

INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS IN SINHALESE FERTILITY *

BRYCE RYAN

THE problem of the functional consistency between high fertility, sex and marriage mores, and social and economic values is a crucial issue in modern Asia. In Ceylon one decade has witnessed a phenomenal decline in death rates but no significant change in birth rates. Although it is possible that fertility is declining, the rate of natural increase is now close to 3 per cent per annum. Even if urban fertility is changing, a matter undemonstrated, it cannot be inferred that Ceylon will follow the western pattern of persistent diffusion of the small family system. Ceylon is overwhelmingly a rural country, and the hiatus between city and village is much greater than in most Western nations. It is unrealistic to expect the rapid diffusion of new values and new techniques from an urban population which itself is probably largely unresponsive to them.¹ A revolutionary development is even less likely to appear spontaneously in the country-side. If fertility is to be reduced materially it must be done through conscious programs of technical education. The fundamental issue is not educational but rather the social engineering problems of integrating a program

* Indebtedness should be expressed to Dr. C. Chandra Sekar who stimulated a number of the questions used in this study, and to Misses Blossom Jayatunge and Malinee Mendis and Messrs. D. C. R. Wickremesinghe and L. D. Jayasena for their field assistance. Mr. Murray Straus, conducting related inquiries, has given freely his data and advice. The inquiry represents one phase of research aided by the Division of Medicine and Public Health of the Rockefeller Foundation in cooperation with the Dept. of Sociology, University of Ceylon. General observations on the Sinhalese are based on three and a half years of personal study of social organization in Ceylon, particularly in four sample Sinhalese villages representing each major region, and studies of the Colombo labor force. For background see the writer's "Socio-Cultural Regions of Ceylon," *Rural Sociology*, March 1950, "The Ceylonese Village and the New Value System," *ibid.* March 1952, and, in collaboration with Sylvia Fernando, "The Female Factory Worker in Colombo," *International Labour Review* Nov.-Dec. 1951. Additional data upon marriage mores will be found in the writer's *CASTE IN THE NEW ASIA—THE SINHALESE SYSTEM*, Rutgers University Press, (in press).

¹ My colleague Mr. Murray Straus has found that University of Ceylon entrants come from families averaging 5.8 children ever born. These homes are generally urbanized and upper class. Since the entrant's average age is 20, it may be inferred the many of these families are completed.

of birth limitation with a society now tied to large family values. This paper is intended to provide a contextual background for the study of institutional elements relevant to fertility and its control. A discussion of certain aspects of the Sinhalese marriage system is followed by more detailed observations on sex and fertility attitudes and mores in one peasant village. It should be understood that the precision and reliability of observations vary indirectly with the strength of tabus. Sex is an improper topic in Ceylon, and as an area of action it is fraught with repressions and tabus. Rather than being a prognosis for family planning, here is one faltering step toward understanding the institutional and psychological milieu within which the problems of fertility must be met.

THE MARRIAGE PATTERN

Controlled fertility is typically associated with the individualistic and romantic marital companionate. No similar social climate exists in Ceylon, nor is it likely soon to exist. If the small-family pattern is introduced, it must be superimposed upon a familial-kinship structure to which marital unions are subordinated and within which the conjugal family develops. Marriage is a calculated and rational extension of kinship; as a relationship between two persons dominated by thoughts of each other it is immoral and atypical. Evidence of social change may be found in the frequency of romantic suicides, but this also shows the continuous power of community and kin. As society is organized the individual has a life-long dependence upon kin. Even among urban sophisticates who would challenge the propriety of marriage by arrangement, few are so hardy as to make the concomitant challenge to kinship authority.

Personal preferences in marriage are not valued highly by village folk. Not only is the old system sacred, the accepted scope of individualism simply does not encompass the issue of mating. Previous acquaintance is usually a matter of unconcern to all parties involved. Although youth will obligingly

speak of romance in longing terms, there is virtually no comprehension of the concept and seldom even a hint of rebellion. There is no behavior system in their experience world which they can identify as romantic courtship.² Public social contact between adolescents is tabu, and husband and wife would no more engage in open endearments than in public sexual intercourse. No doubt with long exposure to even unintelligible Hollywood productions and vernacular romantic novels, a new pattern might be established. Such audiences are few, however, and almost exclusively male. It might be noted that in sophisticated circles, the romantic complex has frequently been directed toward mistresses rather than toward wives. There is a potent and intricate inter-dependency between individual and kin, within which the arranged match is crucial and romantic marriage abhorrent and socially disorganizing. The demonstration of this lies in the detailed view of criteria in spouse selection, and the mating process.

