

Marriage in Sri Lanka has been an important social institution not only in terms of present day values but also in terms of historic norms. The institution of marriage and its functioning in present society provides an interesting base for the study of the economic rationality of people in their social behaviour. After centuries of evolution marriage still preserves some of its traditional characteristics; namely caste, ethnic and religious considerations and transfer of property from one generation to the other or transactions (in money or property) between different families when marriage contracts are entered upon. Present day values of marriage tend to perpetuate some form of a 'social cost' which is reflected in several spheres. More clearly it can be identified in the consumption patterns of the elite groups who spend lavishly on such ceremonies for status reasons. People of all classes in Sri Lanka take their ceremonies, such as marriage ceremonies, very seriously; in fact so seriously that many end up in debt by over indulging in such luxuries'.

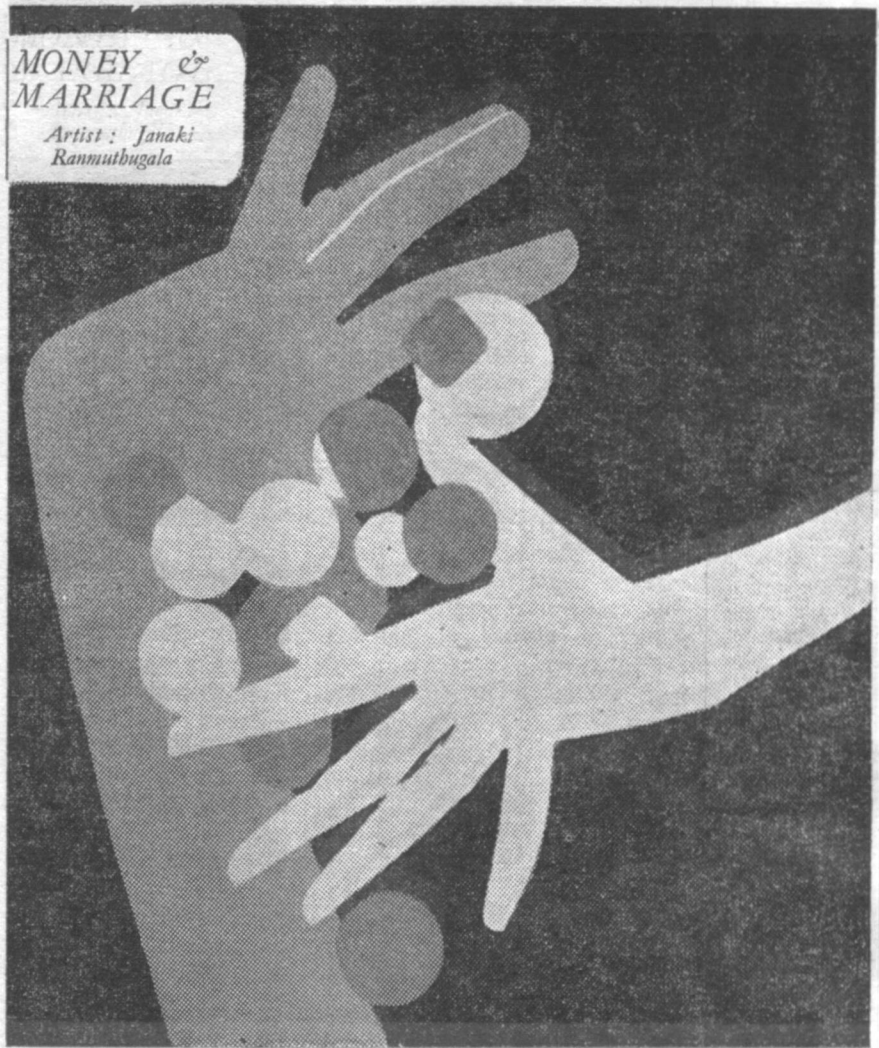
Another important feature of this 'social cost' is the dowry system that contributes to a widening of income inequalities. In addition, our marriages today tend to perpetuate the competitive character dominating society which is reflected in the educational system, the employment market and also in politics. A relationship between this 'competitive character' and the institution of marriage is not difficult to find if one examined the values governing present day marriages.

Historical perspective

The 19th century development of capitalism contributed a number of significant changes to the practices of marriage in Sri Lanka including the introduction of a legal basis for marriage, through legislation. These changes are attributed to the continuous influence of western culture and religion. In the West too the situation generally prevailing in the ancient world was profoundly changed by Christianity. In the Christian tradition as it evolved, the sex relationship, in order to constitute marriage had to be monogamous and

MONEY & MARRIAGE

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THE ECONOMICS OF MARRIAGE

also be characterised by the duty of faithfulness. It came to mean a life-long union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. Such unions were preceded by some form of ceremonial recognised by the law of the particular country in which it took place. It also became necessary to determine whether or not a marriage existed as a preliminary to the adjudication of claims to an estate. Marriage thus became almost universally a formalised transaction requiring a public act or ceremony.

A closer look at the historical background of marriage in Sri Lanka

before proceeding to its present forms would be instructive as the modern practice of marriage appears to be the product of a long term evolution.

As in all other societies and cultures marriage in this country too has performed many basic personal and social functions such as procreation; a formalised upbringing of children; providing for satisfaction of personal needs, for affection, companionship and status; regulating of lines of descent; division of labour between the sexes; economic production and consumption.

The historical evidence of marriage practices in Sri Lanka can be traced back to early times. Reference to the economic aspects of this partnership are of particular interest.

In their monumental work on the "Veddahs" the Seligmaans commented thus on this aspect: "*The man goes to his future father-in-law with a present of honey, yams, grain or dried deer's flesh tied to his unstrung bow, which he uses as a carrying stick. Whether he generally repeats this visit or receives his bride immediately was not clear, and probably the custom varies in this particular. Handuna of Godatalawa told us that he did not take his bride away until he had twice taken a present of food to his mother's brother (father-in-law). When a girl married, her father usually made over to his son-in-law a tract of land, generally a hill known to be inhabited by colonies of the 'bambara' or rock bee, or gave him a piece of personal property such as a bow or one or two arrows. Sometimes a dog was given.*"

The Mahavamsa makes reference to the custom of 'giving' in the period when King Sena ruled in the 9th century A.D. After the King died the Mahavipada Sena entered the town and Samgha who was his consort, he consecrated Mahesi and gave her a dowry according to custom.

In primitive Buddhism the arrangement of a marriage bond was strictly a family affair and unlike in later times no soothsayers or astrologers were called in either to approve of the union, or to cast a day for the ceremony. But fathers were expected to gift their daughters with a marriage portion consisting of jewellery or other forms of wealth. Even in early times, however, our folk customs and ceremonies varied according to the locality and the social and financial position of the parties. After the period of foreign rule began in Sri Lanka several writers recorded interesting details about our marriage customs and ceremonies. Among one of the first Western writers was Father Queyroz, the Portuguese historian. In his book about the Island, published in 1685, he wrote:

"Among the Singhalese, however, though the lower folk buy wives, and the man brings a dowry and furniture with him, and the woman brings only her

personal ornaments, among the nobles there is a different fashion, for the bridegroom-elect sends a present to the parents of the bride, an article for each as a token of the contract, and they are obliged to give the dowry agreed upon, along with the daughter. In other things there is a considerable diversity, for among them there is no stable matrimony nor union except as long as they like; though they are also most observant of not marrying except those of their caste."

This principle of 'giving' came to be known as the dowry system. The system as it exists in Sri Lanka today, is the adaptation of an ancient practice to modern conditions. In ancient times a person's consequence depended on his status in society, that is on his caste and the service on which he held land. When a woman was given in marriage (diga), it was to a person of the same status, and she brought with her some personal ornaments or wealth as her portion or dowry. In some cases, however, a woman was not actually given in marriage, but rather she took a husband (binna) who became adopted to the wife's family and her share of the inheritance was her dowry. In modern times however, though people still tend to stick to caste especially in marriage contracts, it is one's profession or employment that takes the place of social status; and as profession and employment now depend on a person's education and less on his birth or family; it has become common for parents of means to secure husbands for their daughters from the professional class by the offer of rich dowries.

