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Book Review of, Women in Post-Independence Sri Lanka

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who work in this sector will balance their natural desire for self-protection, self-advancement and concern for their families on the one hand with the genuine concern for the poor and the powerless on the other. The challenge is for these organizations to develop policies and practices that will help achieve such a balance.

Altogether, this book is a valuable contribution to the study of voluntary organizations.

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MATHEW ZACHARIAH

WOMEN IN POST-INDEPENDENCE SRI LANKA. *Edited by Swarna Jayaweera.* Thousand Oaks (California): Sage Publications. 2002. 372 pp. (Tables.) US\$49.00, cloth, ISBN 0-7619-9503-X; US\$24.95, paper, ISBN 0-7619-9504-8.

This comprehensive report on the status of women in post-independence Sri Lanka consists of two parts. The first part contains seven scholarly essays that examine large-scale changes in women's political, economic and social positions since Sri Lanka achieved independence in 1948. The second part of the book includes 16 life histories of women born close to this watershed moment.

In Part I, contributors consider a series of topics bearing on women's power and status. Discussing historical changes in the political arena, Savitri Goonesekere notes that implementation and enforcement lag behind a series of progressive constitutional and legal reforms. Radhika Coomaraswamy compares pre- and post-independence legislative and judicial positions on issues such as rape, incest, harassment, trafficking, abortion and domestic violence. She also explores how armed conflict affects women as victims, refugees and combatants. Jayaweera chronicles how free universal education has enhanced women's access to schooling, but identifies only small increases in employment opportunities. She includes class, ethnicity, English-language ability and limiting gender stereotypes in her analysis. Daya Samarasinghe furnishes copious details on women's health and welfare, including statistical data on life expectancy, mortality, nutrition, reproductive choice and problems of the elderly. Wimala de Silva generalizes about family structure in different ethnic communities. Finally, Jayawardena and Malathi de Alwis provide a nuanced introduction to the depth and breadth of the women's movement in Sri Lanka. They discuss activists' relationships with the colonial and post-colonial state and explore the anti-feminist backlash from leftist and nationalist groups. The essays present valuable historical perspectives on ongoing trends and changes, with suggestions for future action. Collectively, these local experts remark that much progress has been made

since independence, but much also remains to be done.

The book offers good resources for scholars interested in comparing information from Sri Lanka with similar data from other countries, but does not itself contain a comparative aspect. As the essay bibliographies clearly illustrate, the authors write within the local social science context, occasionally citing United Nations and World Health Organization resources. In general, however, they do not engage explicitly with international feminist debates. Readers may find the book more useful for its factual content than for its analysis, interpretation or direct contribution to ongoing theoretical discussions. Nevertheless, the essays provide much valuable and thought-provoking material.

In the life histories in Part II, 16 women consider the changes that have occurred in their lives over the past half a century. The interviewers have selected subjects from many backgrounds—elite, middle class and poor; rural and urban—as well as women who have survived the trauma of two internal insurgencies and the civil war. The editor does not address issues of methodology or the recruitment of participants. The evocative qualitative data provide an interesting counterpoint to the quantitative elements in the first part of the book. These life stories will, however, make more sense to readers who are already familiar with the Sri Lankan context and can follow the richly textured references to political parties, locations, schools, films and favourite foods. The section seems somewhat disjointed from the rest of the book, although a short follow-up discussion helpfully provides interpretation and analysis.

In summary, this edited volume offers copious and comprehensive details on women's lives in post-independence Sri Lanka and will, despite its drawbacks, be a good reference book for Sri Lanka specialists and scholars interested in comparative gender analysis.

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IMPERIALISM AND THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT: 1914-1964.

By Partha Sarathi Gupta. New Delhi, Thousand Oaks (California), London (UK): Sage Publications. 2002. xlix, 444 pp. US\$65.00, cloth. ISBN 0-7619-9659-1.

This volume, though the above bibliographical information does not indicate the fact, is actually a second and new edition of a study initially published in 1975, when Partha Sarathi Gupta was in the relatively early stages of a distinguished academic career which lasted until his death in August 1999. Unusual for a young Indian historian who completed his university education in the heady years following the political independence