Criteria of spouse selection may be dichotomized into those which are fixed and universal and those which are variable and subject to compromise or balancing. The rigid requirements are: (1) membership in the same ethnic community, i.e. Sinhalese; (2) identity of caste; (3) bride younger than groom; (4) bride a virgin³; (5) horoscopes of each closely matched. The honor of the family blood must be defended against the impurity of another caste and secondarily from the degradation of a union with a less distinguished family line. The precept

² The curious conceptions of romance current among the "emancipated" are illustrated by the lovelorn columns in the daily papers. Frequently heart-rending stories of love unrequited appear—the other party usually being unaware of the suitor's existence. (One lad "threw an inkwell at her" and still she did not respond.) The love letter is known among village youth but is certain to be a reason for punishment if found. These manifestations of "romance" are probably due more to general repressions than to positive courtship intent, or, it may be hazarded, *personalized* sex interest.

³ There is no tabu against widow remarriage in the same sense as among Hindus. It is, however, ill thought of and rare. Regarding virginity, the village proverb asserts that "a broken box is not welcome for a lakh," i.e. 100,000 Rupees. The extent of premarital chastity probably varies widely between villages and in some localities is complicated by a loose definition of marriage. It is customary in many localities for an examination to be made of the cloth on which the newlyweds sleep the first night of marriage. The absence of stain may become a matter of village gossip and enmity between the in-laws.

of virginity is partly supported by the fear that a man of lower caste may have had access to the bride. The pressure toward early marriage for daughters is supported by the probability of increasingly greater dowry or increasingly undesirable applicants for an aging maid, who, in any case must be her husband's junior. With satisfactory evidence on fundamentals, the business of arranging a match can go forward. Agreement rests ultimately in the balancing of various assets and liabilities: dowry power of the girl's people, security and occupational prestige of the boy, and the status of family lines. A boy's personal prestige is often of greater significance than his economic worth and is closely associated with traditional and colonially evolved ratings of vocations.⁴ (Occupational prestige is more closely correlated with dowry than with salary.) In the normal course of village life personal prestige among cultivators is probably determined more by the sobriety and security of the boy's family, while cooking ability might counter-balance a low dowry in a girl. Poor village fathers may dream of acquiring a government peon (flunky, messenger, janitor) for their girl, and the more prosperous, a government clerk or school teacher. Few attain such heights. In the cities the highest personal prestige, and hence dowry, is accorded the civil service elite and the government doctors. The dowry is in a sense an independent variable. The girl's family knows what it can raise and attempts to acquire the highest status husband available. Cross-cousin preference is common but frequently foregone for dowry or other reasons. It is preserved partly because of its inherent evidence of equal lineage status. Although personal attributes such as proved cooking ability, superior education, or even an unusually light complexion, are not overlooked, they are overshadowed by dowry and status.

Both rigid and variable factors operate in a self-consistent

⁴ Occupational prestige ratings were made by village and by urban high school students in a special inquiry conducted in 1951. Results were similar to those found in American studies except that in every instance of an occupation associated with government, the rating was excessively high. Thus a government clerk approaches the position of a lawyer. This tendency to up-grade the government employee was more pronounced among village youth than among the urban.

pattern in support of the familial concept and are directed toward ends inconsistent with the romantic complex. The greatest moral duty of a father is a "good" marriage for his daughter, and this duty falls on a son at the father's death. These are responsibilities to blood kin, fully as much as to the child. Desire for family prestige may press the father or brother toward almost impossible sacrifices.

We have emphasized here the subservient role of the individual to the family; the father in fulfillment of moral obligation, the son as a source of capital in the form of dowry, the daughter as a means of status acquisition. In marriage the individual is both caught and sheltered within his kinship group. The son helps with his sister's dowry and in so doing protects his own status which in turn is rewarded in dowry. Challenge to the arranged match as such is a challenge to the prerogatives of kin. The lineal family as a status bearing entity in the community has its most critical times in the period of approaching marriage. Every kin connection has his own personal position at stake status-wise, economically, or both. Parents know full well that romantic marriage cannot conform to the rigid dictates of caste, prestige, and house honor. It holds a challenge not merely to the father's rightful authority but to the honor of the generations, past and future, of which the father is the legitimate guardian. Marriage by choice has no claim upon kin for dowry, no claim for help in harvest and no claim for cooperation in marrying some ultimate daughter of the union. Although the infrequent romantic marriages in villages do not necessarily meet with ostracism if caste propriety and other rigid matters have been observed, there is partial or complete estrangement from kinfolk, temporarily serious and often with some persisting coolness. In the closely knit affairs of the village, life for such a couple may not be pleasant.

