EXPLORATIONS IN ANTHROPOLOGY SERIES

ROUTLEDGE

A CELEBRATION OF DEMONS

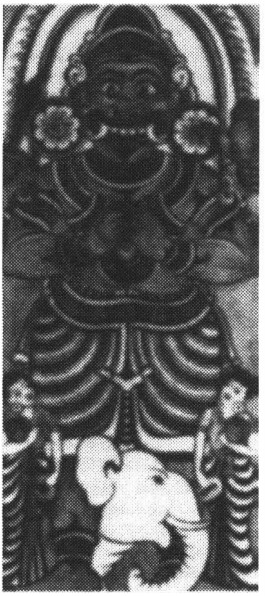
Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka

Bruce Kapferer

A Celebration of Demons

Major Demons
(As drawn by an Exorcist)

Vessamuni: Lord of the Demons



Kalu Kumara

Mahasona

Avamangale Riri Yaka

A Celebration of Demons

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Contents

Figures, Tables and Illustrations

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Chandra Jayawardena (1929–1981)

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Preface to Second Edition

A new edition of a book gives the author a welcome opportunity to reappraise its arguments and to clarify some of its directions. It is now fourteen years since I completed the fieldwork upon which *A Celebration of Demons* is based and ten years have passed since I finished the manuscript. Both the theoretical climate in anthropology and the ethnographic context have changed since I wrote. With the advantage of hindsight, and continuing fieldwork on exorcism and ritual in Sri Lanka, a few of my theoretical and ethnographic statements require some modification. I will make these modifications here rather than in the original text, which I leave essentially unchanged. Much of what I have to say is aimed at clearing up a few matters relating to theory and to ethnography which have arisen in reviews and in discussion with colleagues and students.

When I went to do research in Sri Lanka a study of ritual was far from my mind. My intention was to explore the dynamics of overseas migration of one community in the island and the way this related to the development of its economic and political power in colonial and post-colonial circumstances. The research was to be an extension of my interests nurtured during earlier fieldwork in Zambia. But I grew impatient. I had collected considerable information on the problem but I felt that I had learned little about the cultural world and especially the religious universe of Sinhalese. Religious matters seemed to be at the heart of so much routine social action and certainly of the community of once world-travelling entrepreneurs that I had come to study.

The first exorcism I saw (a *Suniyama* to ward off the effects of sorcery) was for a sailor on leave from working the oil tankers which plied the seas off the southern tip of the island. He had returned with a large amount of back pay and his hospitality to kin and friends seemed boundless. Perhaps his generosity betrayed deeper anxieties, for he and other members of his family felt that the influx of wealth would attract envy, causing sorcery against them. I was not prepared for the spectacle I witnessed or for the

richness of the commentary made in performance upon the local social and political scene. Indeed, I went to the event with some reluctance. I was exhausted from a long day of interviewing and, in any case, felt that the rite would have little relevance to my more pragmatic research interests. But this first entry into the world of exorcism immediately dispelled any hesitation or misgivings. Here was an answer to my fieldwork doubts. A cosmic reality relevant to the everyday religious world of the Sinhalese was magnificently displayed. (The *Suniyama* centres around a ritual building, the palace of the first king, Mahasammata, which images the cosmic totality within which the social order is constituted. See Kapferer 1988:72–5; Wirz 1954.) The symbolic meaning of this reality was interpreted through the playful discourse of the exorcist-actors, an element of what I had called the hermeneutic aspect of this kind of rite. Furthermore, this exorcism focused its cosmic process on the crisis of patient and household and, in the closing comedy of the drama especially, brought the household into conjunction with the ambiguities and conflicts of the wider social and political context. My fieldwork direction was decided in the course of my experience of this ritual and led to this book.

