

out private investment, adversely affecting the economic growth of the country. This situation necessitates comprehensive policy measures either to reduce expenditure or to increase the revenue base of the country so that the government need not depend overwhelmingly on debt. However, considering the security situation and the development needs of the country expenditure cut is harmful not only economically but also politically because it is impossible to the country to reduce the expenditure of any of the following four categories, viz, (1) general public services (defense, and public order and safety), (2) social services (education, health etc), (3) economic services (agriculture and irrigation, fisheries, energy and water supply, transport, communication *etc.*) and (4) Other (interest payments, pension, food stamp, free text books and mid day meal for school children). Therefore, taxation is relevant and essential since alternative ways of financing government expenditure such as money creation, mandating larger required reserves, domestic borrowing and foreign loans can have harmful macroeconomic repercussions. Nonetheless, the tax ratio in Sri Lanka is on the decline and remains well short of the standard rate for developing countries. It follows that there is a need to as well as room to increase the tax ratio in Sri Lanka. However, one can observe that direct taxes, as a percentage of GDP, have remained stable at an average of 2.5 per cent during 1977-2007 period and which raises the point that aforementioned decline in the tax ratio is strongly associated with the decline in indirect taxes. Therefore, increased indirect tax revenue can lead to improvements in the tax ratio. While this is an important fiscal outcome in the paper, we also underscore several other reasons why this is desirable.

## **Seeing the Village through the Trees: Representing the Village in Sri Lankan Fiction**

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Sri Lanka's postcolonial history is unique amongst South Asian countries in that Sri Lanka has not seen a major flight of people leaving rural villages to settle in urban centers. Today, 85% of the population lives outside of urban areas, and urbanization is occurring at the slow rate of .5% (CIA World Fact Book). I point to these numbers to underscore that Sri Lanka is seen today as a country that has kept its rural roots, so to speak. Moreover, I want suggest that with this view comes a host of cultural connotations about the rural. In this paper, I trace a trajectory of Sri Lankan Anglophone narratives that have imaginatively represented village life. My starting point is Leonard Woolf's novel *Village in the Jungle*, published in 1913. Next, published about a half century later in 1966, is Punyakante Wijenaik's *The Waiting Earth*. And, at the other end of my track is P.G. Punchihewa's novel *The Shattered Earth*, published first in Sinhala in 2000 and then rewritten and published in English in 2008. In this 95-year time span, I would like to posit that a specific kind of narrative is being retold. The brand of story goes something like this: Each of these three texts tells of peasant life in an agrarian community, seemingly far-removed from the reaches of big-city Colombo. Most importantly, each work is dark; all three narratives represent villages on the brink of disintegration. Each employs a landless male protagonist around whose life the plotline unfolds. Similarly, each

introduces the figure of the outsider as a character entering the village and creating conflict. At the heart of each story, chena and paddy cultivation are depicted as central means of wellbeing, ways of life that promises, or should promise, to maintain a self-sufficient community, working harmoniously with the land.

In my critique of these texts, I point to the work of Mick More to show there is a macro narrative at play in Sri Lankan politics, one that I would argue is expressed and reinterpreted in these three novels. Second, that rural spaces in Sri Lanka have been morally coded through an agrarian relationship with the environment. In other words, growing rice and chena is traditional, nationally Sri Lankan, and forms a normative land ethic. From here, I argue that these three novels can help us understand some of the nuances of the ways in which agricultural Sri Lanka has been represented. Rather than treating these texts as cultural productions of this dominant ideology, that is the one that More outlines, I read these texts dialogically. In this way, we can look at these three works as complicit in perpetuating this narrative tradition but also we can scrutinize the novels for the ways they challenge or resist entrenched ideas about agrarian Sri Lanka.

## **The Construction of Masculinity and Bravery in the Context of Combat in Southern Sri Lanka**

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In recent times, some commentators have called Sri Lanka a ‘failed state.’ Whether this definition has any validity or not, the point of departure for that definition was the fact that the process of nation building undertaken since independence had effectively failed in the context of interethnic conflict and its militarization. It is axiomatic that the nation building processes have not been able to formulate both a nation state and national identity that gives relatively uncontested and equal representation to the different segments of the Sri Lankan population, be they ethnic, cultural, religious or other groups. In this context, the idea and reality of a fragmented nation state emerged, particularly since Independence whose territory and sense of identity was militarily challenged by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam for over thirty years, and the notion of national identity and the nation itself has come to be equated with the perception of history and cultural embodiments articulated by the discourse of Sinhala nationalism.

In the context of the political scenario briefly outlined above, this paper will focus on the emergence of a powerful military machine in the country since the 1980s and its consequences in terms of popular constructions and explorations of masculinities and ideas of ‘bravery’ specifically located in the backdrop of combat between Sri Lankan military units and the LTTE. My specific focus will be to understand how notions of masculinity are articulated and projected as part of the public persona of combat units of the state. To a lesser extent I will also attempt to draw parallels with the LTTE’s own constructions and articulations of masculinity in the context of its own regime of institutionalized heroism and memory as well. However, the military’s own articulation of what it is to be masculine is not necessarily always conflated with other notions of masculinity articulated with popular media particularly with regards to iconic figures of the local pop world. I will attempt to understand what the point of departure for these different forms of masculinities are, and how they gain recognition, and finally show how the military’s own articulation of masculinity is not merely a gender ideal but a ‘national’ preoccupation that is closely conflated with the state’s ideas of power and invincibility in the context of war.