More definite evidence of marriage practices in Sri Lanka becomes available in the 18th century. Although there was no legislation giving legal effect to marriage in the Kandyan period, observance of some formalities and customs confirmed the legal union between two parties. These practices were related primarily to property inheritance within the families of the same caste. Determination of legality of a marriage was necessary since the Kandyan law of inheritance distinguished between legitimate and illegitimate children. The essential elements of a legal marriage under Kandyan law has been classified by Hayley (1923) as follows:—

1. The parties must have *connubium* (an agreement for union). Generally marriage between persons of different caste or even of different ranks within a caste were prohibited and void. But there were exceptions, and in some districts men of one caste regularly took their wives from another caste. Niti-niganduwa considers the case of a *goigama* or *rate* woman marrying a man of a higher caste than herself, and states that children did not succeed to their father's caste, but were considered legitimate and entitled to inherit their father's property, even if he should have other children by a wife of his own caste.
2. The parties must not have been within the prohibited degrees of relationship (i.e. laws such as a marriage should not take place between parallel cousins, i.e. one should not marry his father's brother's daughter or mother's sister's daughter and one should not marry his paternal grandfather's brother's blood daughter etc.).
3. The parties must have cohabited with the intention of forming a definite alliance, the intention being inferred from the circumstance as far as inheritance was concerned, the formalities were not looked into in order to determine the regularity of a marriage.
4. The consent of the respective heads of the families; the countenance and sanction of the relations to the third or fourth degree on both sides to the union of the parties. A woman was entirely at the disposal of her parents or after their death, of her nearest male relations, even after the termination of her first marriage by death or divorce. But she could choose a suitable husband for herself if her parents or brothers neglected their duty of finding her a suitable partner. In the case of men a greater freedom was allowed, a man being entitled to contract a valid marriage with a woman of a low rank after the death of his parents. But generally opposition of parents or kinsmen was sufficient to annul a marriage

celebrated with all due formality. In the case of chiefs of high rank, the king's consent was necessary before they married.

In Sinhalese law and social practice matrilineal and patrilineal marriages were distinguished. Ralph Peiris, in his study of Sinhalese Social Organisation (1956) states, "In the 'binna' (matrilineal) marriage, the husband lived in the wife's parental home and she had an equal interest in her parents' estate with her brothers, and her children had a claim on the family estate equal to their mother's interest. A binna husband had no privileges in his wife's house, no power over her property and was liable to expulsion or divorce by the wife or her parents at any moment. In the case of 'diga' (patrilineal) marriage the daughter lost her right to inheritance, but was entitled to maintenance in the event of her being obliged to return from misfortune in her father's lifetime".

During the Kandyan period polygamy was found to be a common practice, the most prominent form was the polyandrous marriage where two brothers had one wife and cohabited in the same house. Robert Know who was an English prisoner in Sri Lanka in the 17th century has also commented on polyandrous marriages among the Kandyan Sinhalese. It is clear that this form of marriage had been treated as a convenient method of passing down property from one generation to the other. It is believed that those who inherited little land from their parents often contracted polyandrous marriages in order to retain the ownership of land within the family.

According to Davy (1821) "This singular species of polygamy is not confined to any caste or rank; it is more or less general amongst the high and low, the rich and poor; the apology of the poor is that they cannot afford to have a particular wife; and of the wealthy and men of rank, that such union is polite as it unites families; concentrates property and influence and conduces to the interest of the children who having two fathers will be better taken care of and will still have a father though they may lose one".

Ralph Peiris also shows how the practice of polyandry minimized the fragmentation of ancestral property. For three brothers having four sons

by a joint wife, would certainly have had to provide for twelve heirs if each had a separate wife. If they contracted a polyandrous union the paternal estate would be held undividedly by their four sons. Polyandry was finally related to the *raja-kariya* system which required many a person to be away from home on public service, leaving his family unattended for several months at a time. It was customary for brothers at home to till the fields and care for the joint wife and children. Indeed so common was the practice of fraternal polyandry in late Kandyan times that such an arrangement was presumed when two or three brothers holding land in common, occupied the same Mulgedera and one of them married.

The joint husbands were always 'brothers' and fraternal polyandry was allowed without any limitation as to the number of husbands, but the wife could not take a second associated husband without the consent of the first. If the second husband was not a brother of the first, the wife's family had to be consulted. A wife could refuse to admit a second husband even if he were a brother of the first. The most common form of polyandry was for two brothers to have a wife between them, and even in a family of many brothers, two would arrange to have a joint wife and live separately.

The available evidence of divorce cases, after enforcement of the Kandyan Marriage Ordinances of 1859 reveals that although a marriage was registered in the name of one brother, the others had access to the wife; the polyandrous situation changed imperceptibly into one group marriage if one of the brothers brought another wife into the mulgedera. Besides the widespread practice of polyandry, there had been other forms; Niti-niganduwa states that "it is also a frequent custom for two or three men to have two or three wives in common". It would appear that in a household where some brothers shared a spouse while others had wives of their own, fraternal amity might be such that a brother would not regard his wife as his exclusive property, and his rights were extended to his brothers by tacit consent. During the Kandyan period divorce

POLYANDRY

Polygamy was found to be a common practice in the island when the foreigners arrived. Ribeiro (1685) described Sinhalese marriage at the time of the Portuguese occupation as follows:

"Their marriages are a ridiculous matter. A girl makes a contract to marry a man of her own caste (for she cannot marry outside it), and if the relatives are agreeable they give a banquet and unite the betrothed couple. The next day a brother of the husband takes his place, and if there are seven brothers she is the wife of all of them, distributing the nights by turns, without the husband having a greater right than any of his brothers. If during the day any of them find the chamber unoccupied, he can retire with the woman if he thinks fit, and while he is within no one else can enter. She can refuse herself to none of them; whichever brother it may be that contracts the marriage, the woman is the wife of all, only if the youngest marry, none of the other brothers has any right over her but he can claim access to the wives of all of them whenever he likes. If it chances that there are more brothers than seven, those who exceed that number have no right over her; but if there are two up to five, they are satisfied with one woman; and a woman who is married to a husband with a large number of brothers is considered very fortunate, for all toil and cultivate for her and bring whatever they earn to the house, and she lives much honoured and well supported, and for this reason the children call all of the brothers their fathers'.

was flexible and could be arranged with mutual consent. Divorce was also a common event, the usual method by which a man repudiated his wife was "by taking her back to her village". The law required her parents or brothers to support her until she re-married as daughters did not usually inherit land, although a dowry is given when they are given in 'diga'. The Kandyan custom did not allow community of property between husband and wife, this may have been a natural consequence of the looseness of the marriage ties. It is evident that even in diga marriages, where the bride left her parental home to reside with her husband, the latter had no control over her dower, nor could he interfere with any property acquired by her after marriage, independently of him. But the wife could make use of her husband's property for the maintenance of the family, even selling the produce or mortgaging his lands if necessary for subsistence, but she was

precluded from selling his estate. D'Oyly (1835) notes that a wife could take nothing belonging to her husband if she left him contrary to his wish, and must leave even the wearing apparel provided by him.

Since the contract of marriage was easily terminated, some rituals such as binding the hands of the bride and the bridegroom have been avoided in some instances for symbolizing that the bond was not indisposible. Similarly there were other rituals, the performance of which had been avoided at times, for symbolizing the observance of certain practices in the future.

Development of Commercialism and its Impact on the Institution of Marriage

Although marriage practices in the Kandyan regions were not subject to significant changes in the nineteenth century, the institution of marriage in the maritime provinces experienced changes due to the constant influence of foreign powers, namely the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British who ruled the maritime provinces over a few centuries. During the Portuguese and the Dutch period, the maritime provinces were exposed to the pressure of a commercial system based on trade. Along with these changes that resulted there were considerable changes in social patterns among the low country Sinhalese. The influence of Christianity and other changes introduced to the educational and legal systems made a significant impact. Traditional norms such as the extended family started breaking up since the emphasis placed on its basis, namely agriculture, shifted more towards trade and other occupations.

The pace of change became more rapid when the British regime succeeded the Dutch. The English established what they regarded as a sound basis for their administration by creating a plantation economy on the one hand and an indigenous capitalist class supporting them on the other. The indigenous capitalist class consisted primarily of low country Sinhalese who entered into business related to the plantations. They also generally became Christians and used Christianity as a resource to obtain favours from the English rulers. The children of these locals were given an

English education and were recruited to various middle level positions in the administration. The missionary education during this period played an important role in bringing about cultural changes. Those who benefited from these socio-economic changes were aligned economically with the British interests and were captive in their social life to Western values. Kinship and marriage among these elite groups took a different form from that of Kandyan Sinhalese. When intermarriage (i.e. marriage between cross cousins) was considered ideal according to Sinhalese tradition, the elite of the low country gave more prominence to one's economic and social background and thus have used 'marriage' not only to mean a union of two parties but also to align two business interests.