The requirement of astrological suitability deserves special mention. Almost universally the Ceylonese believe in the validity of astrology. Assortative mating in terms of personality and physique is practiced on the assumption that such

matters are perfectly reflected in the horoscopes. One significant feature of the readings is that indicating sexual compatibility. Men and women fall into one of the various classes such as "rat fit," "cat fit" and "cattle fit." It is not possible technically for a woman of "cow fit" to satisfy a man of say "rat fit."⁵ Parents eager to make a match may sometimes call for a second reading of the horoscopes, but if the pair is not fairly closely "mated," the matter is dropped. Needless to say a firm belief in the absolute validity of this system, by young and old, educated and uneducated, retards the use of the Westerner's inexact empirical method of courtship. The romantic urge can easily lead to a union marked for disaster and youth feels it an unnecessary risk. If one does not subscribe to the premises of the system, considerable mismating *in the Western sense* may occur. However, so long as husband-wife relations are construed in non-romantic, non-egalitarian and non-partnership terms, the issue is probably irrelevant.

DOMINANCE OF THE MALE

The Sinhalese family is usually patrilineal, and also patrilocal in the sense that the newly married couple usually settles in the husband's village. The joint family, however, is uncommon. The new marital unit is thus dominated by the husband's kin through their very proximity, and fear of the mother-in-law is a recurring theme in interviews with women. Although fully patriarchal, the Sinhalese family has not exaggerated male dominance. None-the-less the father-husband is the social authority and his relation to all except small children is devoid of overt expressions of affection but replete with evidence of his dignity and prerogatives. It should not be implied that this patriarchalism is harsh; few relationships between Sinhalese are that.

From early childhood the male is schooled in his superiority. A family of many males is a "fortunate one," one of many

⁵ See also KAMA SUTRA OF VATSYAYNA—THE HINDU ART OF LOVE, translated by B. N. Basu and S. L. Ghosh (Calcutta 1948) Chap. XI.

daughters is "burdened." Frequently households have a single bed, used by the father; a second one is for the eldest son. The men-folk are served their meals; the women eat what remains in the kitchen. Male children roam and play through the village while their sisters are closely bound with household tasks. The position of the father is that of one to whom services are due, priorities accepted and deference paid. There is a deeply seated belief that in marriage the loyalty and subservience of the wife to husband must be complete. He stands in the place of her father as well as in the role of husband, in the village view. On the other hand it is generally agreed that the husband owes his first allegiance to his own parents rather than to his wife. It is the role of woman to lose herself in service to husband but for him marriage never commands the full part of his familial obligations. The child is educated to these concepts by precept and by the overt roles enacted before him, and the sex roles of childhood are consistent with those of later life. Although women can exert influence in many situations, decisions are ultimately those of the husband-father. Rarely a rigid disciplinarian, the father is still *master* in a society where that concept has a living feudal history.

THE SOCIAL MILIEU OF FERTILITY IN A PEASANT VILLAGE⁶

The village utilized for intensive investigation is in the Ceylon "Low Country," six miles from a market town. Its marital institutions and folkways are generally consistent with previous generalizations.

The mean age at marriage for village women (based on a one-fourth sample of existing marital units) was 21.9 years, and for men, 28.4 years. There is some reason to believe that the

⁶ This village has been given close attention for three years and intensive continuous study for more than one year of this period. One member of the study team had been reared in the village and rapport was excellent. A monograph on its social organization and institutional structure is now in preparation. One phase of this was reported upon in "The Ceylonese Village and the New Value System" *op. cit.* The present report relies upon two special inquiries, in addition to ethnologic data. One of these is a one-fourth sample of the 400 village households, the other an intensive study of fertility attitudes in a sub-sample of eighteen mothers. The sources of statistical statements will be evident in the text.

age of women at marriage is rising but there is no evidence of change among men. (Thus women who married after 1937 had a mean age of 23.3.) Village opinion gives 21 or 22 as the ideal age for a bride and about 25 for the groom. (This was statistically verified only in the sample of eighteen mothers.) It is probable that the high ages at marriage are influenced by the difficulties of dowry, including the responsibility of brothers toward sisters. The household sample revealed that the average dowry had amounted to 220 Rupees; in marriages since 1937 it averaged 266 Rupees. (There was probably in fact a lesser inflation in husbands than in incomes.) About one-fourth of the couples indicated that no dowry had been given, a condition which arises from such diverse conditions as gross poverty, impositions upon the kin for providing a daughter, and a few romantic marriages. There is, however, no evidence that the proportion of dowryless matches has changed with passing years.

