

**Into the Lives of Elder's Home:
Reflection on Ageing and Care in an Institutional Setting in Sri Lanka**

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How does the reality of 'afterlife' act on person's experience of time and ageing? With this broad interest in mind, my aim is to find the language of writing and speaking about ageing and care in terms other than, or in addition to, those of a diagnosis, disease, health care or social security, but as a set of local and contingent practices rooted in particular culture-historical background. While afterlife and transmigration is a clichéd theme in the anthropological studies of Theravada Buddhist society including that of Sri Lanka, I try to describe them from elderly people's perspective by looking at how such concepts create their world, or intersect with their daily lives, which can be full of challenges in this ever rapidly changing society.

Indeed in Sri Lanka, having experienced fertility and mortality decline along with international migration during the last few decades, there is a loosening of intergenerational reciprocity based on inheritance-related kinship obligations. Government has pleaded for the retrieval of family or 'traditional community' as a primary caretaker for the aged, while the role of the 'social' in the sphere of elderly care was neglected either by the researchers or the policymakers, leaving a rather dualistic 'State-Or-Family' notion unquestioned.

It is in such a backdrop that I began my fieldwork sticking to the lives of inmates residing in *mahalu madama* or Elder's Home in coastal Sri Lanka, whose lives are supported immensely by the 'social' factors. Most of them are established by philanthropic individual or group, and are supported by neighborhood community in its daily provision of free meals conceptualized as '*dana*,' to which elders respond with lengthy ritual for the givers and their departed kin. Unlike the previous studies on *mahalu madama* that have revealed the socio-economic factors for *entering* home, my concern is how people, once departed from one's family members, can positively create the meaning of ageing and care within such an alternative social relationship in urbanizing context.

In this presentation, I seek to share some reflections on the theme of 'practice of care' from my ongoing fieldwork. Particularly, I will look at inmates' daily interaction with other inmates, floor staffs, *dane* providers, religious images and so on, which I will refer to as 'multidirectional care relationship,' maintained by some cultural means such as the usage of quasi-familial appellation, soothing admonition, or exchange of goods, services and wishes. On the other hand, example of maladjustment or weakened relationship accompanying the degradation of bodily-mentally health is indicative of restricted or asymmetrical nature of this care relationship, which seems to be conditioned by the evaluation of the person, especially of one's religious virtuousness.

Key Words: ageing, religious practices, institutionalization, Interactionism