In his study of elite formation (1975) Michael Roberts refers to 'strategic marriage alliances' and identifies the formation of family phalanxes through such marriages as an important element of elite formation in the nineteenth century. The basis for the negotiation of such marriage contracts has been one's occupational or financial background. The business and marriage alliances of some low-country families who emerged as leading families forming the indigenous capitalist class in the nineteenth century, have bolstered their wealth as well as elite status.

The Kandyan marriage practices were flexible and in terms of present day norms they were casual. There were no legal barriers to divorce while polygamy was a common practice. Concubinage and temporary liaisons were also widely prevalent. These marriage practices were subject to constant criticism and condemnation by the English-educated low country Sinhalese who went to the extent of criticising polyandry and other marriage practices as 'brutal' or 'barbarous' habits from the point of view of Western values. They felt that such habits were against the civilization taught to them by the English. These criticisms also show the extent to which the Western culture had influenced their thinking.

It was not only the Britishers or members of the low-country Sinhalese elite who wanted the Kandyan marriage practices changed. Historical evidence shows that in the 1850s

the Kandyan elite consisting of Kandyan chiefs, Headmen and other noble persons had sought legal enactments which would prohibit their marriage practices, and enforce monogamy and the registration of marriages. The first request for such reforms was made by a group of Kandyan chiefs at an interview with the British Governor Sir George Anderson in the early 1850's. This request was however not given serious consideration by the British rulers. For the second time a large deputation of Kandyan chiefs repeated their request at an interview with the new Governor Sir Henry Ward in May 1858. The records of the then Government Agent in Kandy, Phillip Braybrooke, show that he had received a petition signed by a large number of people including Kandyan chiefs, Headmen and others requesting the Government to bring about immediate reforms to the Kandyan marriage practices.

The Kandyan Marriage Ordinance No 13 of 1859 was passed as a response to these requests. The attempts in implementing this Ordinance were however not successful as expected. The records of Government Agents and other district officers show that the registration of marriages had been difficult. In some instances the practice of polyandry had been continued even in the case of registered marriages. It appears that registration of marriage was not a felt need among the peasants although there were pressures from the elite for reforms in marriage customs.

As the economy faced a transition from feudalism to commercial capitalism based on plantations, the attitudes in regard to ownership of property would have changed. Thus private ownership of property based on the nuclear family would have been preferred against the joint ownership of land and other property which was the basis of polygamic marriage. The evidence supporting the change of attitude in regard to property ownership shows that the initiative for such changes came first from the low country Sinhalese elite. The Kandyan regions were affected by these changes in the latter part of the nineteenth century. It is reflected in the monogamic marriages entered upon by the Kandyan aristocracy (the Kandyan elite) who had an English

education and thus were exposed to Western culture and values. The records of the government officers during this period show that revision of old ordinances and enforcement of new laws became necessary to establish a system of laws governing marriage and divorce in order to minimize litigation and settlement of other matters pertaining to property transactions.

Although some practices and traditions relating to marriage were changed after introducing legal bases, such changes could not influence the patrilineal kinship pattern among the Sinhalese within which marriages were arranged. The diga marriage predominated and under that system possession of a woman and her children are surrendered by marriage, to her husband and his kin. The norms of a patrilineal kinship pattern were such that the father enjoyed a right of dominance and it was his obligation to support his daughters until they married. The father was also obliged to arrange suitable marriage partners and to provide dowries with them. After his death these duties devolved upon his eldest son regarded as pater familias.

If a daughter was given in diga, she was given a dowry of money, jewellery, clothes and other moveables, and was entitled to return to her family and claim maintenance if she divorced. This implies that a father was also obliged to look after his daughter in case the partner chosen by him turned out badly.

Within this kinship structure the marriage between cross cousins (father's sister's daughter or mother's brother's daughter) was considered proper and thus such marriage was a norm among the Kandyan Sinhalese. The terms of cross relationship *avassa* (derived from Sanskrit *Avashya*) meaning 'necessary' signifies the fact that one is not only permitted but even enjoined to marry cross cousins. Although patrilineal marriage customs such as arranging marriage partners by the father, giving a dowry etc. applies even to the low country Sinhalese, the norms such as marriage between cross cousins, does not appear to have been given an important place in the low country marriage practices.

The economic significance attached to the institution of marriage was

demonstrated in early marriage practices such as polygamy; and the marriage between cross-cousins also had economic rationale similar to that of polygamic marriage. However, these marriage practices gradually lost their place as the economy changed from a feudal to a capitalist stage. These changes were more clear in the maritime provinces and in urban areas which grew as townships due to increased commercial activities. The Kandyan areas too, in more urbanized areas where educational and other facilities were available, experienced these changes and the middle class that emerged subsequent to the development of education in these regions were more receptive to changes

"They give according to their ability, a portion of cattle, slaves and money with their daughters; but if they chance to dislike one another and part asunder, this portion must be returned again, and then she is fit for another man, being as they account never the worse for wearing". Robert Knox. (*Knox on the custom of portioning the daughter as it prevailed in the Kandyan country in the 17th century*).

Arranging marriages outside one's group, obtaining the service of a match-maker (*Капува*) became an accepted norm, particularly among the middle class. This replaced the intermarriage system (though intermarriages are still common among the peasants) and offered a more dynamic system of contracting marriages to the middle class society. Even in the case of arranged marriages traditional attributes such as caste, religion, place of birth (whether up-country or low-country) horoscope etc. are considered; while at the same time modern attributes such as family background of respective parties (whether well connected or not) occupation, educational qualifications (whether professionally qualified), wealth, dress (whether European dress or not) etc. play an equally important role. If the latter requirements are not satisfied a marriage may not be entered upon even if the former requirements are more than satisfied. There are also instances where mismatch of either caste or religion is not considered a serious drawback if the latter requirements are satisfied. This shows the extent to which the middle class has adopted flexible norms of marriage considering its economics. In some instances, either occupation or family background of the bride or

the bridegroom becomes the primary factor of matching two parties if the families are well connected (meaning influential capacity or access to wealth etc.) or the prospective bride or bridegroom belongs to a reputed profession. These changes imply a development of a 'class' concept inherent in capitalist societies and a decline of caste concept inherited from the old feudal social order. The consideration of 'class', when union of two parties, are confirmed through marriage, is however not a feature that can be generalized; because such changes are yet confined to a relatively smaller group who are more educated, westernised and also live in urban areas. The large majority of the Sinhalese population still live in rural areas where feudal social and economic characteristics are still existent. Their social life is less affected by changes taking place in the urban areas; thus the importance attached to such traditional attributes as caste is clearly demonstrated in their marriages arranged with the consent of the kin group.

The marriage practices among the peasants in some parts of the island takes a still different form from those of the Kandyan peasants. The dry zone peasants in the areas like Amparai, Moneragala and other remote areas particularly have attached more intensive economic values to the institution of marriage. According to these values, a marriage means a union of two labour units rather than a union of two families. In such marriages, prominence is given to the agricultural skills possessed by the bridegroom rather than to his caste or family background. In most instances the skill of the prospective bridegroom is subject to test by the father of the bride or the eldest male member of her family. It is only if the bridegroom can convince the bride's party that he is an efficient agricultural worker who can look after the family that the marriage is confirmed. In most instances these marriages are not legally confirmed through registration. The practice is that the bride goes and cohabits with the young man who opens up a chena in the jungle. If he succeeds in proving the results of his labour, the parents of the bride allow her to continue her stay with him and assist them to set up a family. In some cases the bride groom is expected to pay a certain price to the parents of the bride in the form

of labour or agricultural implements for compensating the resulted loss of a family labour unit due to his marriage. These marriage practices appear to be more flexible and somewhat similar to tribal marriage practices in Africa in terms of the value attached to labour when a marriage contract is entered upon. In Sri Lanka, however, this type of marriage practices is not common and cannot be generalized for the dry zone peasantry as a whole. Even in the dry zone areas, the practice of marriage differs significantly between various groups. For instance in the 'purana gamas' of Anuradhapura where some characteristics of the ancient hydraulic civilization are still existent, marriages are governed by a rigid set of values which give prominence to castes and ethnic distinctions. Although the element of labour is considered important in choosing a suitable partner, more prominence is given to caste (or the *vamsaya*), and ownership of land and family background of the proposed partner. These values reflect the feudal characteristics of the socio-economic order of traditional villages (*purana gamas*) in the dry zone, where a vertical power structure based on caste distinctions is predominant.