The fieldwork and early analysis for *A Celebration of Demons* was done while I was in the Department of Social Anthropology at Manchester University. I approached exorcism ritual as a "drama" or "event" in the manner of a "situational analysis" (Gluckman 1958, Mitchell 1956) or "extended-case analysis" (Turner 1957, 1968) developed by the so-called "Manchester School" of anthropology (see Kapferer 1988, Werbner 1987). The approach was developed in methodological opposition to the then dominant structural-functionalist orientation of British social anthropology which, nonetheless, spawned it. Events or situations were not to be seen as "apt" illustrations or representations of an embracing structural order, of a whole somehow systematic in itself, internally consistent, harmonic and encompassing. In the situational/extended-case approach the wider whole exists only in and through its practices and not independent of them. Such practice revealed the whole, or totality in this sense, in its wider discordancy and as a complex and as a continually developing "social field". Social situations, dramas or events are organizations of action which reveal a whole range of potentially countervailing, conflicting, and contradictory processes which are vital in continuing historical formations and reformations of experience. Moreover, the "situations", "events" or "dramas" are theoretically as much constructions of the participants as they are those of the anthropological

observer. The discourse of the event or drama reveals a multitude of "voices", to use a popular word among "post-modern" anthropologists, or different perspectives on the scene as the practices of the drama or event take their several directions. It was Turner who revealed the possibilities of the Manchester situational approach to the greatest extent and he did this by focusing on ritual.

For Turner (see especially Turner 1957, 1967, 1968) ritual is the situation or "drama" *par excellence*. Simultaneously, ritual is an organization of practice constructed and defined by participants (and it is so prior to any constructive methodological artifice of an observing anthropologist) and is a practice in which the participants confront the existential conditions of their existence. The ritual process is one where participants examine and strip away their multiple orientations to reality. This is what I refer to as the hermeneutic or deconstruction of worlds of experience which participants effect through ritual. Turner might have called it "anti-structural". He saw this process, with particular reference to a general class of life-crisis rites, to be complemented by a reverse process whereby the worlds of experience were progressively reformed and made "sensible" within a more encompassing totalization of experience.

Sinhalese exorcisms, like many of the rites described by Turner, are totalistic. That is, they proceed in accordance with a specific logic or design (see Handelman 1990) which can organize a great diversity of experience and meaning. Exorcisms are totalistic in the sense that they open out to more and more experiential possibilities rather than close them off. I consider that much of the efficacy of exorcism is in its progressive explosion of the terrifying world of the patient. This world is understood to be confined and self-enclosed, an imprisoned world where all experience and meaning resounds with the overdetermining and reductive message of the life-consuming and fragmenting demon. Sinhalese exorcism exposes the demonic as a false totalization, an oppressive totalitarian world which refuses possibility and which stultifies life, horribly distorting experience in its Procrustean limitation of meaning.

Taussig (1987) has drawn attention to the radical or system-challenging possibility of possession rites like exorcisms. He attributes this to their anti-totalistic character and to the fact that in the dream worlds of their imagination they can project beyond the cruel orders and system-obsessed visions of reality. He is critical of Turner and those influenced by his approach, including me, because they stress order and systematics and fail to realize the resistant character of ritual. He has misrepresented those he criti-

cizes (see Kapferer 1988) but I agree with his pointer to the resistant potential of rite. Exorcism, especially its comedy, achieves some of its modern import through its attack on humanity-destroying and repressive orders. Where I disagree strongly with Taussig is in his post-modernist urgency necessarily to link the resistant possibility of ritual to an essential anti-totalistic quality. He conflates totalizing forms with totalitarian orders. In my view, religion and ritual practice are always totalizing and this underlies their appeal and their force. It may partly account for the fact that totalitarian ideologies and practices often seem to have recourse to the existential potency of religion and rite. Totalitarian systems, oriented as they are to total power and control, typically attempt to confine all experience and meaning within their limited and tightly defined boundaries. Thus they have affinity for the encompassing and incorporative quality of religious cosmology and its ritual practice. Indeed, as the record of human history demonstrates, totalitarian systems do emerge in the context of totalizing religious cosmologies, perhaps elaborating and intensifying their encompassing and incorporating orientation. But what I note here is that conservative, oppressive and dehumanizing forces in worlds of human experience, as well as radically resistant processes which overturn existing human orders, can discover a potency through totalizing religious cosmologies and their ritual practice.

