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"We Must Make Men"[1]: Constructions of Masculinities and Femininities in Parker's Village Folk Tales of Ceylon

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Abstract

Prior to the advent of print capitalism, people of ancient Sri Lanka used folklore -- 'folktale' is one of the various forms of folklore – to create and recreate the sense of a larger nation with a political hierarchy and moral order. Scholar, Michael Roberts (2002), associates the creation of nationalism in Sri Lanka with pre-modern forms of visual (*e.g.*, wall paintings) and oral modes (e.g., storytelling) of communication. Folklorists in Sri Lanka have positioned folk tales – and folklore - as a national heritage. The present research adds a gender dimension to the already existing scholarship on Sri Lankan folktales, by analyzing a sample of folk tales for modalities of gender creation – both masculine and feminine. This research will re-read the folk tales in the sample, for acts of gender, with careful attention paid to gendered functions, performance, engagements and positioning in the tales. This is a preliminary study related to a larger study and it attempts to fill an existing scholarly gap in the study of gender dimensions of folk tales in Sri Lanka.

Introduction

Scholarly studies in folklore have identified the term 'folktale' as one of the various forms of folklore--myths, legends, folksongs, proverbs, riddles, games, dances, chain letters and autograph book verse, etc, being the other forms. A folktale that engages a reader/listener, either in print or oral mode, could be one of the many versions or variations of the same story that could also exist in other spaces, cultures or nations. Most of the folktales that Henry Parker collected from southern villagers of Sri Lanka in the late nineteenth century are also told (in re-adopted forms) in Punjab, Kashmir, Africa, and

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[1]*After creating the earth, this was God Vishnu's first thought. Quoted from The Making of the Great Earth (LPSLT 01), the first tale in Parker's Village Folk Tales of Ceylon, Volume I.*

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the Middle East. Thus, tracing the origin of a folktale or the socio-historical context of its creation would be problematic. Regardless of their indeterminate origins, a folktale, wherever it is narrated, heard and enjoyed would be about people's "real-life experience" Wickramasinghe (1945), or would help to vent out "anxieties" Dundes (1980); they would entertain people with "exciting events", "heroic deeds," "arouse interest in history" and "provide models for religious and ethical perfection" Deigh (1989). Folktales also have gender dimensions. Andalusian folktales and Japanese folktales (particularly Animal-Wife tales) are biased towards the male sex (Brandes, 1982; Kobayashi, 2015). The present study wishes to foreground and analyze the gender aspects in a sample of Sinhala folktales collected and later transcribed into written form by a colonial officer in late nineteenth century Ceylon - Sri Lanka, H. Parker, under the title *Village Folk Tales of Ceylon.* In keeping with the accepted norms of folkloristics this study has classified the tales under scrutiny into Tale Types (see Appendix I) and Episodic Structures (see Appendix II)[2]. From these episodic structures the gender-specific behavior has been analyzed and interrogated with respect to the thematics of the tale. *Part I* of the *Volume I* of *Village Folk Tales of Ceylon*, where Parker lists 37 folktales under the sub-heading, *Stories of the Cultivating Caste and the Vaeddas,* form the basis for this paper, which is the preliminary initiative of a larger study of the same nature, involving all three volumes of Parker's tales.

Theoretical framework

Though Sinhala folklore has attracted scholarly attention in Sri Lanka (Disanayaka, 2012; Ratnapala, 1991; Wickramasinghe, 1970; Wijesekera, 1987; Vitharana 1993,) there have been no extensive studies, gender-related or otherwise, on Parker's folktales, which easily forms the biggest collection of tales ever collected in the south of the country, which prompted Ratnapala (1991) to position Parker's folktales as the "only worthwhile collection of folktales available to us in any language". However, there is one unpublished conference paper by Fernando (2002), titled *Representation of Women in the Folktales of H. Parker*, where the females in Parker's tales have come under focus for their presence/absence in the tales alongside males, and for their character attributes.

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[2] *The present paper is part of a larger study where all 266 folktales of Parker listed in the three volumes would be given Tale Type Indexes, and their Episodic Structures written down.*

Fernando locates the number of male and female characters in all the tales of Parker and tables them for easy reference: in *Volume I*, there are 78 males against 43 females; *Volume II*, 115 males for 87 females; *Volume III* 98 to 78. Taken in total, this table shows that, in all three volumes, the male characters have a presence that is sixteen percent (16%) higher than female characters. Fernando thus argues that women have an "inferior status" within the folktales. One immediate shortcoming of his counting-character method is that he has not defined whether his male/female 'characters' are primary (protagonists of the plot), secondary (aid the main protagonist/s in the plot) or neutral (are merely present in the plot). At the same time, there are characters in the tales who assume gender disguises to avoid danger; there are animals and super natural beings that operate with a gendered identity; there are females and males who appear in the tales in groups (eg: seven sisters and seven brothers); and, there are females who die and are reborn in the same tale as females. Fernando has not identified or acknowledged these complexities of characterization in his gender count. At the same time, he does not question the statistical insignificance of the difference between the presence of male and female characters (16 %). Perhaps, a difference of 30% and above could be an adequate percentage to base the kind of conclusion that he has arrived at.