Indicative of social change is the fact that 4 per cent of the ninety couples claim to have married in spite of their parents wishes. These are all recent marriages, i.e. in the last twelve years. About 13 per cent married by personal choice but with parental approval. There is no evidence of increase in such permissible self choice. (There is no way of knowing how many love matches were thwarted by parents.) The remainder, over 80 per cent, and more than two-thirds of even recent marriages, had been products of *pure* parental arrangements. Fifty-seven per cent professed no previous acquaintance with spouses, the proportion being no different in recent marriages and those consummated many years ago.

This village is more emancipated than many others and is relatively prosperous, many women and men having employment on nearby rubber estates. None-the-less the great bulk of marriages conforms closely to traditional patterns. The propriety of caste, the validity of horoscope, prestige, and other conditions of marrying are fully recognized. While some youth express unconcern over such matters as caste, few if any would

violate the tradition and when they come into responsible parental roles they too will defend family honor in the marriage of their offspring. In the interviews with eighteen mothers, not one was found who defended marriage by personal choice and one of them who had so married is unhappy in her community relations.

ATTITUDES OF WOMEN TOWARD FAMILY SIZE

The typical response of any villager confronted with a question on ideal family size is one indicating human helplessness in the face of destiny. As a public health official paraphrases village women's attitudes, "God giving, what to do?" In children, as in other matters, one's destiny must be fulfilled. As to what kind of destiny the individual would prefer there is wide range of opinion. The sample of mothers, having children ranging in number from one to seven, offered evidence that many women are torn between the community valuation of the large family and a personal desire for restricted numbers. About seven of the eighteen would join with the following:⁷

Fate decides how many children we have, but of course if we were to have more we would be happy. Every woman wishes to have many children. They are a blessing. I would like ten.

But almost an equal number expressed views more consistent with a mother age 35 who after eleven years of marriage has five living children and has had one still birth and another child deceased.

These children are enough for me. I am quite satisfied. We are not very well off and if we had had any more it would have been difficult to bring them up. It is better to have a few and give them all the attention.

Although the majority tended toward one or the other of the

⁷ Interviewers recorded the statements after each interview and were not always able to make perfectly literal reconstructions or translations. Two female interviewers spent two weeks interviewing the eighteen mothers subsequent to an earlier two-week period in which one of them gained general impressions and established personal rapport with the village women.

extreme positions noted above, several gave qualified responses like that from a 40-year-old mother of three girls:

We are happy with our three children but would certainly be glad to have about two more, and we would like boys.

This last mother wishes for more children, but it seems possible that sex substitution would have been a happier alternative. Seven of the mothers stated categorically that "the number of children born to us as of this time is just right." Eleven indicated that more would have been desirable. Although the number of cases is few, it is interesting to note that mothers wishing more children were slightly younger than those who were satisfied and averaged 3.4 living children compared to 4.0 for the latter. (Existing marital unions of 20 years duration or more, in the 25 per cent household sample, had averaged 5.7 births.)

At a later point in the interviews questions were posed about the happiness of large and small families under varying conditions. These responses indicate more strongly the reluctant enthusiasm with which large numbers of children are viewed. It should be remembered however that in this context when a woman speaks of a small number of children, she may in fact mean a family which by Western standards is quite large, i.e. five or six children. Only three or four of the mothers supported infinite fertility. The majority are best represented by the following restrained and somewhat inconsistent view:

More children are better if people have the means and facilities to bring them up. If poor, then few children will be better. But what can we do? We have as many as we are destined to have. In any case it is better to have more boys than girls. Girls are economic and emotional liabilities. If we do not have adequate money we would prefer boys. Boys mean wealth, prestige, and security in old age and carrying on the family name. The more boys the better. It is just the opposite with girls.

The circumstances of interviewing unquestionably had an

effect upon the nature of responses. The most troublesome feature of conducting any field research in a Sinhalese village is the difficulty in arranging a private interview. Although men were always excluded from these discussions, neighbor women and female relatives could not always be turned aside. It was sharply evident to the interviewers that infinite numbers of children were an unqualified blessing in situations where several women were present. Children are viewed by all as a product of destiny and women feel that in expressing sentiments such as "all children are a blessing," they are voicing the mores of the community. As a test of the sincerity with which mothers view themselves as dedicated to limitless reproduction, their attitudes toward the birth of twins was sought. Nearly all were in agreement that "one at a time is plenty." In these responses the theme of children as a mother's burden took a dominant place. One mother who in group interview had conformed to community feeling now observes:

It is very difficult to bring up two children. One is bad enough without being burdened with two at once. Even in nursing the mother cannot possibly treat both alike. Both children are likely to suffer.