Over the last two decades, the pace of social change became more rapid in these areas due to increased development activities such as government sponsored settlement schemes, land development schemes, irrigation development schemes, rural electrification programmes etc. which resulted in the mobility of communities as well as labour. With the increased mobility the old villagers became settlers in an area away from their villages. Thus they were compelled to adopt to new situations and mix with other people who had different origins. This also resulted in changes of their social life, values, and attitudes. It also resulted in developing new kinship allies between settlers of different origin who used marriage as a way of building social relations. Thus, the marriage practices of settler communities in the present colonisation schemes represent a mixed value system which is more receptive to change.

The development of mass media has also contributed to the changes in marriage practices. Particularly in the case of middle class marriages the mass media has been used widely

as a means of matching partners. The service rendered by leading newspapers for prospective brides and bridegrooms has been more extensive over the last decade or two. This is reflected to an extent in the increasing number of advertisers on the one hand and the rapid decline of the marriage arranged by match-makers on the other. The newspaper offered a more efficient and economical way of finding partners for those who consider traditional as well as modern attributes in contracting a marriage. Although the newspaper is open to any one who seeks its service the type of advertisers are drawn mainly from the middle class who are employed in the modern sectors. How they keep pace with the changing economy and to what extent they accept the traditional attributes in finding their partners reflects to some extent the present values of Sri Lanka's middle class. The socio-economic analysis of matrimonial advertisements carried in this issue on pages 9 to 11 throws further light on this subject.

Social and Economic Implications of Marriage

The social and economic implications of present day norms in regard to marriage can be examined in relation to several spheres. As mentioned earlier the transformation of the economy from feudal to a capitalist stage brought significant social changes, more specifically the values and norms of society were changed as the economic basis of society experienced changes. The development of education and communication, changed the attitudes of people and their behaviour. Some groups of society particularly the low country Sinhalese elite were more receptive to these changes at the beginning and at the later stages. What the elite groups accepted became more or less common norms among other social groups as well. In the case of marriage, however, the feudal norms were not changed entirely. Even after centuries of evolution, the mobility between people of different castes, religions, and ethnic groups has been limited in the contracting of marriages. The dowry system which prevailed centuries ago still plays an important role, the only change is that it now takes different forms as dowries are given not only in money, jewellery, property etc. but also in the form of educational facilities abroad, entitlement for

foreign exchange channelled through Convertible Rupee Accounts etc.

The present norms particularly among the middle class allow for a greater degree of mobility between different castes, religions or even between ethnic groups. Although parental intervention on the part of the family interests is common in middle class marriages, the prospective bride and bridegroom also enjoy a greater participation when decisions are made. The obligation to give a dowry under the present day norms is lessened if the bride is employed and earns a reasonable income. This has encouraged parents to give their children a better education which has in turn enabled them to find jobs such as in teaching, or some other form of employment, possibly of a professional status. To many parents a job for their daughters has been a source of security for them, particularly at marriage and in later life. The result is that female participation in higher education and in the labour force has increased over the last few years and it can continue to increase at a higher rate in future.

The values of present society have laid down certain conditions upon marriage that also have some impact on the employment market, education, job aspirations etc. In the case of arranged marriages one could find that these values are geared more towards raising the price of males according to occupational status, qualifications etc. While in the case of females a compromise in regard to price can be entered upon only if they can match the occupational status or qualifications of the male. This is reflected very clearly in the dowry system. For instance, the highest dowries are generally offered to doctors, engineers, accountants and other professionals who are in government or corporation service or to officers in the Sri Lanka Administrative Service who enjoy a higher occupational status though their income in terms of salary is lower when compared to the former. The second preference is given to executives, managerial and similar employees preferably in the government or corporation service, while the third preference is given to teachers, clerks and similar workers in the public and mercantile sectors.

(continued on page 12)

A SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER MARRIAGE ADVERTISEMENTS IN SRI LANKA

The use of mass media as a means of arranging marriages has become increasingly popular among the middle classes over the last two decades. The marriage advertisement system makes direct communication between two parties feasible without the help of middlemen, known as 'match makers' or magul kapuwas, and thus offers a more economical and practical method of contracting marriages. The use of mass media for arranging marriages is an indication of how the institution of marriage in Sri Lanka has been adapted to commercial practices. However, the nature of these advertisements does not suggest a strong departure from traditional norms; it gives those interested in choosing their partners an opportunity to consider both the traditional as well as modern attributes. Generally newspaper advertisements carry information on the caste, religion and ethnic background of the advertiser in addition to information on occupational, educational and family background. The type of bride or bridegroom sought is also mentioned in most cases. One can therefore communicate directly with a suitable party depending on this information.

This study which examines the characteristics of prospective brides and bridegrooms who advertise in leading Sunday newspapers, is based on a sample of 20 per cent, selected randomly from among 582 marriage advertisements appearing in leading Sinhala and English Sunday newspapers over a period of three months. There are, however, limitations to this study as one cannot expect to make broad generalizations on present day marriage in Sri Lanka, based only on marriage advertisements since the advertisers do not represent our society as a whole. However, the advertisements provide a mirror to the values and norms behind marriage in middle class society through which one can attempt an examination of the nature of social change.

The sample consisted of 117 marriage advertisements made up of 46 males and 71 females. The socio-economic background of these advertisers suggests that they come from different levels of the middle class. Some advertisers may fall into the upper stratum of the middle class if one employs criteria such as income, occupation, educational qualifications, family background etc. for classification. These advertisers come from different parts of the island. Among the sampled advertisers, 69 have mentioned their hometowns which are shown in Table I.

According to this Table, a majority of the advertisers come from the Colombo district or the Western province. The second largest number come from Kandy and if we take the Central province as a whole, the advertisers of Kandyan origin constitute about 33 per cent. A large number also come from the Southern province. It is however interesting to note that about 70 per cent of

TABLE I
DISTRICTWISE DISTRIBUTION OF ADVERTISERS

Colombo	...	...	30
Kandy	...	...	11
Galle	...	...	6
Matara	...	...	9
Kegalle	...	...	2
Kurunegala	...	...	3
Ratnapura	...	...	2
Kalutara	...	...	3
Matala	...	...	2
Badulla	...	...	1
Moneragala	...	...	2
Total	...	...	69

the advertisers had a low-country origin; this suggests that the socio-economic environment of greater commercialism in the Maritime provinces has been more conducive towards change of traditional methods of contracting marriages. The historical evidence also points to the fact that changes of traditional marriage practices were initiated by the people of the Maritime provinces who were exposed to socio-economic changes (largely the introduction of capitalism) induced during and after the occupation of foreign powers.

The influence of patrilineal kinship patterns, where marriage is concerned, is reflected even in the case of marriages arranged through the newspaper advertisements. The ideals of the patrilineal kinship pattern accept a father's right to arrange suitable marriage partners for the daughter who will be given in diga. Among the sampled advertisements 79 or 69.1% have been advertised by "others", meaning an elder member of the family or a close relation. In the case of females, almost all have been advertised by parents; among the self-advertised cases the majority were from males. This shows that the 'obligation' a father had, according to traditional practices, to find a suitable partner for his daughter is still continued in a modified form. A large number (especially females) advertised by the parents (with the phrase "father seeks" or "parents seek") shows that even among the middle classes who are more educated and connected to urban areas through occupations or otherwise, the earlier traditions are still dominant as most such parents consider it their duty to find suitable marriage partners for their children.

TABLE II—AGE DISTRIBUTION OF ADVERTISERS

Age Group	Total	%	Males	%	Females	%
18 - 24	12	10.3	3	6.5	9	12.7
24 - 30	52	44.4	16	34.8	36	50.7
30 - 36	38	32.5	19	41.3	19	26.7
36 - 42	14	12.0	7	15.2	7	10.0
42 - 28	1	0.8	1	2.2	—	—
Total	117	100.0	46	100.0	71	100.0

The age distribution of the prospective brides and bridegrooms who advertise in the newspapers suggests that here late marriages is the norm. It probably means that other avenues of obtaining a partner may have been attempted whilst the advertisers were younger and having failed, now the mass media is resorted to. The mean age of marriage for the country as a whole is 28 for males and 23 for females. Among the sampled advertisers, the mean age for males was 33 years while for the females the mean age was 29 years. The age distribution of the advertisers, given in Table II, shows that a majority of the female advertisers are below the age of 30.