Fernando also surveys the character attributes of females in the stories. A summary of these attributes would be as follows: female is the guardian of the household, she lacks intelligence and is greedy, she is cunning and dishonest, she is unfaithful, she is beaten by men, marriage is her ultimate aspiration in life though she is free to choose her husband; in some of the tales, she is also portrayed as being wise, bold and daring. These attributes lead Fernando to conclude that Parker's folktales promote patriarchal ideology and are not conducive to female liberation. As interesting and as ground breaking as his paper is, as far as Parker's folktales are concerned, Fernando's analysis requires further probing and raises more questions. Take for instance, his observations on marriage: "woman's ultimate aspiration is marriage" and women are "free to choose their husbands." Does that mean that 'marriage' for a female in the folktales is a self-determining and autonomous bond? If she has 'an inferior status' across the folktales, what would be her status in a 'marriage'? What about the women who are 'bold,' and 'daring'? Do these 'ideal' females imitate such qualities only to reinforce the superiority of the male gender? Though the present study is not as large as Fernando's to interrogate these questions comprehensively, they will form its backdrop as this study

undertakes its own reading of both the masculine and feminine gender in the tales.

Summarized observations on Parker, and the *Village Folk Tales of Ceylon*

Parker has collected a total of 266 folktales and arranged them under three categories: a) Stories of the Cultivating Caste and Vaeddas b) Stories of the Lower Castes (namely, Tom-Tom Beaters, Durayas, Rodiyas and Kinnaras) c) stories from the Western Province and India. His categorization is not without problems: Parker does inform the reader whether a tale listed under the category *cultivating castes*, is a tale told of or told by a member of that caste; Vaedda is not a caste category; and his categorization (c) is based on geography. Parker does not seem to find his caste categorization problematic, nor does he explain where he obtained his understanding of Sinhala caste classifications. In a personal anecdote, recorded in Volume I of *Village Folk Tales* titled *The Foolishness of the Tom-Tom Beaters,* Parker encourages existing cultural stereotypes about this caste with a story about how he convinced a tom-tom beater that rats were born out of eggs. Parker uses this anecdote as the starting point for his stories listed under tom-tom beaters, all of which, he says are based on the "foolish doings" (Parker 238) of the drummers. All this could be interpreted as Parker's seeming neutrality with regard to, as well as his complicity in upholding, the Sinhala caste system as well as cultural stereotypes about particular castes.

The colonial mindset of Parker, who as a colonial official was duty-bound to uphold the British civilization and culture, is evident in his *Introduction* to *Village Folk Tales of Ceylon*. Here, Parker evinces little respect for native cultures and implicitly justifies the 'noble' British colonizing mission by presenting the 'natives' as illiterate, ignorant and superstitious.

Parker's other major work, *Ancient Ceylon,* and his *Introduction* to *Village Folk Tales of Ceylon,* also demonstrate his gendered worldview. He restricts description of females in 'ancient Ceylon' to just three sketchy paragraphs in his 695-page book *Ancient Ceylon*. Parker does not find 'objectionable' some of the gendered social, cultural and labor practices that he found in Ceylon. In defense of Parker, it could be argued that there was no requirement for him to be more enlightened on gender than the majority of his countrymen of the time. What is relevant to the present study is the obvious gender dimensions and the obvious gender dynamics in the tales he chose to compile but which escape commentary on his part.

The majority of the tales Parker has collected have been written down (in Sinhala) by the narrator and the villagers employed by Parker to collect them. He himself has written down a few stories as they were narrated to him. The stories that appear in the print form "are practically literal translations of the written Sinhalese originals, perhaps it may be thought in some respects, too literal. " [3] Parker has not recorded the context in which the stories were narrated, the gender of the teller/listener of the stories which are essential requirements for collecting of folktales.

