not constitute a large amount. Moreover, unlike in rural areas, they have no access to other sources of subsistence such as home gardens and this makes them totally dependent on their monetary income to meet all their daily needs ranging from food to firewood.

As mentioned before, people living in the slums and shanties, of course along with many others, got caught in the wave of consumerism which swept the country, particularly its urban areas after the liberalization of the economy in the late seventies. At Siduhath Lane, consumerism and Middle East migration reinforced each other. While higher income groups could adopt new consumption patterns using their

locally earned money,poor families could do so only through migration. Those returned after a spell of employment overseas could even overtake the others as they could make their purchases overseas or at duty free prices in Colombo. Imported goods are easily available in the country, but at a price.

The above circumstances persuaded more and more people to seek overseas employment. This was particularly so in the case of young women who could perhaps adopt new consumption patterns only through migration. Since many had already done so, the urge to follow suit became stronger day by day. Unlike in the rural areas, migrants do no longer constitute a minority in the slums and shanties. All those who wish to migrate have not been able to do so due to inadequate opportunities or resource constraints, yet the social current of migration is all pervasive in urban slums and shants like Siduhath Lane and beyond.

As mentioned before, it was easier for young women to migrate as housemaids than for unskilled men. This in effect meant that many wives migrated leaving their husbands behind. On the other hand, some men who had skills or resources, or both, also secured overseas employment. Some men who had small businesses left for Middle East in order to raise capital so that they could expand their businesses. On the whole, it is the poorest families (those who did not possess any material resources at all) who could not send their family members for overseas employment. Their condition has further deteriorated as real value of their meagre earnings and food stamps has declined due to inflation.

And finally to look at the implications of Middle East migration for social differentiation and mobility among the inhabitants at Siduhath Lane. To begin with, it should be recalled that the social distance between the 'disadvantaged' communities of slum and shanty dwellers on the one hand and the more affluent people living outside such communities is far more significant than the intra-community social differentiation. People living in a shanty settlement are usually squatters on undeveloped state or private land. Such settlements comprising of many improvised housing units are usually not serviced by urban authorities as the residents are not rate payers. So the settlers often have no access to basic urban services. This situation makes living conditions in such areas appalling. Moreover, the inhabitants have no ownership rights to their small plots of land and therefore they are in a state of uncertainty as to whether they will be evicted. In spite of all these, more and more people have cramped into such settlements

as acquisition of urban space through 'legitimate' (i.e. market) means is beyond their capacity.

Living under the conditions described above not only is demeaning but also imposes certain subtle civic disabilities on the inhabitants. These are manifested in the form of high walls erected by the members of higher strata of urban society separating their residential and other property from squatter settlements, lack of personal residential addresses preventing mail reaching individual families, denial of access to well-equipped schools in the city, etc. Given the poor living conditions and these handicaps, individual social mobility while remaining in such communities is virtually impossible.

Some settlers who have made gains through retail trade, passenger and goods transport, building contracts and Middle East migration tend to play a major part in local-level community development councils [4] that have been formed in slum and shanty communities in order obtain 'legitimacy' and basic services. Even though the rest of the population does not necessarily accept their leadership, they nevertheless rally around common objectives such as land rights, official recognition and basic services. While these new developments can be viewed as attempts by the 'disadvantaged' communities for 'collective' social mobility, they have been further reinforced by the activities of governmental and non—governmental organizations to 'upgrade' shanty settlements. Recently adopted state policy has been to legitimize and incorporate slum and shanty settlements through special housing projects, site and services programmes, and granting of ownership rights in respect of land, etc. In many parts of the city of Colombo where these policies were put into effect, many residents have spent large sums of their 'hidden' money to build modern houses which in effect have changed the spatial pattern that prevailed before. Even though many people are 'left behind' due to lack of resources to build such expensive houses, there is a tendency to put together whatever resources they have to build a better home.