There is no belief among villagers that merit in the sense of spiritual attainment is derived through motherhood. Reproduction does not take one further upon the *Way*. Numbers of children do, however, reflect merit achieved in previous existences. In the words of many mothers "children are a blessing," but for a substantial proportion it might be said that *many* children are *imposed* as a blessing. It is pleasant to know that one's previous life was meritorious, but there is little conviction that fertility is spiritually beneficial.

THE UNPRODUCTIVE WIFE

This interpretation of village mothers' skeptical attitudes regarding the value of high productivity should not be construed as a belief that a childless or even single or dual-child

marriage is desirable. One or two women favored no more than one or two children, but they were exceptional even in private interviewing. No one believes that childlessness is a desirable state. Village women know that the unproductive marriage may not be the result of the wife's sterility, but they know that it is the wife toward whom community opprobrium is directed and that it is the husband who gets pity and sympathy. While villagers also pity the barren woman, the folkways of social intercourse yield partial ostracism and avoidance. The position of such a wife in village life is excellently expressed by one young mother:

I pity her. She will have no one to help her and care for her when she is ill. In old age she will have no one to sit with her and comfort her. The pleasures of having children are not known to her. If she does anything bad people say it is due to the fact that she is barren. They refer to her as the *vanda gani* (barren woman), a contemptuous term. They will not show her first to a girl who has just attained puberty. We must not meet such a woman when we set out on an auspicious task like going to a wedding or pirith ceremony, or to see a bride and groom-to-be. She is unlucky and it is believed that the business won't be a success. So she is avoided.

The lot of the childless wife is uncomfortable, and the birth of a first child is looked forward to with eagerness. Apart from social stigma, failure to conceive is evidence of great sin in a former existence. A husband is not justified in leaving a wife who bears him no children, but women recognize that children are insurance against desertion. If no sign of pregnancy has appeared after two years of marriage, steps are taken to remedy the situation. Appeals to planetary gods may be made, vows taken before regional gods, and even appeals to "demon gods" ("devil dances") utilized. Consultation with an astrologer may provide assurance that eventually all will be well. (Although appeals to the Buddha are not admitted in this village, there is an ancient temple pool in another region which has the property of inducing conception.) Continued infertility may result

in adoption through the belief that the expression of mother love is physiologically conducive to conception. Large sums may be spent on rituals designed to protect the pregnant wife and insure delivery.

ATTITUDES OF WOMEN TOWARD BIRTH CONTROL

To wish that destiny might be kind is one matter, to seek actively the prevention of birth is another. From the lips of nearly every woman came, at this suggestion, responses essentially the same. "It is a great sin to try to prevent pregnancy. You must allow all those to be born who are to be born." We must recognize that query on this matter is first interpreted by practically every woman as signifying abortion. When the distinction is drawn, the women are not so sure that it is a valid one and the idea of abortion colors statements of attitude. In an attempt to get around this difficulty, questions were posed on the assumption that a *mantram* (charm) was known that permitted intercourse without conception. Of the eighteen mothers only two admitted that a mother suffering great economic hardship and with many children would be justified in using the charm. Significantly these views came in two of the wholly private interviews, and each woman had expressed the desire for no more children; one had five living, the other, two. One says:

We consider it a misfortune to have too many children. It makes things difficult for a family. Provided one is not destroying life she is quite justified in preventing pregnancy. Women would be thankful if they knew of such a device for although they dare not confess in public, individually women would not like to have more than three children.

But for two statements like the above there were sixteen like that of another mother:

If a dead "soul" wishes to be born into your family, it would be a terrible sin to prevent its birth. We will pay for such acts in our next life. Children that are to be born to you must be

allowed to be born. That is how life goes on. We cannot and should not prevent this.

Here speaks the voice of the community, echoed by men and women alike. A rebirth in the great cycle must not be denied to any being.⁸

Abortion is well known but violently discredited. It is undoubtedly attempted, however, in instances of unmarried pregnancies. Folk knowledge ascribes abortive power to the consumption of large quantities of pineapple and of vinegar, and certain indigenous physicians who are skilled in the medicines of abortion are well known. It is not improbable that some married women resort to dietary attempts to control, but further action is surely rare. No husband or wife was induced to admit that they had actually sought to restrict birth by any means. *Coitus interruptus* is probably uncommon among married couples. There is no word for the practice in the local vocabulary and its meaning must be explained rather than simply referred to. While some unmarried youths probably practice it, the general state of affairs among the married is no doubt accurately stated by a man of many offspring: "Why should I do *that* when I am legally married and entitled to have children?"