Findings

Representation of men and women

Female as a 'threat' and male as a caste-marked category

Parker's first tale in *Volume I* is titled *The Making of the Great Earth* (Tale Index LPSLT 01) where three male gods – *Vishnu*, *Saman* and *Rahu* -- create the earth and its first gendered beings, *Brahmana* and a female; *Brahmana* is created first, given breath by the gods and he converses with his creators. On the penultimate paragraph of this tale, *Brahmana* is asked to create a female for his "assistance" (Parker 41), as if she is a mere afterthought of this all-male creation project. The first male on the newly formed earth is not a neutral entity – he is marked by caste; and in the caste hierarchy of Sri Lanka he occupies the top-most rung, his identification, *Brahamana,* carries connotations of religious leaning and exceptional learning.[4] This tale endorses inter-gender bias (male is created first, female, later for his assistance) and intra-gender bias (the first male is from a valorized caste, therefore, his presence implies a hierarchy in the male order), thus reinforcing the superiority of a particular type of male and inferiority of females; it draws the gods, valorized and venerated by people of Sri Lanka up-to-date, into its discriminatory project. Parker also features two other creation tales, with questionable gender representations, in the long foot notes to this story. In the tale *Servant Maid & the Sky* (LPSLT 02), a working class female (*servant maid*) sets in motion the events that created the present state of affairs on the earth. In the beginning, the sky touched the rooftops and stars lit up houses with their light. A female servant brings chaos into this world with a reckless act: annoyed with the clouds frequently obstructing the broom, she hits the sky with it. Shamed by this affront, the sky separates from the

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[3] *Quoted from the Introduction to Village Folk Tales of Ceylon, H Parker page 26*
[4] *Interview with Prof. J.B. Disanayaka, 24th March 2015*

earth. Female aggression is pushed to the forefront of the story: culturally, a female expressing her annoyance with a broom is considered an insulting act.[5] The question is: how would the sky react if the offender is a male (servant)? Impulsive female aggression and the absence of males (there are no males in this story!) seem to have contributed to a disagreeable state of affairs. In the third creation tale (LPSLT 03: *God Sakra & Jackfruit*), social division of labor is stressed when God Sakra uses a female as a cook (assistant?) to teach men in the newly formed earth how to eat Jack Fruit, thus relegating the female to a passive agent in a grand male project.

All three creation tales suspend linear, historical or "profane time" Davies (1995) and return to the beginning of events or "sacred time" Davies (1995). Suspension of 'profane time' and return to mythical 'sacred time,' Davies suggests[6], is a reaction to a threat faced by primitive 'men.' This argument offers an alternative reading of the creation tales: the urgent need to valorize a *Brahmana* male over females and other males in the tale *The Making of the Great Earth,* could be understood as a response to a 'threat': a threat from females? - and from low caste males?; in the other two creation tales, the act of representing the females in the negative (as an architect of chaos and a passive entity) lends itself to the interpretation that males feared females. Why would a select group of males (cultivators and vaeddas) seem to fear females, and males from the lower castes? Or, what is the pragmatic impulse that could have prompted these males to create inter/ intra gender hierarchy? A possible answer could be the human need for perfection. A human being's need for 'perfection,' argues Coupe (2007), creates "powerfully imaginative stories" and "systematic violence" Coupe (2007). The 'systematic violence' inflicted upon females in the tales help buttress the male gender. The female body becomes the fertile space in which the male gender gives itself identity. The low-caste males are the fodder with which the Brahmana nourishes his caste purity - all by 'himself' Brahmana is nothing. Though the creation tales seemingly carry the idea of the superiority of particular males, they concurrently transmit the anxieties and fears of those males.

Parker's ordering of these three tales - as the first tales in a collection whose scope is national ('Ancient Ceylon') – is

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[5] *One of the Prime Ministerial candidates at the recently concluded Parliamentary Elections urged females to use the 'elapatha' (a type of broom used to sweep a smaller area, usually a toilet), if his main opposition candidate came to their houses seeking votes.*

[6] *He quotes from Mircea Eliade's text, The Myth of the Eternal Return*

questionable. The act of placing creation tales with obvious gender bias at the beginning of the book, and not elsewhere, attests to Parkers seeming participation in the gendered and caste-based worldviews that percolate the tales.

Depiction of marriage

Marriage is an obvious site where gender relationships are played out. In the folktales under study, heteronormative marriage (the only form of marriage found in the tales) finds many different modes of representation. In the tale, *The Golden Kaekiri Fruit* (LPSLT 13), a woman boldly asks a widowed male: "What indeed! Why don't you invite me?" (Parker 117) - a suggestion that she wants to be his wife, to which he replies "Ha. Stop here" (Parker 117). This is the model of marriage practiced by the cultivators found in the tales: marriage is female initiated, lacks emotional dialogue or sensual element, is simple and practical. At the same time, for these females, marriage is a claustrophobic affair located inside the house and defined by household duties; males hold power over them, can beat them for a fault and also vent their frustrations upon them.