Siduhath Lane squatter settlement has already been earmarked for up—grading by the authorities. The residents have been promised their land rights, basic services and housing loans. Many residents are eagerly waiting to build better homes in place of present temporary, improvised structures either by obtaining housing loans or by using their own resources. Although most returned migrants have already exhausted their savings, some have retained at least part of their savings in the hope of investing it in housing.

A few returned migrants from slums and shanties in Colombo, particularly skilled male workers, who had accumulated adequate financial resources through overseas employment, have moved out of such settlements altogether; they have either bought residential property elsewhere or moved into lower middle class housing schemes in and around Colombo. They have been able to do so as they had enough capital to establish new businesses such as passenger transport. For most migrants, this kind of mobility is indeed a remote possibility. Similar movements were not reported from Siduhath Lane. As mentioned before, the vast majority of the migrants from Siduhath Lane are females. As is well known, housemaids are paid the lowest wages and therefore, are unable to save large sums of money for investment in business. Moreover, families of many housemaids are totally dependent on their inward remittances while they are still away in the Middle East. Even if they save and bring back all what they earn, their families can easily run through all the savings in a short period of time as cost of living is particularly high in Colombo. Though they had been very poor earlier dependent on meagre incomes, migration has changed their consumption habits. Moreover, most migrant women do not wish to revert back to their previous sources of income such as wage labour and domestic work. So, as soon as the savings are exhausted, they seek overseas employment again. In fact, some of the return migrants had already done so.

In view of the proposed physical up-grading programme at Siduhath lane, most migrants can be expected to invest whatever resources at their disposal in housing and other amenities. It is therefore unlikely that they would invest their savings, if any, in income generating ventures, at least in the next few years. Since there are not many people who could move out of the settlement in favour of better soroundings, they are more than likely to give priority to changing the physical appearance of their neighbourhood in the hope that it would help remove the stigma attached to shanty living.

4. Concluding Remarks

The focus of the present paper has been on the implications of the process of migration for social stratification and social mobility. An analysis of such implications is crucial for an understanding of the process of migration itself for the avowed objective of migration is the betterment of material and social conditions of the people involved.

While it is not denied that there has been a general improvement in the living conditions of the migrants and their families, migration has

not brought about any significant structural change for the simple reason that most migrants were not tied down by structural relationships prior to migration. Those who break away from whetever weak structural links they had to the local system of production and exchange appear to be in a totally uprooted position as they are not, voluntarily or involunterily, brought back into their previous structural positions. This has given rise to a floating migrant population which is almost totally dependant on 'repeat migration' for their survival and sustenance.

The instances where migrants, having returned, have got themselves 'established' in terms of having a steady, new source of subsistence independent of 'migration' are few and far between. Those who have done so have in fact 'moved up' in the social ladder. They are few because they are mostly skilled male workers who had earned much higher wages than the unskilled female workers.

As far as implications for status stratification are concerned, there is a fundamental difference, on the one hand, between male and female workers and rural and urban settings on the other. Even if male workers did not gain any social esteem by migrating, there is certainly no devaluation of their social status. Yet, as far as female workers are concerned, in extreme cases they are not treated any better than 'prostitutes' . In this respect, however, there is a difference between urban and rural settings. In the urban setting, since the female workers come primarily from slums and shanties, migration does not bring about any appreciable change in their social status within the wider social context since their social esteem is usually very low even prior to migration. Even in their own neighbourhoods, no significant change in perceptions can be observed. In traditional rural settings where 'open' violation of moral codes are not ignored, female migrants have paid a heavy price in social esteem. In the case of married workers, their husbands also have to pay part of the price involved, this is evident in the fact that they are often treated more like incapable, irresponsible 'puppets' who sell their wives for money! In the case of unmarried girls, parents have been forced to join their daughters to pay the heavy price involved. While migration has become a significant handicap in the marriage market, in some instances, they have been required to pay handsome dowries in compensation for alleged loss of virginity; some prospective partners refuse to marry altogether.