Below the surface of decent village talk, there is, however, a widespread knowledge of a "safe period." Practically all men know of this and although few women admit knowledge of it, they undoubtedly are aware of the technique. (Men also think that women have other and more secret techniques as well.) Quite rightly the villagers have no great faith in the method, for by folk definition the safe period is the 14 days preceding menstruation. Folk physiology attributes this to the fact that as the menses approach, the womb is not clean and the sperm

⁸ This is not to say that village metaphysics adequately reflect Buddhist doctrine. Actually some liberal scholars indicate that contraception is consistent with Buddhist principles. It is interesting to note that the Buddhists have been attacked by Roman Catholics for *not* opposing birth control. The late Prime Minister of Ceylon went on record in support of the village interpretation, a position not held however, by several other prominent Buddhist political leaders.

is held up to be washed away by the oncoming flood. Similarly it is believed by women that conception will not occur so long as a mother is nursing, but one woman assured us that by personal experience she knew this was not true. This might, however, have some bearing upon the advanced age at which many children are weaned.

The safe period is not morally censored by the villagers and in discussions of the wrongness of preventing conception, this practice was not connoted. There is nothing unnatural about abstaining from intercourse. To the contrary continence is consistent with the Buddhist *Way*. Probably some couples with a number of children practice it more or less.

ATTITUDES OF MEN TOWARD FAMILY SIZE AND BIRTH CONTROL

Although the speech reactions of men were not so systematically collected as for women, it is probable that rapport was better since the interviewer himself was a member of the community. Even under these circumstances the articulation of sex matters was distasteful and relief was usually evidenced when conversation veered into less tabued areas. It is significant that no evidence of underlying ambivalent desire for limited families could be detected. Men sincerely want large families, and especially many sons: "children are prosperity." Not once in the extensive discussions with village men was there a mention of the burden of child care and the difficulties of rearing. The personal trials and burdens of parenthood are almost wholly the mother's. Father is proud parent toward his neighbors, a caresser of infants in the home, and contributor to his kin status through well-calculated marriages. He is served by his household, and the larger his small kingdom the greater his dignity and glory. Through children, especially sons, he gains status as a man, is assured that his responsibilities will be inherited by others and that he himself will have security in old age. From the male standpoint children are assets if the family is not overweighted with girls. In the latter instance, the economic cost is noticeable because the ultimate advantages are

fewer and the threat of dowry hangs for years over his head. But the remedy for this situation is simple—keep trying and eventually get boys. In the meantime girls too can tap rubber and alleviate the dowry responsibility themselves.

The whole tenor of interviews was different for men than women. The wife has no avenue of escape from the increasing demands upon her made by the growing family. (Cookery alone is an infinitely more difficult and time consuming task than in the Western farm home.) On the other hand, one may question whether the father of a large family works more assiduously to provide. The appearances are that he works no more—he merely lives less well until the youth begin earning.

Our interviewers agree that a majority of the mothers would welcome some morally suitable relief from the imminent arrival of the next baby. They also agree that the fathers see no cause for worry. Not only is high productivity defended on grounds of familistic strength and economic prosperity, suggestions of birth control are indicted morally and nationalistically.

Why should we control? During the times of the Sinhalese kings, the population was greater than that of today. The cock-bird who climbed to a house in Anuradhapura was able to go to Polonnaruwa without getting down to earth (i.e. from rooftop to rooftop).

On the level of family welfare the cross purposes of husband and wife are well illustrated:

No, I would not be worried about it (having many more children), but my wife is, since we have four already. But when I approach her she cannot resist my temptations. Even if I step onto the mat she gets a child, unlike some women.

This man's wife has spoken to him about the safe period, but he is disinterested in regulation and quite unconcerned about increasing numbers. It is not uncommon for men of middle age to imply that their wives would like to follow the safe period, but like the respondent above the wife has slight opportunity to do anything but acquiesce to his "temptations."

SEX DOMINANCE OF MALES

We have noted that in child rearing the role and status of the son is utterly different from that of the daughter, who is reared for subservience to the male. In a literal sense she is to look upon the eventual husband as her master. While some women resent it, this arises more in the mode of expression than in the fact of power. The husband's sexual authority is the most important single element for an understanding of fertility. This authority is implicit in the familial definition of marriage relationships. An illiterate woman of 45 who has had six children, observes:

Once a girl marries she wholly belongs to her husband, and her duty is first toward him. If she invites his displeasure, who will look after her and her children? A man's first loyalty is to his (blood) family and aged parents. He should never neglect them just because he has a wife. She must put up with it although it may be unpleasant for her. . . . A woman need not be educated to know how to get on harmoniously with her husband. If she is sensible she can get around him. If she is gentle about it he will come around to her point of view.