To illustrate the above, seven sisters go in search of male partners in the tale *Tamarind Tikka* (LPSLT 07) and marry seven cultivating males. However, the initiative taken by these females is not reflected in their post-married life: their lives are confined to their houses and the river; they only engage in household tasks and violently punish their only sister-in-law for failing in her household duties; they abandon their homes immediately after their husbands are killed in a revenge attack by the main protagonist, Tamarind Tikka. In the tale *The White Turtle* (LPSLT 22) two sisters seeking marriage partners declare their purpose as: "We are going to a country where they give to eat and to wear" (Parker 102). This declaration is also used by a male who seeks employment in the tale *The Prince and the Yakka* (LPSLT 14), thus suggesting that marriage holds practical concerns for a female. This is possibly, the reason why six out of the seven sisters in *Tamarind Tikka* abandon their houses and run away the moment their husbands are killed. Despite the static nature of married life and its shortcomings for the females, they still actively seek marriages in the tales. One possible reading of this tendency is that marriage, for a female, is a means of employment or livelihood. Since females to a great extent do not engage in the production of wealth (by cultivating, animal rearing, robbing, engaging in trade) they need marriage to have access to wealth – and, therefore, basic needs of life. Thus, the female hunts for marriage (like hunting for a

job), asserts the conditions of employment (food and clothes), performs defined duties (household chores), and deserts her employer the moment he dies. In a marriage, one act that females stage-manage for their own benefit is an illness. When a female suffering from an illness demands a food item as part of the cure, her husband responds immediately, even if that demand is cruel and, at times, impossible. Females in the tales frequently use an illness as an occasion to seek revenge or harm another female. In *The Golden Kaekiri Fruit,* Mahage makes cruel demands of her husband, which results in the violent death of the daughter of his first marriage. In the tale *The White Turtle,* a female regularly urges her two husbands (she killed her sister and married her husband as well, particularly because they were wealthy) to bring her desired food items while feigning illnesses. Both males oblige. Seemingly, this manipulative act to achieve an objective could be seen/read as agency for females. But, within the tales, such acts are represented in the negative and the manipulator is usually punished in the end – both females in the tales quoted above meet with violent ends.

Depictions of aristocratic/royal women

In the tales involving the royal princes and princesses, marriages, far from being practical and mundane, also offer a sensual take. Males and females of this class usually fall in love after an act of voyeurism at a bathing place. In the tale, *The Turtle Dove* (LPSLT 07)*,* a princess falls in love with a prince at a bathing place. She informs her father about her chosen prince and the father arranges the marriage. A princess gets physically attracted to a prince at a bathing place in the tale *The Prince and the Yakka.* Thus the river and the bathing place become a site of sensuality, and marriage is usually initiated by females.

In the tale *The Glass Princess,* a royal prince sends his sword to represent him at a marriage ceremony with a choice for the selected princess – she could marry the sword and come to him or she could refuse to do so. The princess opts to marry the sword with the reasoning: "Even a deaf man or a lame man would be good enough for me. Therefore I must be married." (Parker 50). This statement suggests that marriage, even for a royal princess, is a mandatory act and emotional compatibility might not matter in some cases. The princes in some of the tales marry more than one female and such practices are considered natural since none of the princesses in the tales object to that practice. The father of a princess usually sets an exchange value for a princess, as in the tale *The Prince and the Princess* (LPSLT 11*),* where the king demands a well full of gold from the prince who seeks his daughter's hand. The father of the princess

in *The Glass Princess* (LPSLT 20) sets next-to-impossible tasks for suitors who seek the hand of his beautiful daughter, thus suggesting that a prince seeking a partner needs to overcome the economic and physical obstacles placed by potential fathers-in-laws. A prince would also have to be vigilant against other males (usually princes and, in some cases, low caste males who are pretenders to the throne) who would kill him in order to possess his wife. Such destructive acts are usually neutralized through pre-emptive action initiated by princesses. The alert and expeditious princess in *The Prince and the Princess* (herself riding a horse and carrying a sword) kills the horse of a kinnara man who attempts to kidnap her and also causes a diversion to escape from four vaeddas who pursue her for the same purpose. Later, this princess disguised as a male teacher, orders his (her) students to kill both these parties, thus indirectly participating in the death of males – males who are beneath her class. This is the first instance in the tales where a female engages in an indirect act of killing males to protect her family. The princess in *The Glass Princess* helps her husband overcome two parties (his brothers and a vaedda) who attempt to kill him and abduct her. Thus, unlike the cultivator’s wives, the royal wives are won by their husbands with heroic efforts involving economic costs and physical toil. Even such hard-won happiness has to be regularly protected from other males who would attempt to possess their wives – and the initiatives of undermining such males are usually taken by the wives. The royal wives, unlike the wives of the cultivators, play a participatory role in their marriages, particularly when it comes to defending their husbands. However, their participation in this act of self-defense, is stage-managed: they can neutralize a threat from low caste males even by inflicting indirect physical/verbal harm; but if the offender is a male from her own class, they can only evade him. Thus, the marriage of royal princesses involves female bodies being objectified as economic entities with exchange values, usually regulated by males. Male bodies are subject to acts of voyeurism, which sets off the events leading to this exchange. A female usually takes the initiative to protect her marriage from other males, though she would allow another female to enter her marriage as another partner of her husband. However, a female wielding a sword, riding a horse and taking pre-emptive action to protect a polygamous husband is not a female with agency, rather ‘she’ is a ‘female’ created by males to stage-manage a male dominated world. ‘She’ only idealizes the male gender and reinforces its superiority, and, therefore, need not exist in the ‘real’ world beyond the text.