Over 50 per cent of the female advertisers are concentrated in the age group of 24-30 years. There were only 9 females in the age group of 18-24 years. In the case of males, the majority is distributed over older age groups. There were only 19 male advertisers (nearly 35 percent) below the age of 30 years. The age differences between male and female advertisers also reflects the differences of their activity status. In the case of female advertisers 39 were unemployed and 32 were employed, whereas all the male advertisers were employed. The female advertisers in the younger age groups consist mainly of the unemployed. It is however important to note that age at marriage, even among the unemployed female advertisers is generally over 25 years; this also reflects how the traditional norms in regard to the age of females at marriage changes in the present context.

In this analysis of newspaper marriage advertisements, Sudatta Ranasinghe, a senior researcher at the Marga Institute, shows the extent to which our middle classes keep pace with the changing economy and how far they still accept traditional attributes and norms in finding their marriage partners.

The occupational and educational background of the advertisers reveals some characteristics of their classnature; showing that a large number of them are employed in modern sectors of the economy and earn wages or salaries. A majority of them were engaged in public sector jobs. Table III classifies them by occupational categories and nature of employment.

The data given in Table III shows that the advertisers are distributed largely between three major fields of employment, of which professional, technical and clerical categories cover over 60

TABLE III
OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	No.	%
Professional & Technical	25	32.5
Medical ...	3	
Engineering ...	5	
Para Medical ...	1	
Technicians ...	2	
Scientists ...	1	
Teaching ...	13	
Administrative, Managerial and Executive ...	9	12.1
Clerical ...	21	27.3
Self-employed ...	18	23.9
Agriculture ...	3	
Trade ...	9	
Industry ...	4	
Services ...	2	
Defence Services ...	1	1.3
Employed Abroad	3	3.9
Total ...	77	100.0

per cent. In the case of those employed in the category of professionals and technologists income levels as well as social status attached to the job can vary depending on the skills. For instance those employed in the medical and engineering professions can enjoy a better social status as well as a higher income level compared to those employed as teachers or technicians. In the clerical category, however, such differences can be minimal.

TABLE IV EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF ADVERTISERS

	Total	%	Male	%	Female	%
G.C.E. (OL) ...	42	61.0	9	36.0	33	75.0
G.C.E. (AL) ...	2	3.0	1	4.0	1	2.3
Graduate (Arts) ...	13	19.0	6	24.0	7	16.0
Graduate (Science) ...	6	8.0	4	16.0	2	4.4
Post Graduate (Arts) ...	1	1.0	—	—	1	2.3
Post Graduate (Science) ...	1	1.3	1	4.0	—	—
Professional or Technical ...	4	5.8	4	16.0	—	—
Total	69	100.0	25	100.0	44	100.0

The educational background of the advertisers shows some differences between the education levels of males and females. Of the sampled advertisers 69 specified their educational background. Table IV classifies them by levels of education and sex.

According to the table, 75 per cent of the female advertisers have passed the G.C.E. (O.L.), while a little over 20 percent have received a University education. Those with a G.C.E. (O.L.) qualification consist mainly of unemployed female advertisers. The female advertisers with University degrees were in most instances employed as school teachers or were engaged in middle level managerial positions. The male advertisers had relatively higher educational qualifications. All those who had professional or technical training were males. They may have spent a fairly long time to gain these qualifications and the fact that male advertisers are generally above the age of females is also explained to some extent by the differences of educational qualifications between males and females.

Almost all the advertisers have given information on their caste and religion. In the case of minority communities the ethnic group was specified. Caste and religion were two major considerations of matching two parties in the case of arranged marriages. The importance attached to caste in the earlier marriage practices was expressed by distinguishing legitimate and illegitimate children and using such criteria to make decisions on property inheritance. These practices were however changed by new laws relating to property inheritance. Yet, caste distinctions continued to play an important role in marriage.

In the case of marriages arranged using mass media, emphasis has been given to other factors such as family background, employment, income etc. in addition to that of caste and religion. The emphasis given to caste, religion and other ethnic differences reflects what is inherited from traditional practices; while the emphasis placed on modern attributes such as family background, employment and income of the partner, reflects the extent to which Western values have penetrated into what are regarded as traditional factors. This tendency indicates a new social trend, particularly among the middle class.

The distribution of sampled advertisers by caste and religion is given in Table V. It shows that the Govi caste

forms the majority while those belonging to the Karawe caste takes up the second largest number. The advertisers belonging to minority castes are small in number. This distribution also reflects the caste composition in the country where the Govigamas and the Karawes form the majority, while the other castes who

performed different service functions under the feudal society form the minority. Although the advertisers have specified their castes, they are not engaged at present in their respective caste occupations, or the occupations of respective castes are not related in most cases to their present jobs. In this context the information given about caste has no economic significance. The table also shows that the majority of advertisers (84 per cent) are Buddhists, while Catholics and Christians are small in numbers.

Socio-Economic Considerations

In examining the emphasis placed on caste and religion for arranging marriages through newspaper advertisements, it was found that over 55% of the advertisers did not specify whether they sought partners from their own caste and religion. A majority of the advertisers thus seemed indifferent towards choosing partners from a particular caste and religion. This majority of advertisers, however, specified their own castes and religions, which implied that accepting a partner from a different caste or religion may be allowed but it also showed that they attached significance to their own castes and religions. The decision of this group on arranging a marriage with different castes may depend more on economic factors such as employment and income or social factors such as family status of the partner. This points to a tendency away from traditionally accepted norms in a situation where adoption of modern norms is likely to take place as a response to rapid economic changes.

About 33% stated explicitly that the bride or the bridegroom sought should be from the same caste and religion; while about 12% stated that they did not consider caste and religion as important and were willing to accept partners of any caste or religion provided other considerations such as employment, income, or family status were satisfied.

A classification of the advertisements by caste and the degree of emphasis placed on caste and religion in choosing their partners, shows that the lack of emphasis given one's own caste is common to all castes. In the case of 79 advertisers of the Govi caste only 25

TABLE V
BACKGROUND OF ADVERTISERS BY CASTE AND RELIGION

Caste	M	F	T	%	Bud- dhist	Catho- lic	Chris- tian	Hindu	Others
Govigama	31	48	79	67.5	73	5	—	—	1
Karawe	6	7	13	11.0	8	4	1	—	—
Durawe	3	2	5	4.3	4	—	—	—	1
Salagama	—	4	4	3.4	3	1	—	—	—
Navandanne	—	2	2	1.7	2	—	—	—	—
Deva	—	4	4	3.4	4	—	—	—	—
Rajaka	2	1	3	2.5	2	—	1	—	—
Vellala*	—	1	1	0.9	—	—	—	1	—
Chetty**	1	1	2	1.8	—	1	—	—	1
Unspecified	3	1	4	3.4	2	—	—	—	2
TOTAL	46	71	117	100.0	98 (84.0)	11 (9.40)	2 (1.70)	1 (0.85)	5 (4.27)

*A caste among the Tamils which is similar to Govi caste among the Sinhalese.
**Refers to an ethnic minority in the coastal areas.

(31%) stated that the bride or the bridegroom sought should be from the same caste and religion. While six advertisers of the Govi caste (7.6%) explicitly stated that they do not consider caste or religion; another 48 advertisers (60.8%) did not specify whether the partner sought should be from the same caste and religion.

In the case of Karawe caste three out of thirteen advertisers (23%) stated that caste and religion are considered important while another ten (78%) did not specify whether the partner sought should be from the same caste and religion. Among the advertisers of other castes not much emphasis has been placed on caste and religion of the partner except in the case of a few advertisers belonging to the Salagama, Navandanne and Vellala castes where a majority had sought partners specifically from their own castes and religions.

Among the sampled advertisers only (12%) stated definitely that no caste, religious or ethnic differences would be considered in choosing their partners. As against this number, 30.8% stated that the partner should be of the same caste and religion, while 57% of the advertisers had not specified whether they expected partners from the same caste and religion. Although the number willing to deviate from the accepted norms is still small, the increasing number of advertisers who take on an attitude of indifference towards the traditional norms such as contracting marriage strictly within one's own caste and religion suggests that the tendency towards a departure from such norms can continue to grow as new values affecting marriage are likely to be developed in the changing economic context.