A Celebration of Demons lays some of the empirical and conceptual groundwork for my *Legends of People, Myths of State* (1988) which is partly concerned with the destructive totalitarianism of certain aspects of Sinhala nationalism. Ideally, the last book should not be read without a knowledge of the first. This is so for the metaphors of demon exorcism are used in the nationalist ideology of state power and in popular nationalist resistance to the state. Those involved in the modern violence, both the agents of the state (police, military and civilian militia) and counter-state forces, are most often persons from the peasantry and the urban poor. They are from worlds in which demons and the deities who subjugate them are integral to everyday realities. What should be noted, however, is that the metaphors of exorcism are removed from the diverse, shifting and transformational context of exorcism rite. The metaphors are "totalitarianized" and acquire a dreadful and deterministic fixity of meaning. The demonic is made to realize its devastating potential in the rites of killing which those who support or oppose the state have devised (Kapferer 1989). This is quite the reverse in exorcism where demons are rendered impotent, transformed into harmless – virtually friendly – figures of fun, and

encompassed. They are not permitted to realize their violence.

I emphasize that the exorcisms I described are to be distinguished from other rites of healing and personal alleviation also often glossed as exorcisms. Some reviewers (e.g. Lambek 1985, R. Obeyesekere 1985) have assumed that they belong to the one category and thus have overlooked significant variations in the social conditions of their practice and the dynamics and form of performance. The exorcisms I recorded are rites performed in the open at the house of the patient. Usually they are all-night affairs and are performed by members of a specialist caste who possess knowledge and skills passed down the generations. I write about a highly institutionalized ritual practice which demonstrates some continuity with practices in ancient and medieval Sri Lanka. Of greatest importance, the rituals I discuss address defined classes or categories of illness or distress held to be the consequence of particular demons after whom the specific rites are called. They are not to be confused with exorcism rites performed at shrines dotted throughout the island (usually for particular kinds of demonic-deity) or, most especially, with a great variety of extremely innovative rites of the type sensitively described by Gananath Obeyesekere (1981) springing up especially along the urbanized coast. These rites are not controlled by members of specific caste communities. They are a relatively free form, and as Obeyesekere recounts are fashioned in direct relation to the personal experience of their creators. The rite performed is generally directed at a demon or deity with whom the performer has a deep personal relationship and addresses all manner of anguish and personal misfortune and not a defined class. Many of these rites could perhaps be described as "charismatic" with a tremendous emphasis on "miraculous" effects. The person who performs them is seen by supplicants to embody supernatural power the benefits of which can be transferred to them. In contrast, exorcists do not themselves embody transformational powers; rather this is the property of the specific rites they perform.

The distinction I make has some empirical and theoretical import. The processes revealed through the observation of the new rites cannot necessarily be extended to exorcisms and vice versa. Ritual, as Obeyesekere (1981) points out, has its creation and effectiveness in its symbolization of deep psychological and social concerns. This quite unexceptionable argument is easily reinforced through attention to the new rites. But exorcisms reveal additional possibility, I think, more clearly. They demonstrate how experience is constituted within the symbolic process of a ritual form

quite independently of the personal problems which may have brought a particular patient to a performance. Moreover, the force of the exorcisms I studied is, through the process of transformation, integral to the practiced form of the rite. A variety of techniques, some of which may be glossed as catharsis, abreaction and so on, are vital in exorcism. But my ethnography of exorcism demonstrates that the force or effectiveness of such aspects is in the design/logic of the rite and in the systematic interweaving of different aesthetic modes. These design/logics and their aesthetization in peformance are more than mere expressive cultural frames or idioms for universal psychological processes and resist an unproblematic reduction to such psychology.

A conflation of the exorcisms I studied with the other myriad rites to overcome illness and misfortune risks obscuring the several directions of socio-cultural and ritual change in modern Sri Lanka. In *A Celebration of Demons* I try to indicate that the discriminations that Sinhalese themselves make concerning the ritual practices available to them are significant. They are not merely different ways of achieving the same thing. To some extent distinct objectives and audiences are indicated in their practice. While people from all walks of life may focus their attention on specific practices, especially those situated at temples, I found that certain rites expressed some variation in their social location. Some critics have disagreed (Stirrat 1984), but my continuing fieldwork in Sri Lanka reinforces my observation. In many ways exorcisms, along with a great variety of other ritual practices, are part of a symbolic discourse revealing the conflicts and contradictions of Sri Lanka's modern class society.