Females absorbing male frustrations

The female of the cultivating family could also find herself as an absorber of male frustration as in the case of Nagul Munna, the eponymous chena cultivator, who suffers a series of misfortunes while cultivating a chena: his chena partner is killed in a fire and the devastating nature of the fire makes the villagers think that Nagul Munna has died. He, thereafter, makes a living by acting as a devil and kills other men in order to prolong his devil-act. When he is finally caught, he holds his wife responsible for all his misfortunes and kills her. Her death comes in the penultimate paragraph of the story as a mater-of-fact event. The story does not dwell on the aftermath of her death or suggest a penalty for this crime.

Punishment of women for violating accepted codes of behavior

Matalange Loku Appu, a dim-witted inefficient cultivator, convinces gullible tom-tom beaters to beat up older women in their village with a particular club and imprison them in a room in order to convert them to younger females. The tom-tom beaters end up killing many women in their village (they repeat this act twice using the different sides of the club) and the tale treats their deaths as a part of a comic act. No remorse or penalty is suggested in the tale. Both the above tales suggest that female lives are expendable in fictitious spaces created for (male?) entertainment.

Another tale that endorses a gender stereotype with regard to females is the tale *The Faithless Princess* (LPSLT 16), where God Sakra intervenes in the affairs of a prince who refuses to marry because he holds the opinion that "women are faithless" (Parker 145). God Sakra creates a female out of his own body in order to convince this prince to marry. This female, however, becomes a free agent of her own destiny when she engages in an illegitimate affair with a supernatural being (*a nagaya*) and attempts to kill the prince. The prince beheads her with the help of another female – his sister. This female's pursuit of her own destiny, only reinforces the gender stereotype ascribed to her kind by her husband – faithlessness.

Illicit affairs are also found in cultivating families in the tales. In the tale *The Millet Trader* (LPSLT 06) cooking, which is the primary labor ascribed to the females in the tales, becomes a symbolic act of engagement between the female and her secret lover. This lover comes to her house in the night when her husband is guarding the chena. She cooks and keeps the best food for him, and he consumes the food in darkness. Thus, the act of feeding in darkness becomes a symbolic act for love and sensuality. Though females take lovers in

the tales, the cultivating men do not follow that trend, possibly a suggestion that the males are serious and consistent in their relationships. Infidelity usually carries harsh punishments, and in this tale the woman is beaten by the man. In the *Gamarala's Cakes* (LPSLT 39) a woman engages in affairs with two lovers, and feeds them rice cakes in the night when her husband guards the Chena. Her immediate neighbor is aware of her infidelities and tells Gamarala, the chief protagonist in the tale, that the best way to eat cakes is to pretend to be her lover. Thus, cooking and consuming of food appear to be a trope or a euphemism for sexual acts within the tales, allowing females powerful influence over that sphere.

Caste issues

Females do not tolerate insults by males of lower castes. In *Millet Trader* the eponymous trader is insulted by his host's wife as he attempts to disrupt her meeting with her lover. "Be off! Be off! Rodiya!" (Parker 65) she thus chases him away.[7] The trader does not challenge her, but takes his revenge by informing the husband of her infidelity. A princess in the tale *The Turtle Dove* insults and threatens the anti-hero of the tale, a shrewd and untrustworthy hettiya who lustfully asks her to share a meal with him. The male does not respond to her insults.