On the other hand, the general improvements in their material circumstances, though in many cases may not last long, have certain-

ly brought some relief to them. Improved housing and the possession of an array of household goods, many of which are status symbols, have resulted in an appreciable change in their lifestyle which itself has placed them above their impoverished neighbours, in both rural as well as urban settings. Unlike the latter, they do no longer 'appear' to be impoverished. So the relative deprivation of the migrants vis—a—vis the more affluent social strata is certainly a relative one because they have won some admiration among those who are down below!

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Appendix A.

The high caste aristocratic family involved belongs to the traditional landed elite in the village while the migrant family concerned had emerged from lowly origins. The father in the migrant family had been a driver to a Tamil surveyor in the area. Even though the driver's caste position is not clear, it is strongly believed that he hailed from a Kandyan low—caste family. Having got married to a low country Govigama woman who had earned her living by engaging in menial occupations such as domestic work, he had built a wattle and daub house on a piece of land given to him by his employer and settled down there. He had 5 children, two sons and three daughters, before he died about fifteen years ago.

The children went to schools in Matale town but did not acquire adequate educational qualifications in order to be able to compete for white collar employment. Under difficult economic circumstances after the death of the father, male children had strived to erke out a living for the family by engaging in small businesses. The grown up daughters are said to have turned to 'immoral' means of livelihood such as working in night clubs, etc. In the late seventies, the elder son had migrated to the Middle East. Having returned after several years of employment, he had established a passenger transport business, and built the present house. Meanwhile, two sisters had also secured employment in the Middle East. The third sister, who had just attained puberty and the second son also migrated to the Middle East in the mid 1980's.

The elder brother who had been sensitive to 'gossip' in the village about his sisters had been engaged in verbal quarrels with the sisters. In one incident, one sister had struck him with a brick in the head causing injury to his skull. A few years later he had died due to a brain tumor which, villagers suspect, was caused by the initial injury.

By 1985 the family had become affluent, now living in a large, modern, well—equiped house. The son had revived the transport business. The family members possess considerable assets in the form of savings deposits and gold. At the end of 1987, two sisters, having

returned to the Middle East, were still there. While one of them, who was already married and separated had sent a ticket to her husband to join her;he had taken the opportunity and gone to the Middle East, the other is said to be living with a Pakistani worker in Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile the son had got friendly with the daughter of a migrant woman living in the 'Housing settlement' but, his mother, having got angry over this affair, had not only insulted both the daughter and the mother by physically assaulting the former but also brought the relationship to an end. A few months later, the boy had got friendly with a girl from the aristocratic family mentioned above while she was still a school girl doing her advanced level. The boy's family, particularly the mother, had been very happy over this affair as he was going to establish a marital relationship with a traditional aristocratic family. However, when the parents of the girl found out about the relationship, they had asked the daughter to give up and abstain from talking to him on the way. Having realized that the parents would never give their consent, she eloped with the boy with the concurrence of his family.

The aristocratic family considered this as a big insult to them and decided to have nothing to do with the daughter any longer. They in fact went to the extent of performing 'last rites' by inviting Buddhist monks to the house as if she had expired.

A few months later, one of the boy's sisters had arranged a job placement for his wife as well. Since the family was not hard pressed for money, this move was interpreted by many as aimed at insulting the aristocratic family. At the completion of the field work, she was still in the Middle East.

1 For a detailed analysis, see Gunatileke (1972), Indraratne, et al. (1983)

2 It should be noted that these local perceptions are a reflexion of a broader process of caste conflict and competition that was underway in Sri Lanka in the 19th century (cf. Roberts, 1982).

3 See Appendix A; the ensuing episode is presented in the form of a short case–study.

4 These are grass–roots–level, community welfare associations formed by the articulate members of these communities in order to obtain state support for housing, sanitary and other public and private utilities.