I stress the dynamism in the overall field of ritual practices available to Sinhalese. In some instances certain new ritual forms may appear to be displacing others. Obeyesekere suggests that demon exorcisms and the larger communal rites, such as those for the goddess Pattini, are disappearing in the wake of rites more relevant to modern conditions. My own fieldwork indicates, however, that the types of ritual that I recorded are still vital elements in urban and village areas. My impression is that the new rites documented by Obeyesekere are closely connected to the deity shrines and are part of an expanding set of practices centered on the temples (see Gombrich and Obeyesekere 1988). The individualistic character of the rites has similarities with changes occurring in Buddhist worship associated with what has been called the "Buddhist Revival".

But Obeyesekere's view that the demon exorcisms and the

communal rites are out of fashion implicitly works on a common anthropological "traditional/modern" dichotomy. This kind of approach assumes incompatibilities between old and innovative forms. It asserts a linear direction to change and a successional view of history with old forms necessarily giving way to the new. The multiplicity of directions which change can take is overlooked. More problematic, dichotomies of the traditional/modern kind encourage a static view of tradition. They fail to see that the so-called traditional rites are continually engaging innovative practice as they continue to elaborate on elements already integral to them. Furthermore, the traditional rites contain key events which enable individuals to map their personal concerns into the general transformational dynamic of the rites as a whole. This transformational process reaches beyond the individual concerns of persons who are at the focus of the rites and reaches into the total situation of the ritual involving others.

The modern force of the traditional rites is often present in their routine episodes of possession and trance. This was demonstrated at one performance of a *gammaduva* ceremony for Pattini (like exorcisms this rite has patients, though they are more properly surrogates for the community as a whole). The ceremony took place in the southern tea-growing area of the island one year after the anti-Tamil riots of 1983. It was staged to heal the wounds which had opened between the rival Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups. The myth of Pattini, dramatically presented in her ritual, involves her transformation from a condition of furious annihilating anger into one of encompassing and healing equanimity.

Three women became entranced at the moment of Pattini's dramatized appearance. They symbolized in their bodies their different locations in the shifting realities of their experience and their particular agonies. All danced entranced at the same time. One was the wife of the local police inspector. Her mode of trance was extraordinarily mechanical and ordered. Her gestures were, indeed, those of a policeman on traffic duty. A second woman was a tea-estate Tamil employee. She appeared tight and confined, her arms held close to her body. At times she approached the policeman's wife and gestured, as if in supplication before this apparent figure of authority. The powers present in the general context of the rite and which were still dominant in the consciousness of the audience were clearly present in this trance-mime. The relationship which the policeman's wife and the tea worker established was occasionally subverted by the less inhibited trance of a teenage Sinhalese schoolgirl, the last of the three to be entranced.

The personal symbolism of trance was demonstrated in a *Mahasona* exorcism I saw recently. The patient was a young unemployed fisherman. Quite unlike all other trances in this exorcism which I had seen in the past, this man dramatically presented an image of subordination not just to the demonic but in the social world in which his impoverished condition consigned him. He ate the polluted demon offerings, crawled on the ground through chairs and between the legs of the audience. At the time of this fieldwork, some twelve years after I had completed the main research for this book, poverty and unemployment had drastically increased in the area.

The young fisherman had performed as a patient in a number of *Mahasonas* over the last few years. His trance produced some awe among those of similar background and experience and was attracting huge audiences. I had the impression that he was about to set himself up as an independent healer of a kind similar to the cases described in *Medusa's Hair.* This is a common practice among innovative ritualists. While the new ritual forms are to be seen as distinct from the older forms, nonetheless they are connected. One way is through the legitimacy, and I suggest knowledge, that "traditional" rites give to the creators of the new rites. Old and original ritual forms exist to some extent in symbiosis, each reinforcing the significance, relevance and authority of the other.