Masculinity is inscribed into caste and ethnicity in the sample of tales under scrutiny. Low caste males are depicted in a negative light in the tales told by cultivators. Matalange Loku Appu, a destructive and dim-witted man deceives tom-tom beaters into believing that it is possible to convert older females into younger ones using a club. The gullible drummers trust him twice before realizing their folly. The victims then kidnap Matalange Loku Appu and force him into a sack to be drowned in a river. While carrying the sack, their attention is diverted by the beating of drums in the jungle. During that short respite, Matalange Loku Appu tells a curious passerby, a "Muhammadan trader in clothes" (Parker 100), that he is forcibly taken to be made King. The trader willingly exchanges places with Matalange Loku Appu, only to be thrown into the river by the unsuspecting tom-tom beaters. The protagonist steals all the clothes of the trader and convinces the tom-tom beaters that he obtained the clothes from the bottom of the river. The tom-tom beaters then

[7] It is difficult to ascertain from the tale whether the Millet Trader who is thus insulted is a man from the Rodi caste. He is possibly not, because he cheats a lot of cultivators and become rich in the end. Such happy endings are usually not granted to low caste people in the tales of cultivators.

ask him to throw them into the river in the same fashion; he obliges willingly and confiscates all their belongings. In a similar fashion, Tamarind Tikka, who is taken to be drowned by his uncles as an act of revenge, tricks a gullible washerman into exchanging places with him in a tied-up sack. The washerman drowns and Tamarind Tikka takes all his clothes. The kinnara man and four vaeddas who attempt to forcibly kidnap a princess in *The Prince and the Princess* are ambushed and killed violently. A hettiya (man from the trading caste) in the tale *The Turtle Dove* is untrustworthy, shrewd and cruel. "Tambi-elder-brother" (Parker 207) suffers serious head injuries by an inadvertent act of Gamarala in the tale *Gamarala's Cakes*. In the tales *The Jackal Devata* (LPSLT 28) *a*nd *The Kinnara and the Parrot* (LPSLT 26), an animal and birds show more intelligence than tom-tom beaters as they outsmart the low caste men. The tales absorb caste and ethnic tensions into their thematics. Males marked by low caste or a different ethnic label are systematically bound to stereotypes. They usually sow chaos in the tales and are made to experience violent deaths, dire financial loss or humiliation

If low caste males are represented as those lacking common sense and intelligence, some of the female characters too are portrayed in a similar light. The Millet Trader entices a woman to elope with him with the promise that the millet in his village taste better. He steals all her valuables. She finds it difficult to trace him because of his name -- *Pereda*, meaning day-before-yesterday. When she complains to her husband about the theft and the name of the thief, he beats her up with the assumption that she is a liar – if something was stolen day-before-yesterday how come she did not tell him day-before-yesterday? The trader deceives another woman, who is grieving the loss of her daughter, by pretending to have come from the world of the dead. He asks for all her jewellery so that he could marry her daughter in that world. The woman obliges.

There are females who contrast with these stereotyped characters as well. The Glass Princess possesses beauty, magic (she can fly, take any disguise, has access to rare medicine) and can use a sword to defend herself. She can even predict events and thus foils an attempt by the prince's brothers to kill the prince and abduct her. She also uses her magical powers to rescue the prince from a vaedda who attempts the same feat as the prince's brothers. She plays a significant role in the happiness and political power that her prince obtains in the end. The princess in the tale *The Prince and the Princess* fights lone battles with a king, a kinnara and vaeddas to be with her prince who lacks initiative, energy and who is lazy. She is

the only princess who indirectly kills males – all of whom are of lower castes. However, both these strong female characters serve a male agenda. Both princesses perform typically male tasks like riding horses, using swords, only to save and restore power to a male. However, the Gamarala's wife, in the tale *Gamarala's Cakes,* known as Gama Mahage, transcends other females in the tales in terms of her independent acts. When Gamarala demands that she cook cakes, she ignores him. When he asks her again, she cooks them, but their sons eat them. Gama Mahage, when the husband confronts her about the cakes, pushes him and behaves aggressively, prompting him to ask another woman to make cakes for him.

There is social division of labor in the tales. All the females in the tales studied are engaged in household tasks like cooking, sewing, fetching water and drying crops. Males engage in cultivation, trading, teaching, sooth saying, war and theft. This trend is also found in the animal tales, where animals with feminine gender care for the young and occupy the kitchen.

