

AFTER VICTIMHOOD: WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN WAR AND DISPLACEMENT?

Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake

Women are often cast in terms of opposites and dichotomies. She is *shakti* (power) and a weaker sex. She is auspicious (*sumankali*) and polluted. She is the maker and destroyer. She creates but is herself polluted at the time of creation. She is the evil force but she is godly as a mother. As a young woman she is sexually dangerous and vulnerable but in a married form she is harmless and passive. A *devadasi* is also a paradox *par excellence*. A *Devadasi* is *nitya sumankali* (Kersernboom 1987:xv) i.e. auspicious forever. Under normal circumstances the state of *Sumankali* is bestowed on women who are married and whose husbands are alive. *Tali*, flowers, gold and the mark on the forehead, *pottu* are the symbols of being *sumankali*... when the husband dies, all the symbols are removed and the widow is pronounced ritually inauspicious and kept away from events such as weddings... However in the case of the *devadasi*, she is not within the family, is never married to a man, does have relationships with many men, and she is not governed by the rules of chastity and codes of restraint. But she is considered perpetually a *sumankali*. (Thiruchandran, S:1997, 55)

Women have come out strong during the war...they have stood out as individuals or as small groups; exposing the atrocities and violations of dignity... Women, who in the midst of war pleaded and argued with the militants for their families and the whole nation... Women's history does have a triumph. There is powerlessness, disappointment and disillusion but also hope. We have done it a little bit. Objectively, the pursuit of truth and the propagation of honest positions were not only crucial for the Community, but were a view that could cost many of us our lives.

(Dr. Rajini Thiranaganama (senior lecturer, Jaffna University, assassinated by LTTE cadres on September 21, 1989).

Introduction

Historically, women who took on various non-traditional gender roles in situations of social stress, conflict, war and revolution, have been pushed back into the kitchen after the revolution" as part of a return to everyday life (Jayawardane: 1986, Enloe: 1983). Arguably, one of the primary reasons that the return to peace often meant a return to the gender status quo was the lack of social recognition and a culturally appropriate idiom to articulate and legitimate women's empowerment in the midst of conflict, war and social disruption.

Currently there is growing recognition among those involved in humanitarian relief and rehabilitation work that women frequently bear the material and psychological brunt of armed conflict, and hence there is a need for gender sensitive relief and rehabilitation work. Yet few programs have systematically explored how relief efforts might contribute to recovery from individual trauma and social suffering and facilitate women's empowerment in and through conflict. Thus many gender programs organised by the Government's relief and rehabilitation authority and NGOs still remain within conventional development thinking rather than attempting to work out culturally appropriate and effective strategies for women's

empowerment in the context of the social transformations that have occurred over years of armed conflict and displacement.

This paper attempts to trace moments and languages of empowerment in the generally tragic story of displaced Tamil women's lives towards recognising and promoting positive changes to women's roles wrought in conflict. In the Sri Lankan armed conflict, now in its 14th year, many young and middle aged women have had to take on an unaccustomed role as head of household and principal income generator after being displaced and/or suffering the loss of husbands, fathers, sons and brothers. Often the victims or witnesses of extreme violence and trauma, over time, many displaced women have also gained greater confidence, mobility and authority within their families and even their communities as they are forced to take on new, traditionally male roles due to the social disruption caused by conflict. This is particularly the case with a growing number of young Tamil war widows who are challenging conventional Hindu constructions of the good woman as one who is married and auspicious (*samangali*). Increasingly many young widows are redefining the perception of widows (and to a lesser extent unmarried women), as inauspicious beings (*amangali*), by refusing to be socially and culturally marginalized and ostracised because they have lost husbands. Yet very few of these women seem to have found a culturally appropriate language to articulate the transformations that they have experienced, and many feel ashamed, guilty and/or traumatised by their changed circumstances and gender roles arising from conflict. The second part of this paper then deals with the impact of changing women's roles for humanitarian relief initiatives. It seeks to link relief with building, and sustaining women's recovery from the traumas of war through a critique of the victim ideology that pervades most humanitarian interventions.

The paper then maps civilian women's agency in moments of violent social transformation and cultural change, to configure a more complex picture of women's agency, as well as their languages of resistance and empowerment in conflict. It also takes a critical look at how the construct of the Sri Lankan Tamil woman as a double victim of war, as well as Tamil caste, culture, and society in peacetime, might obscure and indeed impede women's agency and empowerment in conflict. I do not directly address the issue of militant women of the LTTE who might have found questionable if not deadly liberation in the Tamil nationalist project as fighting cadres or suicide bombers partly because there already exists a fairly extensive debate on the subject (cf. Coomaraswamy: n.d, De Mel: Maunaguru: 1995).