Time and again in the women's statements the word "property" appears, describing the wife. Frequent too are the allusions to transference of paternal authority from the wife's father to the husband. Marriage is a transfer and extension of unilateral authority, and the woman's lot is cast with an unknown male bred to the role of patriarch. One woman concludes, "In spite of all hardships and even cruelty the woman must never leave her husband for she belongs to him." Yet this same person was one of the few to express overtly her resentment at the male's total dominance in sexual relations. With seven children living and one deceased, she complains that it is regarded as a "primary duty of a wife to surrender at every call."

The field notes of one interviewer have implicit support in many observations, although explicit statements like the above were rare.

Much as these women detest the uncompromising nature of the husband in sex relations, many seemed to accept their servile condition with grim resignation, the destiny of all women. After much verbal manoeuvring we did succeed in getting some to be frank on the topic of husband-wife relations and they said their sentiments were spoken for the majority of the village women.

Most husbands they agreed were tyrannical in their sex relations. Intercourse was more the outcome of demand than of request. Often regardless of how tired the wife might be or how poor her physical condition, the husband would demand his pleasure. "What is the good of refusing, they will never let us alone," and, in fact they dare not refuse for "he will go to some other woman and then what will become of me and my children?" This is a genuine fear. A direct quotation from a *husband* expresses the situation, "Why do we feed and clothe them if we cannot use them as we like." (The word for "use" is that spoken in connection with any inanimate object and implies *constant* use.)

We see how the condition of economic dependence affects this issue. Once a woman is given in marriage she is expected to stick to her husband regardless of how trying married life with him may be for the simple reason that parents cannot afford to maintain her and her children nor meet the expense of a second marriage.

That these impressions are not casual ones is indicated by the independent notes of the male associate who worked in complete separation from the female interviewers.

The women are passive in sexual intercourse. The husband takes the active part. He approaches the wife in the night. To him love is the sexual act and most husbands have nothing else to do with their wives, (i.e. affectionally). The villager does not know love making. When the husband sleeps outside on the veranda, the wife may not close the door until late in the night. When the little children are asleep the father may come inside the house and engage in sexual intercourse. Much time is not wasted on this for the husbands are not experienced in fondling or making their wives happy otherwise. Wives do not question their authority in sexual matters, and whatever their demands

are ready to sacrifice to please them. The wife's birthright is the pleasing of her husband. The wife thinks so and the husband exploits the idea.

These accounts may conflict in interpretation of the wife's attitude, but the sex roles they describe are identical. The wife in her physiological role is sexual property. (We suspect that many wives infrequently experience orgasm and that its possibility is unknown to many villagers.) Sex is merely an emission by the male in probably a large proportion of unions. If the wife is satisfied, it is coincidental and of no importance in marital relationships.⁹

CONCLUSIONS

The institutional context of marriage among the Sinhalese is similar to that prevalent in many patriarchal and patrilineal societies. Spouses are the surrogates of kin and the new household is one in an interminable chain of kinship units, solidarities, and reciprocities. Sinhalese society emphasizes the consanguine unit less than some other peoples, but the power of kin is expressed strongly in the process of marrying, in social relationships and direction of loyalties of the marital household, and in predominance of paternal kin contacts.

Encompassing marriage within the domain of kin fairly effectively shuts out individual choice and romanticism. These would violate familial prerogative and parental authority and challenge the integrity of caste and status levels and traditional marriage preferences. Disregard for astrological tests of compatibility are implied. Not only must the deviating individuals choose a path of insecurity and possibly ostracism, they must jeopardize the welfare of loved ones. The marriage of a brother is relevant to his sister's marriage and both are relevant to unmarried cousins and the good name of the family line itself. In support of this, romantic marriage is abhorrent and even

⁹ That some village women receive more satisfaction in extramarital relations is probable. On the whole there is considerable tolerance toward this type of relationship. In one village, not discussed here, local gossip is heavy with observations on the seductive qualities of the married women. In another area a woman's song deals with the burden of intercourse with a husband and joys to be had from a lover.

the manifestation of affection between members of the opposite sex, whether single or married, is shocking to the point of immorality.