Employment and Family Background

Apart from the factors like caste and religion, emphasis has also been given to employment, family background and income or wealth of the partner. These modern attributes of choosing a marriage partner appear to be playing an important role in arranged marriages through newspaper advertisements. Among the sampled advertisers 73% expected employed partners preferably in Government or Corporation service, while another 23% expected partners with a good family background. This consists of 16 male advertisers who sought non-working brides from well connected families. The phrase 'well connected' implies the relationships of the respective party to various positions in the power structure including not only wealth but also political, bureaucratic and other power positions. Among those who sought employed partners, there were 25 males who made up over 54 per cent of the male advertisers. Four of them expected professionally qualified partners. All the female advertisers sought employed partners earning a good salary. In some cases the type of employment of the partner was specified. Among them, there were ten females (14% of the female advertisers) who sought professionals

TABLE VI VALUE OF DOWRIES OFFERED FOR MEN IN PARTICULAR OCCUPATIONS

Occupational Category of Bridegroom	Value of Dowry—Rs.	100,000 or above	50,000 to 100,000	10,000 to 50,000	10,000 or less	No dowry
Professionals	4	2	1	—	7
Executive and Staff Officers in Govt. or Corp. Services	1	3	3	3	10
Public & Mercantile Sec. general employees (Teachers, Clerks etc.)	—	—	9	9	18
Self-employed in business	—	—	1	1	2
Total	5	5	14	13	37

(Doctors, Engineers, Accountants etc.), and another 16 (23%) who sought Executives or Staff Officers preferably in the Government or Corporation services.

Dowry

The offer of dowry which is another traditional feature of marriage customs in Sri Lanka, appears to take an important place in marriages arranged through newspaper advertisements. In the sample, the number of prospective brides who were entitled for dowries (in jewellery, money, property etc.), amounted to 53 (75%) of them 34 were unemployed while the remaining 19 were employed. It is interesting to note that out of 39 unemployed female advertisers, only five did not offer dowries. This suggests that the possibilities of finding a suitable partner for marriage under present day values are not limited if the prospective bride is employed and earns a fair income. In the case of unemployed females, however, a dowry seems to be an important qualification for marriage.

It is evident from the data that the occupational status of the bridegroom sought depends to a large extent on the quantum of the dowry. The advertisements which specify the occupation of the bridegroom sought and the value of the dowry to which the bride is entitled, shows that the higher the value of a dowry the greater the tendency to seek bridegrooms in reputed professions. In some cases the value of the dowry carried by a female seeking a doctor or an engineer was above Rs. 100,000; while, those who sought Executives or Staff Officers, the dowry was around Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 100,000. The information on dowries with reference to the occupational category of the bridegroom sought shows that four of the five female advertisers who offered dowries worth Rs. 100,000 or over were seeking professionals. Another three seeking professionals were entitled to somewhat lesser dowries. Out of ten female advertisers who sought Executives or Staff Officers in Government or Corporation service four had dowries worth of Rs. 50,000 - 100,000 or more. In the case of those who sought employees such as clerks and teachers in the public and mercantile sectors, the dowry offered was generally less than that offered to professionals or executives and staff officers. This data reveals that the value of the dowry offered varies according to the occupational status of the bridegroom.

It also reflects a certain price attached to occupations of different status. The dowry system under these values therefore takes the form of a commercial transaction which is different from what existed in the past.

Emphasis on Dress

Emphasis has also been given in some instances to the dress of the partner sought. Among the female advertisers about (35%) emphasised that the partner should be European-dressed. This reflects to some extent the continuing cultural Westernisation in the country. The dress of the partner is, however, not an important consideration which can be generalized; it only shows a point of preference when a choice has to be made between several prospective bridegrooms who respond to attractive marriage advertisements. The emphasis placed on horoscope in matching partners is also important. The traditional marriage relied to a great extent on the horoscope. If the horoscope of the prospective bride and the bridegroom did not 'match' each other, a marriage could not have been arranged. The importance attached to matching of horoscopes in the case of marriages arranged through newspaper advertisements is considerable. Of the sampled advertisements 67 (57%) gave information on the horoscopes of the prospective bride or the bridegroom concerned and expected responses only from those who had matching horoscopes.

The characteristics of the prospective brides and bridegrooms who advertise in the newspapers suggest certain tendencies towards a change in traditional marriage practices. The information on the type of partner sought and the emphasis placed on caste and religion is particularly significant. It leads to the conclusion that strict considerations of caste and religion in arranged marriages, among the middle classes tends to change in a context where traditional norms are being modified in a society that adopts to changing economic situations. These advertisers come from different parts of the island and probably many of them have their roots in the rural areas with their parents probably coming from a lower class than the applicants. In this sense, at least some of the advertisements will reflect the aspirations of a rising class and their desire to 'buy' status, a phenomenon common all over the world.

Sudatta Ranasinghe

If the bridegroom is a professional meaning a doctor (person with Western medical qualifications), engineer or an accountant (those who possess professional qualifications in the respective fields) whose monthly earning capacity is above Rs. 1,000/-, the price offered in the form of dowry is generally higher. A compromise in regard to this price can be entered upon, depending on the occupational status of the female if employed, or on her family background, meaning the connections of the prospective bride's family to various power positions in society. The quantum of dowry and in what forms it is offered, therefore vary according to professions and status attached to these, and qualifications, income etc. of prospective bridegrooms.

According to Sinhalese traditions, the offer of a dowry was justified on the grounds that the Kandyan laws of inheritance did not permit the females who were given in *diga* to inherit ancestral property; thus, dowry represented the right of a female member of a family to share a certain portion of ancestral wealth. It was also considered that the dowry would not only help a female given in *diga* to establish herself economically but would also be added support to maintain her dignity within the kin group of her husband. If the union ended in divorce, it entailed the restoration of dowry. This practice was legally ensured by the Marriage and Divorce Ordinance of 1912.

The dowry was also a dominant feature of Tamil and Muslim marriage practices. According to the *Thesawalamai* and Muslim laws, the dowry given in the form of property is subject to restoration on divorce, but the donation of cash (known as *Kalkuli* in the Muslim law) made to the husband's party once the marriage is finalised, is not generally returned even on divorce. The mechanism of dowry among the Tamil community is interesting. The marriage practices particularly among the Jaffna Tamils appear to be more rigid in dowry transactions. It is evident more in the case of middle class marriages, where the bridegroom is obliged to provide the bride with jewellery worth a few thousands, and in turn the bride's party is obliged to make a donation of cash (amounting to several thousands) to the bridegroom's party after finalising the marriage. The dowry

given in the form of property etc. is a transaction that comes after the marriage. The Tamil Law does not cover the cash donation, which is the disposal of the husband's family. In some instances this donation is invested in the education of the husband's family members or it can even be converted to a fresh donation from the husband's family to another if the marriage of a female member of the husband's family takes place.

The rigidity of marriage practices specially in the case of dowry transactions among the Tamil community implies a severe burden socially as well as economically to the families where there are females who have reached the age of marriage. If more girls are born to a family a poor father has to devote the whole of his life to raise funds for donations at the marriage of his daughters. The pressure which is made by such a system of unjustifiable transactions, has led to the unfavourable situation of curtailing the matrimonial prospects of some people. There are instances where young females find it difficult to get married at the proper age due to the inability of their families to make a substantial donation or dowry to the family of their partners proposed or otherwise.

Generally, the caste system is taken far more seriously by the Tamils than the Sinhalese and as a result the rigidity of traditional marriage practices has undergone less change than in the South. In only exceptional circumstances among Tamils are such marriages not contracted by parental arrangements according to caste and social standing; and where dowry is essential.

The practice of interchange of gifts and giving of dowries is most firmly embedded in Muslim custom and law; and to many Muslims their marriage law is regarded a religious law. Among Muslims the custom still persists where, 'A person wishing to marry, application must be made to the bride's father and mother for their consent'; 'Should the parents of such bride be dead, the man must make his intentions known to the relatives of the bride, and endeavour to obtain their consent'; 'And after consent has been obtained it is the custom that the bride and bridegroom interchange some presents which, however, are reciprocally restored if

the marriage does not take place'; 'The parents or nearest relatives of the bride shall then with the knowledge and consent of the bride enter upon an agreement with the bridegroom concerning the marriage gift, called *Maskaviṅ*' (i.e., Mahr).

Under Muslim law a valid marriage is constituted by declaration and acceptance, with the proper stipulation of dower (mahr) payable to the bride, in the presence of two competent witnesses.