I draw from ethnographic field research conducted during several field work stints over a number of years (1996-1998) in the border areas (as they have come to be termed in the media and popular culture), of the north-central province of the island which have

experienced cycles of violent armed conflict, including repeated bombing and shelling of civilian populations. In particular, I draw from interviews conducted with women living in three different settings of displacement :

- 1) Welfare centres or refugee camps where people are housed in sheds, schools or structures constructed by the government.
- 2) Residents of border villages who have been displaced many times by the fighting, shelling and bombing, but chose to return to their villages rather than remain in refugee camps. These people live in constant fear of attack and displacement again, but since the majority are farmers they choose to return to their land.
- 3) New settlements in the border areas of the Vanni where the Sri Lanka Government settles landless displaced families from the same province in a new plot of land. These new settlements are part of the rehabilitation and reconstruction program in Vavuniya. In particular, I draw from interviews with young women heads of households in Siddambarapuram Camp, which is located just outside the town of Vavunia. This particular camp received a large number of displaced persons and families from Jaffna and the Vanni who had fled to India in the early nineties and were subsequently repatriated. I also draw from interviews conducted with women heads of households in the new settlement scheme adjacent to Siddambarapuram camp.

Women as Victims of War and Culture

In Sri Lanka the tendency to view women as victims of armed conflict has been fueled by a number of popular and specialist discourses, concerning several brutal rapes committed by the Sri Lanka Army, as well as the Indian Peace Keeping Forces when they controlled the conflict zones. Human rights discourse and humanitarian interventions have significantly contributed to the tendency to view women as victims, even as they have drawn attention to the various and systematic forms of violence that civilian women experience at the hands of armed combatants, whether state armies or paramilitary personnel, in situations of armed conflict and displacement as was extensively documented and highlighted in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and other parts of Africa and Asia. This process culminated in the UN resolution that established rape as a war crime and saw the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women.¹ Highlighting gross violations of women's bodies and lives in situations of conflict and displacement has been part of an intervention by feminists and activists to promote women's rights as human rights internationally. Yet, the focus on women as "victims" has arguably resulted in the elision of how long term social upheaval might have also transformed women's often subordinate gender roles, lives and position in non-obvious ways.

But the construct of the Tamil woman as victim of war also draws from another genealogy. Anthropological, sociological and literary ethnography has tended to represent Tamil women as living within a highly patriarchal caste ridden Hindu cultural ethos, particularly in comparison to Sinhala women whose lives are seen to be relatively less circumscribed by caste ideologies and purity/pollution concepts and practices. The figure of the LTTE woman soldier, the armed virgin or the nationalist mother stands as one of the few

highly problematic exceptions to the representation of the Tamil woman as victim of her culture and caste.

Of course the representation of Tamil woman in relation to caste and family is not entirely monochrome in the anthropological literature which is split on the subject. For many anthropologists have also emphasised strong matrilineal tendencies in Sri Lankan Tamil society, where women inherit property in the maternal line according to customary Thesawalamai law and enjoy claims on natal families, in contrast to the rigidly patriarchal cultures of North India where patrilineal descent and inheritance is the norm (cf. Wadley: 1991). Feminist ethnography, on the other hand, has emphasised the subordinate status of Tamil women in the Hindu caste structure, while frequently noting the split between the ideology of Shakti or female power as the primary generative force of the universe (also associated with the pantheon of powerful Hindu goddesses) and the reality of women's apparent powerlessness (Thiruchandran: 1997). Both schools however emphasise the generally restrictive nature of the Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu caste system on women and often tend to see caste and gender relations as culturally rather than historically determined. Women have rarely been centred in debates on caste, and when they have been, they are more often than not constructed as victims rather than agents of culture.²

More recently anthropologists have argued that colonialism permeated by British Victorian patriarchal culture eroded the status of women in the South Indian societies that follow the matrilineal Dravidian kinship pattern, where property is passed in the women's line, from mother to daughter, a practice which usually indicates the relatively high status of women in society. Rather, they highlight how colonial legal systems might have eroded the rights and freedoms that women had under customary law, particularly in matrilineal societies, while emphasising the historically changing circumstances of family, kinship, caste and gender relations. In this vein, this paper explores how fifteen years of armed conflict and displacement might have altered the structure of the family, caste and gender *status quo* among displaced Tamils in the border areas affected by the conflict.

