

## An Appropriate Sacrifice? Perfections of Generosity and the Politics of Elders Charity in Sri Lanka's Gerontological Turn

Tom Widger<sup>1</sup> and Sarah Kabir<sup>2</sup>

1. Department of Anthropology, Durham University, UK

2. Department of International Development, London School of Economics, UK

Anthropological research into individual and societal experiences of ageing has developed along two broad lines. The first has been an effort to challenge the idea that human beings age in biologically and socially similar ways regardless of cultural context, while the second has been to explore the moral and political implications and ambivalences of changing elder care arrangements, especially as they pertain to relationships between the family, state, and market. This paper draws from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in a charitable elders' home in Colombo, Sri Lanka, to describe the effects of an ageing population on popular Buddhist giving practices, and the effects of those practices on the ways in which the elderly population is being imagined. The material shows how elders' homes, amidst some controversy, are increasingly being seen as appropriate places for the gifting of *matakadāna*, leading to the fusion of charitable and sacrificial traditions of *dāna* and innovations in ritual practice. We argue that the relationship that exists between elders' homes and *dāna* is illustrative of an emerging thanatopolitics attributable to the challenges presented by a growing population of the dependent elderly.

Keywords: Ageing population, Buddhism, Charity, Politics