Following the religious ceremony is the civil ceremony where the registration takes place. The register is signed by the bride's father and if he is not alive by the grandfather or a brother or male next of kin on her father's side. At this stage the sum of money that the bride should receive as 'mahr' is stipulated and entered into a column in the official register. This stipulation becomes a key factor in the event of divorce. The practice till recently was to state the amount of 'mahr' in gold, but today the value could be denoted in rupees. It is compulsory that the column in the register for 'mahr' is filled. There is also a column for dowry, where the amount to be given by the bride's family should be stated, but filling of this column is not compulsory.

The impact made by norms and values behind the institution of marriage on the employment market, education and also on job aspirations of youth is considerable. Although it is not empirically tested a few general observations on such implications could be made. The characteristics of the present employment market are such that there is a greater demand for professional skills which are in short supply. Thus the price of these professional skills also go up as the demand increases. The gaining of professional skills involves a substantial investment in education and it is only a limited number who could afford it. The place for these professionals is open not only in the domestic employment market but also in the employment market abroad. All these have contributed in raising their professional status and in turn raising matrimonial prospects.

Although there is a short supply of other technical and professional skills vital for national development, society has not recognised the dignity of such

labour (technicians, construction workers, para-medical workers etc.) by placing such skills on a higher point of the wage structure. In the case of agriculture too the same situation prevails as there is no proper recognition, monetary or status-wise, for those scientifically trained in agriculture. These peculiarities of the employment market have had adverse effects on the economy on the one hand and on the formation of social values on the other.

Social values which are also conditioned by the class characteristics of society, attach discriminatory prices to labour skills falling to the upper and lower system and have used the institution of marriage to maintain this discrimination more firmly. Here one can find that wealth transactions in the form of dowry (which also takes different forms) are being regulated by these social distinctions and in some instances it implies a transfer of accumulated wealth from one family to another, forming 'family phalanxes'. The professional skills (gained mostly abroad) have been of greater use in the accumulation of wealth over several decades. This is largely true in the case of the medical and legal professions. The marriage alliances of some of the professional families in the early 20th century would have laid the basis for some of the present norms regarding dowry.

The educational system in Sri Lanka is still largely geared towards examinations and certificates. Passing higher examinations, securing stable employment and settling down with of course a good dowry have become goals of society. The whole educational system has been conducive to these goals and particularly those who had access to better opportunities of education, have been able to achieve these goals entering reputed professions and other power positions in the administration. The prospects and status enjoyed by those in certain professions have also created an unnecessary burden to society as the education system, after taking up a substantial portion of national income has apparently been able to create fewer successes than failures. The increasing demand for higher education from those who wish to enter a certain type of employment compel the system to orient itself towards examinations and certificates. But the number

WEDDINGS: SRI LANKA MIDDLE CLASS STYLE

Weddings are traditionally a time of coming together and festivity. In the traditional Sri Lankan village it was a period of playing of raban, of children coming together, eating and speech-making. Within a formal structure, more or less laid down by tradition, an air of festivity and informal interaction existed. The kith and kin of the bride and groom were invited. And, in the traditional system, as friends too were largely drawn from kith and kin the majority of the personnel at a wedding were relations.

In European weddings too there is an air of informality and festivity. The number of participants in such a Western wedding today is generally small because of the breakdown of the extended family. Further, within the formal attire that is often used in Western weddings a high degree of informality and even irreverence prevails. The present day type of Western wedding is of course, a result of the deep-going social changes that have occurred over the last 200 years or so.

The middle class Sri Lankan wedding takes place today either in a hotel or some such public place. The Colombo elite or the country's upper middle class generally tend to hold their weddings in either one or the other of the two leading hotels in the city. As what the leading hotel is in Sri Lanka has changed with the coming of new hotels over the last five years, the preferred place of weddings in this group has also simultaneously changed. For the "middle"-middle class or the lower middle class, less expensive hotels and places of gathering like those of various religious organisations, women's organisations, private clubs etc. are used. Specially in areas out of Colombo, weddings take place in town halls or with the advent of the new outstation tourist hotels, sometimes in a hotel.

The middle class that can afford such a wedding are those who in the eyes of their relatives, are those who have made it in the new competitive world. Thus the number of invitees tend to be large, as the parents of the bride and groom make this an occasion to show their new status to the less fortunate kith and kin, as well as, to others. Before the imposition of austerity rules by the Government it was an occasion for high spending and waste. This type of wedding ceremony has similarities to the so-called *pottlach* ceremony of certain American Indian tribes where one's status depended on the amount of one's property destroyed in front of on-lookers. Those who attend weddings today dress themselves, if they are females in sarees, dresses etc. and the recent fashion changes are reflected strongly. With the spread of mass communications, as well as travel, fashions have spread throughout the country easily. One sees therefore today a tendency towards similarities in dress in those that attend weddings in the big hotels, as well as, those that attend weddings in outstation halls.

The dress of the women which till recent times were sarees, were therefore associated closely with the traditional culture.

This dress therefore had an organic growth with the traditional culture. The middle class men on the other hand dressed themselves in trousers and coats or national dress (for the rural middle class). However, recently the trouser and coat has specially for the younger become the standard uniform. But this is an imported dress (specially the coat, not having any functional value in a hot climate like Sri Lanka and not generally worn everyday) and consequently the men wearing these in such gatherings appear uncomfortable and often have the appearance of stuffed animals. Further the suits tend to be dark in colour, reminiscent of Western fashions decades ago and of present day Western funeral parlours. (The imitative culture is always a few decades behind the imitated").

Whereas in the village wedding or in the wedding in the West there was a high degree of social interaction, the formal middle class hotel wedding has only limited social interaction. One sees therefore, women and men seated in circles (quite often in separate circles, one for men and one for women) rarely talking to each other and very stiff in appearance. It quite often seems that everybody is watching each other about their dresses or social cues. An addition to the middle class wedding over one or two decades ago is the Western band. At the time it was introduced the bands used to play outdated western music, but as the outdated western music was melodious it sometimes fitted into the spirit of joy in a wedding. The present day wedding bands also play outdated music, but since it is outdated music of recent years which was basically to be played in pop groups and such surroundings, a high level of inappropriate noise is developed.

With the coming of recent pop groups over the last 20 years or so, a phenomenon in such weddings is the institution of dancing. Dances originally in the West were those of the ballroom as well as those associated with the sway and beat of largely African derived rhythms. The new middle class, specially the younger groups take part in dancing in many such weddings today, even those held in rural areas. Males outnumber females in such dancing contrary to the imitated Western pattern, in the more urban areas the female participation being higher. However, the amount of female participation is increasing rapidly. When such dancing occurs, there are, depending on the social class represented in the wedding, a large number of onlookers who look upon it as a form of cabaret.

In some weddings there is also instituted an informal bar, where alcoholic drinks are served. Sometimes the hotel bar is converted for such use and a selected few (almost exclusively males) are secretly given a drink. This of course is a practice emanating from the village where village morality decreed that drinks be not indulged in but was done on the sly. In weddings nearer the rural areas the bar is more surreptitious and males retire almost in secret for a quick drink to reappear later in the larger gathering.

succeeding is relatively few compared to the number competing for such qualifications.

The job aspirations of youth who join the labour market after getting some educational qualifications are also geared towards certain types of jobs. Those who join the workforce after some years of formal education as well as those who join the workforce with some 'certificates' generally expect 'wage earning', stable jobs. The more educated aspire to jobs that have white collar status, but hardly anyone aspires to jobs in agriculture or related fields. These aspirations reflect the value system of present society, within which today's youth leaving schools and higher educational institutes exist. According to these values a youth if not in wage earning, stable employment will have meagre matrimonial prospects. Many studies on job aspirations of youth reveal that they expect jobs which ensure a stable income, security and future prospects. One can also observe a relationship between these criteria and the values by which the price of a young man is assessed in the case of present day arranged marriages.

Marriage also plays an important role in Sri Lanka's political spheres. The family relationships developed through marriage contracts particularly among the elite families of Kandyan as well as low country origin have been used as an entry to politics by some while there are other instances where the relationships developed through marriage have been used to strengthen the political position of those already involved in politics. There have been some studies of the genealogical background of present day leading politicians and it strongly suggests that marriage relationships tended to operate as a hidden force of solidarity among these politicians. In some instances these relationships have also been of use to mitigate the ideological differences between some of these politicians. These facts have also been widely discussed in many forums including the National State Assembly. The nepotism arising from political favours has been a characteristic feature of the ruling elite groups not only in Sri Lanka but also in many other ex-colonial countries with and without parliamentary democracies.