Women in the Armed Conflict

Since 1983 when Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict transmuted into a dirty war perpetrated by a number of armed forces and groups, civilians in the border areas have lived amidst overlapping regimes of terrifying security. Between the major contenders in the war - the Sri Lanka government's military regime of passes and check points and the LTTE's parallel security regime - civilian men and women also have to contend with sub regimes of several other armed groups - the Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Front (EPRLF - East coast) and Rafik group, People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE - Vanni), Eelam Peoples Democratic Party (EPDP) Jaffna. For fifteen years of war has generated a number of armed paramilitary groups who seem intent only on retaining the power they wield at gun point. Many of these paramilitary groups which are bank rolled by the Sri Lanka government and work with the Army to combat the LTTE and maintain regimes of terror and torture in the areas they control. All these groups, mainly

youth, carry guns. The paramilitaries remain outside the authority and discipline structure of the Government's armed forces, which are marginally better trained and better aware of humanitarian law. Thus, the paramilitary cadre tend to have a relatively freer reign than government forces to terrorise civilians, torture them, and extort money at gun point. At the national level, several leaders of paramilitary groups are installed as members of Parliament and support the ruling government.³ These groups have also developed systems of taxation of civilians by virtue of their control over the main transport routes, and the movement of persons and goods through an economy of terror, scarcity and fear. In the Sri Lankan conflict, the LTTE pioneered this system of taxation on the movement of goods and trafficking in persons. Since then, the Army has resorted to similar practices. Where the army issues passes and identification papers, there is a high degree of corruption. Residents of high security areas complain of being asked to pay large sums of money to army personnel before they are issued with these papers.

Violence against women in this context is the stuff of rape, trauma and disappeared persons, torture, assassination, and the gendered politics of body searches at check points usually conducted by armed youth who have been trained in the arts of terror, torture, and the degradation of their victims. Several instances of check point rape by the Sri Lankan Government's security forces have occurred, though rape has not been practised as a systematic policy for ethnic cleansing by any groups in the conflict, unlike in Bosnia. Women suffer particularly from the poor security situation in the border areas. Their mobility and thus ability to go out to work is severely curtailed due to fear of body searches and check point rape, not to mention anxiety about being caught in cross fire. Mothers are often fearful for their daughters' safety and sexual vulnerability and tend to confine them to the home or refugee camp. Simultaneously, a sexual service industry has developed in Anuradhapura where soldiers return from the conflict areas, with many homeless and displaced women engaging in prostitution.

The fear of checkpoint rape is a constraint on women's ability to move around and venture out of their immediate locale for work. Conditions are considerably worse for displaced women who are forced to live in refugee camps where privacy is minimal if non-existent and levels of generalised violence, alcoholism and domestic violence is high.⁴

Spaces of Empowerment: Displacing Gender and Caste Hierarchies

Yet displacement and camp life had also provided spaces for empowerment for several women who had taken on the role of head of household for various reasons. In this section I outline some of the process of transformation in young single and widowed women's lives which women I met at the Siddambarapuram camp and adjacent new settlement scheme described. Siddambarapuram was located a few miles outside Vavuniya, the largest town in the north Central Vanni region. It had received a large influx of refugees from the north. In many ways the facilities, location and environmental/climatic conditions at that camp and the

adjoining new settlements were exceptionally propitious. The relative prosperity of the locale and its residents was evident in the fact that the market in the camp was a vibrant and happening place that had become a shopping centre for nearby old (purana) villagers as well. At Siddambarapuram the sense of independence and mobility of many women heads of household was tangible and remarkable in contrast to other women I met in camps in less propitious settings. This is explainable in terms of the camp location, close to the larger town of Vavuniya where women could find employment, particularly in the service sector. This is of course not an option for displaced women in other less conveniently located camps.

The Siddambarapuram Camp was initially constructed as a transit camp by UNHCR for refugees returning to Jaffna from India in 1991, who were subsequently stranded when the conflict started again in what is known as the second Eelam War. Many of the people in the camp had been resident for more than five years. One of the oldest refugee camps in Vavuniya, in many respects the camp was exceptionally well located and serviced. Several young Tamil widows I interviewed in the camp and the adjoining new settlement noted that while they had initially had a hard time adjusting to displacement, camp life and the burdens of caring for their young families, they also had gained freedom to work outside the household and increasingly enjoyed the role of being the head of the household and its principle decision maker.