One story (LPSLT 37: *How a Yaka and Man Fought*) alludes to homosexuality. The episodes of the story are couched in subtlety and therefore this analysis would take a closer look at those episodic elements. The story concerns three men who went shooting. One man deliberately separates himself from the others in the jungle without informing them "for a certain purpose" (134). The 'purpose' is obviously to answer a call of nature – and either the narrator of the tale, or Parker had omitted that. In none of the other tales is the concept of answering a call of nature mentioned either as part of a plot or as a natural event. A yaka "seizes" (134) this man (referred to as 'the separated man' hereafter) and "began to push against him" (134). When the others chase the yaka and shoot it they find the separated man's body "having gone quite slimy"; he is also unconscious. When the separated man regains consciousness, after spells uttered by a Yaksa Vedarala (exorcist), he recounts his experience as follows: "A Yaka having come, seizing me pressed against me to roll over to the ground" (135). These acts, strongly point towards an assault of a homosexual nature. Sexuality alluded to in all the tales is heteronormative thus homosexuality would be considered the deviant mode of sexuality. A supernatural being of the repulsive order (yakas are usually associated with destruction in the tales and at times, they are helpful to the human beings) suggestive of sexual encounter being abnormal.

Conclusion

Parker's folktales, just as much as they are aesthetically motivated creations of a culture, are sites where gender tensions are played out. Feminine gender is the marked category in the tales; the female is frequently regulated within the tales, either by crafting her in the negative (faithless), or in the passive mode (assistance), or modeling her on a perfect 'male' in order to idealize the male gender. The modalities of this creation inform the reader more about the male gender than the female. Her negativity/passivity allows the teller of the tale to create a male of the opposite character, a virtuous victim. Her negativity/passivity becomes a site where a 'male' earns his existence, a kind of scaffolding that props 'him' up. Thus, the feminine threat becomes a simulated 'womb' for males, who also need further protection: 'he' needs to protect 'himself' from the deviant types of his own gender – 'males' from low castes and other ethnic groups. Selected females defeat these 'deviant males', who, in that supposedly victorious act, become the protectors (or mothers!) of the chosen 'males.' Village folk tales of Ceylon, thus, are textual sites where the male gender seems to make sense of its own existence by foregrounding itself. They are mirrors the male gender holds up to males' own insecurities. What the males could encounter when they read or listen to the tales are their own fears and frustrations.

Limitations of the present study

This study only considered the 37 tales listed under *Part I* of Volume I of Parker's *Village Folk Tales of Ceylon*. This is the initial part of a larger research to re-read all three volumes of Parker's folktales for gender constructions and therefore might not be fully representative of the gendered constructions found within the tales. This research acknowledges that there could have been 'distortions' in meaning or authorial intentions in the act of 'transliteration' by the compiler of the village folk tales despite his best intentions. This paper does not attempt to discover masculinities and femininities as a subjective or lived experience. Rather it analyses cultural ideas, symbols and narratives that imply and are located in a putative gendered subjectivity and perspective.

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Appendix I

Tale Type Index of Parker's Village Folk Tales of Ceylon – Volume I; Part I: Stories of the Cultivating Caste and Vaeddas

This Tale Type Index is based on Japanese folklorist Koji Inda's Tale Types[8]. LPSLT stands for Lal-Parker-Sri Lankan-Tale. The bold title is the Tale Type – which is "a traditional tae that has an independent existence."[9]. The title of the tale, the region from where it was collected and its relevant volume and page number in Parker's book are given underneath the tale type.

I: Creation Tales 01-03

LPSLT 01: Gods, the Earth, Man and Woman

1: The Making of the Great Earth (NWP) Vol I: 39-41

LPSLT 02: Servant Maid & the Sky

Vol I: 42 (footnotes)

LPSLT 03: God Sakra & Jackfruit

Vol I: 42 (footnotes)

II: Ordinary Folktales

LPSLT 04: Mother rewards and punishes

2: The Sun, Moon and the Great Paddy (NWP) Vol I: 44-45

LPSLT 05: Supernatural help

3: The Story of Senasura (NWP) Vol I: 46-48

LPSLT 06: Misunderstanding language

6: The Millet Trader (NWP) Vol I: 64-70

10: Matalange Loku Appu (NWP) Vol I: 98-10

LPSLT 07: Revenge of a neglected boy

9: Tamarind Tikka (NWP) Vol I: 91-96

LPSLT 08: A man who killed many men and his wife

21: Nagul-Munna (NWP) Vol I: 157-160

LPSLT 09: Father and son who dreamed

12: The Kitul Seeds (NWP) Vol I: 183

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[8] *Kobayashi, F. Japanese Animal-Wife Tales. Peter Lang: New York. 2015. Print.*
[9] *Thompson, S. The Folktale. University of California Press: California, 1977. Print.*

