Appendix: I

Methodological procedure of the study

A. Time period of the study

Ethnographic fieldwork of this study was carried out in two steps. First stay in the village was five and half months during the very beginning of February 2006 to mid July in 2006, and was supplemented by another stay during February and March in 2007.

B. Access and entry to the village

Even before I embarked on my first fieldwork, I had certain convictions about this village from March 2002 due to certain interactions with it in the form of a resource person for training voluntary election observers in Puttalam district, as well as, a member of a mobile election-monitoring group for “Serumaduwe” electorate in the same district under the People’s Action for Free and Fair Election (PAFFREL: a local non-government organization) which was connected with election monitoring in the country. Since that time, my experience of the village continued through participation in election monitoring as elections were a recurrent phenomenon in the country in recent years (see end note No. 11 in p. 340 of chapter five).

At the same time, I had another opportunity to access the village through one of my friends who was three years junior to me in my university. He was one of my key informants and helped me to find a lodge as well as facilitated my socialization with the village community.
However, since the beginning of my fieldwork, I tried to develop an independent perception about the village by adopting a neutral approach in my dealings with its people. The location of my accommodation further facilitated this task.

The house that I rented for accommodation was located in one of the oldest hamlets of the village, Nelligahawile, and faced the Chillaw – Serumuduwe main road. On either side of the house, there were two junctions that connected two gravel roads which led to another two hamlets of the village, Harumanwile and Kandulassegode. Four meters away towards the right of this house, there was a house+grocery that attracted a considerable crowd everyday. The owner of this house and grocery was a younger brother of my landowner. Apart from my university friend, this grocery owner helped me to rent his brother’s house and provided food for me during my stay in the village. This grocery owner was also one of my key informants and key actors for introducing me to the village. One of the two nurseries in the village was situated near the bus-stop facing the grocery. On every weekday morning, parents who accompanied their children to that nursery visited the grocery to buy food for their children. Ten meters away on the left of my accommodation, there was another house owned by my landowner’s relative who illegally sold kasippu (local hooch). Many people used to come to this place since early morning. After two-three days of my stay in the village, I began to go to that grocery in the evening to talk to the owner of the grocery. This gave me an opportunity to meet the villagers constantly and develop my relationship with the villagers on my own.
C. Manner of data collection

My work in the first two months in the village was marked by general observations and unstructured conversations with the villagers whom I was able to access and develop a relationship. These observations and conversations helped me to further develop my basic understanding of the village and villagers. I also spent time collecting necessary data on demographic transition, state activities, such as land distribution, agricultural development, welfare programs and other development activities in the village. After that, I spent a considerable time for the unstructured and structured interviews with the villagers whom I identified as the central figures along with continuing my general observations on the village and interacting with the villagers.

In the second one-and-half month stay in the village during February to March in 2007, I mostly focused on the structured interviews with key informants and key actors in village affairs whom I identified during my first stay in the village. This period helped me further clarify the data which I had gathered during my first stay in the village.

The objectivity of ethnographic research is undermined by the sheer volumes of observational data which means that ethnographers have to make decisions as to what deserves their attention in terms of analyzing and writing up. It is argued that the data that support the research hypothesis are given precedence over the data that challenge it (McNeill and Champman, 2005). Moreover, because much observational research is carried out by lone researchers, it is impossible to verify the data collected. The
ethnographic researchers can counter this kind of criticism by keeping research diaries which document trials and tribulations of every stage of the field research (McNeill and Chapman, 2005: 116). Particularly, maintenance of such research diaries on the fieldwork is exceedingly helpful to the researcher when he writes the report, because it reminds every stage of the field research to the researcher. Brewer (2000) says, ‘reflexivity and the writing-up process are inseparable’ (quoted ibid: 116), because reflexivity is the form of self-evaluation in which researcher himself involves reflecting critically on how he organized the research process. Hence, from the very first day of my fieldwork, I maintained a field diary. Events and incidents of the day that I observed were recorded in every night in an analytical manner. This way of field diary maintenance was helpful for some necessary clarifications even in the fieldwork itself, because it enabled me to crosscheck some doubtful information easily.

D. Limitation and problems encountered

Although I had basic insights about the village and I had good opportunities to establish a good rapport with the villagers since the beginning of my fieldwork, there were some difficulties which barred me from gathering some information. This was due to several reasons: When I went to the village in the second week of February, 30th March 2006 had been already announced as the date for the Local Government Election in the country. During the election period of Sri Lanka in past three decades, election-related violence has become very high. For the last ten years, Puttalam district, especially the Serumaduwe electorate where I conducted my research was more prone to violence and other related activities in election periods (CMEV, 1997 to
2004; PAFFREL, 2000 to 2004). In this backdrop, my arrival in the village scared some villagers who were politically active in the village. I expected this situation even before I set out for field work and accordingly, it affected my interaction with those people at the beginning of the fieldwork.

Another main problem I faced during the study was obtaining of officially documented data which were necessary to identify the past state activities in the village. As I already mentioned, the village, “Kurulubedde” is not a typical traditional Sri Lankan village. It is a re-established village under the pre and post-colonial state policy of land distribution program of 1940s. But, unfortunately, it was difficult to find sufficient documents on those land distributions because of the poor maintenance of document in the government offices. My experiences on collecting data from many government offices were the same.

In the village level too, it was difficult to gain information about the village pertaining to village level voluntary organizations and state activities in the village because of poor document maintenance. Hence, I had to rely on the informant’s recollections despite the fact that all the information was not forthcoming due to their old age. Further, they may have been out of the village activities for a long time. In some cases, I also noticed that the relevant information was intentionally withheld. Nevertheless, my longer stay and continuous engagement with the villagers helped me significantly to sort out the gaps, errors and omissions.