Many women said that they had little desire to remarry, mainly due to anxiety that their children might not be well cared for by a second husband. Several women commented that previously their husbands would not permit them to work outside the household, even if they had done so prior to marriage. Of course, one of the principle reasons for these women's newly found sense of control was the fact that they were able to and had found employment outside the household and the camp.

To a great extent the erosion of caste ideology and practice particularly among the younger generation in the camps had contributed to women's mobility and sense of empowerment. For caste has historically provided the mainstay of the Hindu Tamil gender *status quo* since caste belonging often determines women's mobility, and restricted mobility particularly among the high castes is a sign of high status. Unlike in Jaffna where village settlement was caste and region based, in the camp it was difficult to maintain social and spatial segregation, caste hierarchies, and purity pollution taboos for a number of reasons. This is particularly true for members of the younger generation who simply refused to adhere to caste inhibitions.

As one mother speaking about the disruption of caste hierarchies in displacement observed: "because we are poor here as displaced people we only have two glasses to drink from. So when a visitor from another caste comes we have to use the same glass. Now my daughter refuses to observe the separate utensils and she is friendly with boys we wouldn't consider at home. Everything is changing with the younger generation because they are growing up all mixed up because we are displaced and living on top of each other in a camp". This mother went on to detail how it was difficult to keep girls and boys separate in the camp situation. She thought that the

freer mingling of youth meant that there would be more inter-caste marriages and hence erosion of caste. Presumably this also means that girls had more choice over who might be their partners. The reconstitution of displaced families around women who had lost male kin curiously resonates with an older gender *status quo*: that of the pre-colonial Darvidian matilineal family and kinship system where women remain with their natal families after marriage, and were customarily entitled to lay claim on the resources of the matri-clan, and hence enjoyed a relatively higher status, in comparison with strictly patrilineal societies. For as Binna Agarwal has pointed out in "A Field of One's Own" (1996), the existence of matrilineal systems where matrilineal descent, matrilineal residence, and/or bi-lateral inheritance is practiced is usually an indicator of the **relatively** higher status of women when compared to the status of women in patrilineal groups. Similar observations concerning the status of women in matrilineal communities have been made by anthropologists who have studied the Nayars of Kerala as well as the Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims of the East coast of Sri Lanka where matrilineal inheritance is the norm (Yalman). These are also societies where social indicators have been relatively good, with high levels of female literacy, education and health care in South Asia.

During the colonial period in Sri Lanka there was however a general erosion of the matrilineal inheritance and bi-lateral descent practice, despite general provision being made for customary common law for indigenous communities (Thesavallamai, Tamil customary law, Kandian Sinhala law as well as Muslim Personal law). In the same period the modernizing tendency to the nuclear family enshrined in secular European, Dutch and British law, also privileged male inheritance, thereby reducing the power that women had within the extended family system with matrilineal inheritance.

The switch from matrilineal, matrilineal, to virilocal forms of residence and inheritance, where women take only movable property to their affinal household might also be traced to various post/colonial land distribution schemes wherein title deeds for land were invested in male heads of household, with the injunction against the further division of land due to land fragmentation, which set a precedent for male inheritance of the entirety of the family's land. The result has been the tendency towards male primogeniture - with the eldest son inheriting the land and daughters being disinherited from land ownership.

Unfortunately the similar pattern of title deeds being invested in male heads of households is still evident in the new settlement and land distribution schemes for landless displaced populations which are taking place in Vavuniya under the rehabilitation and reconstruction project. In these projects it is only where the male head of household is presumed dead that title deeds are given to women.

Languages of Empowerment: Recasting Widowhood and the Return to Matri-focal Families

Structural changes to the family have also brought cultural change. A generation of young Tamil war widows who have been displaced to and in the border areas for many years seem

to be increasingly challenging conventional Hindu constructions of widowhood as a negative and polluting condition which bars their participation from many aspects of community life. Consciously or unconsciously, they appear to be redefining conceptions of the good woman as one who lives within the traditional confines of caste, kin group and village. Many of these young women who have lost husbands to death, displacement or family fragmentation in the course of armed conflict and flight from bombing and shelling, increasingly refuse to erase the signs of *sumankali* (particularly the red pottu) they wore when married, and refuse to be socially and culturally marginalized and ostracised because they lack husbands and children.