In several such instances the rulers under this political system came from the elite classes consisting of the descendants of old feudal chiefs and the indigenous capitalist class. The social and political environment in these countries has been conducive for their elites to enter politics and use their power to satisfy their class interests. In this process, the institution of marriage has been used to safeguard the political as well as economic interests of this class.

Present day marriage is also affected by the growing economic problems in Sri Lanka. Among these problems, youth unemployment can be identified as a most crucial problem which is likely to have a significant impact on marriage. It would not be incorrect to say that youths who have reached the age of marriage are yet unmarried as they have no self-supporting employment. Thus the problems of unemployment have compelled them to postpone marriage. According to Sinhalese tradition a man must have the means to support a wife and family before he gets married. In the past, self dependence where food is concerned was considered a qualification for a man to contract a marriage, and this was tested by the bride's party on their visit to the bridegroom's ancestral home. The present day norms generally give emphasis to man's employment and income, although in the villages early traditions are still being practiced.

The present unemployed population is estimated at nearly 800,000 of which over 500,000 live in villages. About 75 percent of these unemployed are youth in the age group of 15-24 years and they consist of an equal number of males and females. The majority of these youth have also received some sort of secondary education. It is also significant that those who are married constitute only a very small proportion of those unemployed. Among those married the majority are females. The increasing unemployment among youth in both rural and urban sectors suggests that employment opportunities are limited in agriculture as well as in other wage sectors. This problem has a tremendous significance on account of its socio-economic implications. The postponement of marriage can be one social consequence coupled with various economic factors.

Cashing in on Marriage

Sri Lanka has increasingly attracted attention, in recent years, of Westerners seeking oriental marriage partners. The latest exposures on this sordid business came out recently in the West German tabloid "*Bild am Sonntag*" and the Swedish newspaper "*Aftenbladet*". The Swedish paper described how a girl from a rural home in Sri Lanka had found her dream of a Scandinavian paradise turning into a nightmare.

The lure of an apparently comfortable life, free from financial stress, has emboldened many Sri Lankan girls to answer advertisements in the local press with the hope of wedding men from affluent western countries. The principal motivating factor in this type of marriage is money. The applicants apparently believe that the middle aged men who seek Eastern brides will not merely honour their marriage vows but also elevate them from their humdrum, prosaic existence to the glittering life of the rich world. This seems to be a reversal of the present dowry system; the Western man here provides the money, while in the normal Sri Lanka case the woman is the money giver.

An analysis of the socio-economic backgrounds of many of these girls and their partners has revealed very wide differences particularly in social and cultural backgrounds. The girls are often from families where the fathers are not in a position to give a dowry and settle their charges as they would wish to.

For these tourists, mostly from the Scandinavian countries, a marriage in Sri Lanka is a novelty. There are, however, instances of foreigners marrying Sri Lankan girls and living happily thereafter. Reports reaching our shores from time to time, however, reveal the plight of many girls doing all they could to escape from their country of adoption.

The parents of many of these girls who have scoffed at the mere mention of their daughters marrying an outsider from their selected social circle and backgrounds, readily respond to a suggestion for a proposal of marriage from a foreigner whom they hardly know. The lure is in easy money. They believe firmly that a well settled daughter would bring financial stability to the entire family including those members who are yet to be settled.

Not many of these parents would have read of the German papers exposures of the lucrative trade carried on by a Scandinavian "marriage agency". The agency called for photographs along with specific details from Sri Lanka girls who wish to marry European bachelors. This data was collected by the agency and issued in catalogues to prospective customers for a fee. The interested males fly over to Colombo to take back a willing partner to Europe.

The last few years marked a declining fertility trend in Sri Lanka. The rate of growth of population has dropped over the last two years from 1.8 percent to 1.6 percent. This is attributable to factors such as the extension of family planning programmes and rising trend of late marriages among the females as well as males. This is a direct consequence of the postponement of marriage which can be explained in terms of increasing educational attainments of females and an increasing labour force participation among them compared to the past. As mentioned earlier a large number of youth join the workforce but remain unemployed. They are therefore unable to fulfil family obligations which involve not only attending to domestic work but also contributing physically to family income. The increased family burden among the poor communities (in terms of income over 80 percent of Sri Lanka's population falls into the poor category where real incomes are less than Rs. 400 p.m.) has changed the role of the female from one of 'houseworker' to 'income earner'; thus a female youth is now expected to find suitable employment after leaving school. It has been revealed that preference is given to teaching, nursing, clerical and similar jobs by those who have reached G.C.E. (O.L.) or above; and spinning, weaving or similar school work, have been preferred in the case of those who dropped out at the middle school level. The modern norms in regard to marriage such as preference given to employed females with a fair level of education, late marriage etc. reflects to some extent the impact made by growing economic changes on marriage. These changes can be seen even in a village context.

In 1953 the average age at marriage for females was 23 years in general and 20.4 and 18.7 years for Kandyan and Muslim females respectively. By 1968 the average age at marriage rose to 23.6 in general and 21.6 for Kandyan females, while among the females

of the Muslim community, the average age at marriage remained without a significant change. The census of 1971 reveals that average age at marriage among females has increased further and is over 24 years.

In the case of present developed countries the postponement of marriage and the decline of fertility has been a phenomenon occurring concurrently as the economy moved from a less developed to a developed stage. These characteristics of demographic transitions are generally attributed to rapid economic growth, increasing opportunities of employment, advancement of science, technology, education, communication and other factors. In the case of Sri Lanka however, a similar demographic change appears to be emerging in a state of under-development. It is also a manifestation of how society responds to a situation of partial under-development were some indicators of social development like education and literacy have reached a satisfactory standard while other indicators of economic development such as employment, incomes etc. have not.

Conclusion

An attempt has been made in a preceding discussion to survey the institution of marriage in Sri Lanka's society in its early as well as modern forms. It is apparent that the economic rationality of early practices of marriage had their roots in the feudal economy while the modern practices have their roots in a capitalist economy; though they still preserve some characteristics inherited from the old feudal socio-economic order. The importance attached to caste, religion and ethnic differences reflects the influence of feudal values on present society while other considerations such as family status, professional skills and incomes reflect the extent to which the values of a society with class distinctions influenced the institutions of marriage.

The socio-economic transition in Sri Lanka started with the influence of Western powers had a considerable impact in changing the characteristics of certain social institutions, among which was the institution of marriage. But these changes (for example monogamy taking the place of polygamy) did not occur as a result of evolution but as a result of changes introduced from outside. Thus the institution of marriage by itself did not change entirely. It preserved some of its feudal norms and values which justified, within the old social framework, the economic rationality on which the institution of marriage was based. The growth of the capitalist economy in the 19th and early 20th century took place through the plantations, but it had only a little influence in changing the life of peasants who remained isolated and not directly integrated into the plantation economy. In this context the pace of social change among the peasants was not as rapid when compared to the changes that took place among the urban communities. The distinctions between norms and values behind the institution of marriage among peasants and urban communities would also reflect the distinctions between the economies within which they operate.

The socio-economic implications of present day marriage practices would point to the fact that existing norms and values governing these practices are nothing but a manifestation of a 'social cost' with little returns to society as a whole. The consumption patterns of the elite, which are generally conspicuous, are formed according to these values. Further such values also promote some form of social and cultural dependence on the West. They also limit the possibilities of integrating various social groups for common goals. These norms and values also tend to maintain social inequalities through a system of unjustifiable transfer of wealth. It appears that some of these practices attach a commercial value to the female and thus undermines the role of woman in present society. The impact of present day criteria, by which, marriage contracts are entered upon is considerable in areas such as the employment market, education and in the formation of people's aspirations. These factors have all compelled society as a whole to pay a higher price than it should.

MEAN AGE AT MARRIAGE	General		Kandyan		Muslim	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
1959	28.1	22.7	27.8	21.5	27.1	18.3
1960	28.3	23.1	27.6	21.5	27.1	18.5
1961	28.8	23.1	27.8	21.7	26.5	18.4
1962	28.0	23.1	27.7	21.8	26.8	18.5
1963	28.8	23.2	29.2	20.0	28.6	19.5
1964	29.4	23.8	31.2	24.5	26.5	18.5
1965	29.6	24.7	33.7	26.7	27.5	19.7
1966	27.2	22.4	28.5	21.8	26.1	18.3