III: Tales about Royalty

LPSLT 10: Strong Princess

4: The Glass Princess (NWP) Vol I: 49-57

LPSLT11: Princess who kills to protect her prince

8: The Prince and the Princess (NWP) Vol I: 84-90

LPSLT 12: Prince as a slave of hettiya

7: The Turtle Dove (NWP) Vol I: 71-81

LPSLT 13: Cultivator's girl becomes a princess

13: The Golden Kaekiri Fruit (NWP) Vol I: 117-121

LPSLT 14: How a prince overcame a pretender to the throne

15: The Prince and the Yakka (NWP) Vol I: 125-133

LPSLT 15: How a youth who looked after goats obtained kingship

18: The Three Questions (NWP) Vol I: 138-144

LPSLT 16: How a prince beheaded a wicked princess

19: The Faithless Princess (NWP) Vol I: 145-147

20: The Prince Who Did Not Go to School (NWP) Vol I: 148-156

LPSLT 17: The prince who restores his father's sight

22: The Kule-baka Flower (NWP) Vol I: 161-165

LPSLT 18: The prince who kills yaksani and saves 12 queens

24: How a Prince was chased by a Yaksani and What Befell (NWP) Vol I: 173-177

LPSLT 19: The princess who saves a prince and his wealth

25: The Wicked King (NWP) Vol I: 178-182

LPSLT 20: The foolish king who was outwitted by the pandithaya's daughter

27: The Speaking Horse (NWP) Vol I: 185-186

IV: Animal Tales

a) Humans and Animals

LPSLT 21: Failure of a frog

5: The Frog Prince (NWP) Vol I: 59-61

LPSLT 22: Turtle helps daughter become a princess

11: The White Turtle (NWP) Vol I: 102-108

LPSLT 23: Black Storks bring up a young girl

12: The Black Stork's Girl (NWP) Vol I: 109-116

LPSLT 24: How a female Quail saves her eggs

28: The Female Quail (NWP) Vol I: 187-191

LPSLT 25: How a Pied Robbin married a hunchback

29: The Pied Robin (NWP) Vol I: 192-194

LPSLT 26: How Parrots outwitted Kinnara men

34: The Kinnara and the Parrots (Village Vaedda Bintenna) Vol I: 211-213

LPSLT 27: How Jackal outwitted a judge

35: How a Jackal Settled a Lawsuit (Village Vaedda Bintenna) Vol I: 214-219

LPSLT 28: How a Jackal outwitted a tom-tom beater

37: The Jackal Devata (Washerman) Vol I: 235-237

b) Animal-animal tales

LPSLT 29: How the Hare and Jackal became enemies

30: The Jackal and the Hare (NWP) Vol I: 195-198

LPSLT 30: How a Mouse Deer outwitted a Leopard

31: The Leopard and the Mouse Deer (NWP) Vol I: 199-201

LPSLT 31: How a Jackal outwitted a Crocodile

32: The Crocodile's Wedding (NWP) Vol I: 202-204

LPSLT 32: How Turtles outwitted Jackals

36: The Jackal and the Turtle (Village Vaedda Bintenna) Vol I: 220-225

LPSLT 33: How Turtles outwitted a Lion

37: The Lion and the Turtle (Village Vaedda Bintenna) Vol I: 227-230

V) Humorous Tales

LPSLT 34: Four deaf persons harass each other

12: The Four Deaf Persons (NWP) Vol I: 122-123

LPSLT 35: Father and son who dreamed

12: The Kitul Seeds (NWP) Vol I: 183

LPSLT 36: How a man converted old females to young ones

10: Matalange Loku Appu (cultivator) Vol I: 98-10

VI) Supernatural Tales

LPSLT 37: A yaka harasses a man

16: How a Yaka and Man Fought (NWP) Vol I: 134-135

LPSLT 38: A man scared two yakas and obtained goods from them

17: Concerning a man and two yakas (NWP) Vol I: 136-137

VII) Gamarala Tales

LPSLT 39: How Gamarala ate cakes

33: Gamarala's Cakes (Village Vaedda Bintenna) Vol I: 205-209

Index II

Example of Episodic Structure of a Tale: This episodic structure is formed by breaking the tale into motifs. A motif is the smallest element in a tale. According to Thompson (1977) there are three types of motifs: actors in the tale, objects in the background and single incidents.

LPSLT 05: Supernatural Help

(3: The Story of Senasura - NWP)

- 1) Senasura affects a cultivator - his cultivation go wrong
- 2) He leaves the village, a friend advices him to combine chena cultivation
- 3) Astrologer tells him that Senasura will haunt him for the rest of his life
- 4) Senasura comes to his house as an old man
- 5) He tells Senasura of his bad luck
- 6) Senasura gives him a book with instructions as to how to pay obeisance to him. He asks the man to pay him obeisance three times a day
- 7) The man becomes prosperous

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