Displacement along with the fragmentation and reconstitution of families around women in a conflict where men frequently have had to flee to avoid being killed or inducted by the armed groups, appears to have provided a space to redefine traditional Hindu Tamil perceptions of widows and single women as inauspicious beings. As they struggle with new gender roles and identities, many of these young widows who refuse to wear the prescribed garb of widowhood appear to break with the ideology of *Kanaki* (Paththini) the exemplary faithful wife and widow of Tamil mythology and ideology.

Yet (many) still seem to lack a language to articulate this process of transformation. They clearly felt guilty about expressing their new roles though one woman confided it is a relief now that he (her husband) is not with me. "He used to drink and beat me up".

Clearly the process of women's empowerment wrought by their changing roles in conflict is not transparent, unambivalent, or free of guilt. This was evident in many young widows' uncertainty about whether they should return home if and when the conflict ended. For them displacement constituted the space of ambivalence: a place of regeneration and hope for a future unfettered by the past, loss and trauma. They were also concerned that return home would mean a return to the pre-war caste and gender *status quo*. Of course, anxiety about return was also related to qualms about personal security and trauma, and was clearest among young women heads of households at Siddambarapuram, who had integrated to the local economy.

Rethinking Displacement through the Changing Status of Women in Conflict

Many internally displaced women who have given up the dream of return are in the paradoxical position of being materially and psychologically displaced by the humanitarian interventions and human rights discourses, and practices that define them as victims who need to be returned to their original homelands for their protection and for the restoration of national and international order and peace.⁵ For the assumption of return is a fundamental premise of State, international and NGO policies vis-a-vis internally displaced people. The fact is that the policy of return might be contributing to prolong the conflict and a cause of trauma for people who fled their home over five years ago. This is particularly true of women who wish to settle in the place where they have found refuge but who are being kept dependent on relief handouts

rather than being assisted to build new lives and livelihoods. Thus, ironically, relief might be prolonging the difficulties of the very people it is supposed to assist.

In Sri Lanka popular romanticizations of home as well as constructions of internally displaced people as victims (Sinhala term *anathagatha kattiya* - literally means the abandoned people, while the Tamil term *Veedu attavargal* means people without a home), often obscure the realities of living at home in conflict. However, there is now strong evidence to suggest that despite the psycho-social traumas that displacement entails, long-term displacement has provided windows of opportunity for greater personal and group autonomy and experiments with identity and leadership for displaced people, particularly for women (Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development, 1995; Sachithanandam, 1995). Certainly this has been the case for many displaced Tamil women, many of whom have lost husbands and sons in the conflict. It is time now for humanitarian relief efforts to be conceptualized in terms of 1) sustainability; 2) maintaining local orders of ethnic coexistence and empowerment between displaced people and their local hosts, 3) empowerment of women within an altered conception of the family. Under these circumstances, an approach which conceptualizes humanitarian work as part of a development continuum with gender-sensitive post/conflict intervention is especially necessary in instances where armed conflicts have lasted for several years with communities experiencing cycles of war and peace and displacement. The return to peace should not mean a return to the pre-war gender *status quo*. It follows that humanitarian and development interventions should be directed to creatively support and sustain positive changes to the status of civilian women living in conflict. The need to conceptualize relief as part of a development continuum is particularly evident on the gender issue. It has taken long enough to put women on the development agenda, and in situations of emergency and conflict, women tend to be once again marginalized, as quick responses become the primary agenda. Displaced women should receive priority in land grants.

Women's Empowerment in Conflict? the Humanitarian Challenge

Unlike in Afghanistan where the situation of women has unambiguously deteriorated due to conflict and the victory of the Taliban, in Sri Lanka, the evidence suggests that despite many women's experience of traumatic violence and displacement, some changes to the gender *status quo* wrought by armed conflict might have empowered women whose freedom and mobility were restricted by patriarchal cultural mores, morality and convention in peace time. Several women who have faced the loss and scattering of family members due to displacement, conflict, and the break down of family structures have also assumed new roles which were thrust upon them as a result of the disruption of peace-time community organisation, social structures and patriarchal values. *Yet I do not wish to suggest that this is a general story which might be told of women living in conflict and displacement.* Rather this paper has attempted to focus on civilian women's agency at moments when they seem most victimized, to excavate some hidden moments and

routes of women's empowerment in the generally tragic story of displaced women's lives in Sri Lanka.