That such a system of familistic marriage is frequently associated with mores of high fertility is well known. Although the origins of high fertility values may indeed lie in social adaptations to a capricious death rate, the system is today self supporting and the adaptive folkways have become ends and values in themselves. In respect only to age at marriage is the Sinhalese marriage pattern inconsistent with high productivity. (In the more remote districts, however, girls are frequently married soon after puberty.) In other spheres family structure and mores are congruent with high reproduction. As in most peasant societies, the household is both a consumption and production unit. Security in old age rests upon sons. Many children mean that many helpful connections can be established through marriage. The economic cost of children is slight and the potentials are considerable. These and other advantages of the large family are implemented by folkways which, if less rational, are no less potent stimulants. The village girl fears the fate of singleness or of being a childless wife; infertility is treated with contempt. Mother achieves respect as mother, and she, cut apart from her own blood kin, must through procreation build her own intimate social world in which to find recognition and self expression. For the husband the social stimuli to a fertile marriage are many and powerful. The *esprit de corps* of the kin group stimulates child production not merely as an individual enterprise but as the fulfillment of one's role in the blood family. Children contribute to the strength of the *house* as surely as to the strength of the household. Through them parents gain acclaim, and in sons they have allies in time of crisis. Infants give both husband and wife emotional expressions denied them in their own relationship. Under the patriarchal code the husband swells in new importance as his kingdom grows and as the lines of deference and service expand and come to encompass their sons' wives and the grandchildren.

Small wonder that fertility in this life is a measure of one's merit in previous existences and that the "unnatural" prevention of birth is so readily damned by the convenient device of the kammatic cycle.

The argument is, however, incomplete and we have observed empirically a reluctance among mothers to favor a reproductive life pressing the limits of fecundity. Women do not visualize continuous pregnancies without misgivings although most accept them with fatalistic composure. Husbands to the contrary have nothing ill to say of the most fecund marriage. The difference lies in the contrasting roles of father and mother in reference to children and in the structure of the patrilineal marriage system. A wife's absolution from the threat of infertility is complete with the birth of a single child, and the difficulties of child bearing and care increases in at least arithmetical ratio to numbers. With these difficulties the husband has no part and rarely much concern, for they are the natural function of wife and her god-given means of pleasing him. The husband is also motivated by something the wife can never fully share. Children are contributions to *his* family not to hers; the wife is a contractual agent for the husband's kin; he is of its very substance. To her, children may be assets of the conjugal union but to him they are also assets in the society to which his first loyalties belong. Close emotional identification of wife with husband is difficult by the very terms of marriage and conflicting loyalties. For him, status counts where he is conditioned by lifelong loyalties; for her, lifelong loyalties have been broken by marriage and she finds her joys in a home and husband who are forever mortgaged to an alien group. Socially the wife becomes a member of the new *house* but only theoretically can emotional identification be produced by fiat. The husband wants children, first as a responsible member of kin and secondarily as an individual. The wife wants children as an individual and secondarily for her husband's kin. Through provision of children she gains security, and through their marriage with her brother's children she contributes to her own people, but the rewards are

long delayed, less dependable and less constant than those of her husband living among his own kindred.¹⁰ It might also be hazarded that unsatisfying sexual intercourse for the wife predisposes her to an attitude of resignation rather than joy in pregnancy.

The implications of these observations for the problem of controlled fertility leave room for the introduction of contraceptive practice. No doubt a substantial minority of village women are today trying to reduce the frequency of pregnancies. Lack of technical knowledge is perhaps no greater handicap than the unsympathetic attitudes of sex dominant males. It seems fair to conclude that if women were provided with simple contraceptive techniques which were rationalized to moral precepts, and unknown to husbands, the more youthful mothers of several children would use them. Of these conditioning factors "moral rationalization" is probably the easiest, for the Buddhist position is not doctrinaire and the laity are skilled in compromise with even rigid precepts. Since the secret use of such devices is improbable, we might consider the possibility that husbands would abet their wives provided there was no interference with sexual prerogatives. This course implies a shift in viewpoint for husbands, and a shift from a position strongly supported by family structure. It is certain that the entire situation is different from one in which religious objections are uppermost. Here sex satisfaction is a male prerogative rather than a joint one and the large family has tangible advantages. Increasing numbers of children pay increasing dividends to the one who dominates sex relations. To assume that this domination can be tempered with great doses of husbandly sympathy for the wife's position is to look for a companionate marriage in a society which consistently abhors it.

The critical point for the diffusion of contraceptive practices

¹⁰ Comparative studies of husband-wife relations in matrilineal-matrilocal and patrilineal-patrilocal ones would be valuable. Both forms are recognized in Sinhalese law and are practiced, although the form discussed here is the more favored. The present argument presenting the wife in the role of sexual property of a kin group with the husband as the legitimate actor, might be supported by the presence of, now illegal, fraternal polyandry.

is in the husband-wife relationship rather than in religious sanctions or even the economic value of large families. Educational and public relations techniques cannot easily surmount the conjoined effects of male sex dominance and distinctive male rewards for numerous progeny. Even under urban conditions and values, these factors may retard a small family movement more than might be expected from the experiences of Western nations.