The victim ideology which pervades relief and rehabilitation as well as social health and trauma interventions for women in conflict situations needs to be problematised especially as it may be internalized by some women with damaging consequences. Clearly, non-combatant women who have found spaces of empowerment in the conflict need sustained assistance to maintain their new found mobility and independence in the face of sometimes virulently nationalist assertions of patriarchal cultural tradition and practices during the conflict and in the period of post war reconstruction.

I have argued elsewhere that nationalist women and women combatants in nationalist struggles waged by groups like the LTTE, or the nationalist women in Ireland or Palestine, are imbricated in ultra-conservative "nationalist constructions of women" and tend to subordinate their gender identities to the nationalist cause (Rajasingham 1995). Suicide bombing is but the extreme version of this phenomenon which might, in Durkheimian terms, be glossed as altruistic suicide, when individual autonomy and personal agency is completely subsumed in the national cause. The question might well be raised as to whether women would be more given than men to altruistic suicide, given their socialization in patriarchal Asian cultures where girl children and women are more often than not taught to put themselves second, and their male folk, family, and community honour first. Clearly, non-combatant women are differently imbricated in nationalist discourses, and the return to peace time (which entails the reassertion of the gender *status quo*) is as problematic for them as it is for combatant women, but for different reasons.

Notes

1. Reports of the UN Special Reporter on Violence Against Women.
2. Colonial evolutionary classifications of (primitive societies presumed that fewer restrictions on women's freedom indicated a more primitive stage of civilizational advance.
3. Many paramilitants have been trained either by the State and have benefited from training in violence from various foreign sources including the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF) as well as war experts from Israel and the U.S.
4. Since the armed conflict commenced in Sri Lanka, the population of displaced people has fluctuated from half a million to 1.2 million, or between a tenth and a fifth of the country's population at various points in the conflict. At the end of December 1995, the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction in Sri Lanka estimated that there were 1,017,181 internally displaced people in Sri Lanka while 140,000 were displaced overseas (some of the latter have sought asylum status). Figures of displaced persons are however controversial.
6. For those in the conflict regions, the right to set up residence in an area of one's choice and the right to movement is seriously restricted by the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka's security regimes. While the Sri Lanka government restricts the movement of Tamils displaced southward, the LTTE will not permit Sinhalese to move or settle in the North. In fact, both the LTTE and the Sri Lanka

government have used displaced persons as security shields or buffers during military campaigns. The Sri Lanka Government's restrictions on the mobility of persons and their confinement to camps, have other implications for youth and children. Militant groups who infiltrate camps have very little difficulty in recruiting new cadres from deeply frustrated and resentful youth, men and women, girls and boys.

7. Among internally displaced Muslim women, however, the pattern is slightly different, Depending on the location of camps and the resources that families had, some women feel they have gained autonomy in their new situations while others complain of greater segregation.

Bibliography

Agarwal, Binna, 1996 *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

Enloe, Cynthia, 1983 *Does Khaki Become You? The Militarization of Women's Lives*. London. South End Press.

Jayawardena, Kumari 1986 *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*. London, Zed Books

Rajasingham, Darini 1995, "On Mediating Multiple Identities: The Shifting Field of Women's Sexuality in the Community, State and Nation" in *From Basic Needs to Basic Rights*. Margaret Schuler ed. Washington DC. Women, Law and Development International.

Thiruchandan, Selvy 1997, *Ideology, Caste, Class and Gender*. Delhi. Vikas.

Wadley, Susan Ed. 1991, *The Powers of Tamil Women*. New Delhi. Manohar.

THE POLITICIAN

I was going to the City to sell the herbs I had plucked;
On the way I rested by some trees at the Blue Gate.
Along the road there came horseman riding
Whose face was pale with a strange look of dread.
Friend and relations waiting to say good-bye
Pressed at his side but he did not dare to pause.
I, in wonder asked the people about me
Who he was and what had happened to him.
They told me this was a Privy Councillor
Whose grave duties were like the pivot State.

His food allowance was ten thousand cash;
Three times a day the Emperor came to his house.
Yesterday he was called to a meeting of Heroes:
To-day he is banished to the country of Yai-chou.
So always, the Counsellors of Kings;
Favour and ruin changed between dawn and dusk!
Green, green,-the grass of the Eastern Suburb;
And amid the grass, a road that leads to the hills.
Resting in peace among the white clouds,
At last he has made a "coup" that cannot fail!

by PO CHU-I (A:D 772-846)

Translated by Arthur Waley