Comic drama, like trance, is vital to maintaining the enduring relevance of exorcism in changing social and political contexts. Indeed, I think comedy is gaining increased significance within the overall form of the rites. Undoubtedly, growing tourism has had a hand in this. The comedy and dance of exorcism have commodity value on the hotel circuit. They are appealing to foreigners and are certainly the most accessible. During fieldwork in the 1980s it was not unusual to encounter a minibus-load of tourists being brought to houses where an exorcism was being performed. But tourism was only just starting to become important at the time of my initial fieldwork.

Anthropologists tend to explain change by concentrating on processes external to the phenomenon being examined. Thus the phenomenon reflects and symbolizes social and political shifts and manifests the psychological concerns of those individuals who are the agents of change. But change is also a property internal to phenomena themselves. In demon exorcisms particular events are vital in both the overall transformational project of the rites and are critical events keying participants and audience into the transformations. This is so with the comic episodes which are also highly

sensitive to developments in the surrounding world of exorcism and are oriented to drawing everyday experiences of such events into the process of the exorcism and harnessing them to its transformational work. Therefore, circumstance and shifting historical conditions continually influence changes in ritual form and content; but these changes are wrought through the imagination of ritual practitioners acting within their creative traditions. They extend and realize the potential of the ritual worlds in which they work.

The exorcist-actors in the troupe I studied most intensively were renowned for their innovative brilliance, and it is their dialogues which are reproduced in this text. I did not stress enough that I was witness to a real creative moment in the development of exorcism tradition. Wirz (1954) had recorded comic dialogues in exorcism over twenty years earlier but exorcists who knew of Wirz and had been working at the time acknowledged the brilliance of the comic elaborations I saw. Working in the same area some twelve years after my initial research I found that comic routines I had seen, down to the last details of verbal nuance and gesture, had become standard fare and a range of different troupes freely acknowledged the source. Sadly, the lead actor mainly responsible for the development of the wonderful comedy I enjoyed (see photographs of masked demons) committed suicide.

A Celebration of Demons attempts to combine philosophical and theoretical concern with ethnography. Anthropological ethnography is never mere record and a critical methodological issue relates to how anthropological accounts are constructed. Clearly any anthropologist comes to the field situation with a baggage of conceptual and theoretical orientations drawn from her or his training and particular positioning usually within metropolitan society. Anthropologists might claim that their exfoliation of the worlds of others challenges prevailing metropolitan theories, but despite such legitimating ideologies the reverse is more often the case (see Fabian 1984, Clifford and Marcus 1986). "The Other" becomes the site for affirming or contradicting dominant theories. This study does not escape this charge, though I know of no ethnography that could. I articulate a diversity of approaches conventional in anthropology including Marxist, structuralist, and symbolic interactionist. I felt that several perspectives had to be engaged in order to reveal the complexity of the context of Sinhalese exorcism as I encountered it. No specific position seemed to me to be adequate. Thus I felt that a structuralist approach offered much in understanding the participation of women in exorcism. It accounted for my data far better than various social or psychologi-

cal functionalist reductions of the kind still common in anthropology. But my ethnography did not fit with conventional structuralist positions either. I was uncomfortable with them and tried to modify their argument to agree more with the evidence I had encountered. But perhaps modification of this order is not the answer, for the flaws of the theoretical assumptions are likely to persist. Further, it remains wedded to a Western positivist paradigm common in anthropology, and the social sciences and humanities in general, that the model or theory is a mirror to reality. In this view, theories or analytical perspectives matched against the evidence of ethnography can be modified so that the theory becomes not merely a representation of reality but reality itself. I was moving away from such a position even in the writing of this text and *A Celebration of Demons* can be seen as transitional to a more phenomenological orientation. This is so especially in the chapters directed specifically to exorcism performance and the dynamics of their aesthetic. The phenomenological orientation I took was intended to give full status to the importance of exorcist understanding and practice which did not subordinate them to metropolitan "authority".

Phenomenology is more an orientation to the understanding of human experience and does not comprise a body of agreed organized theory (Spiegelberg 1981). There are many phenomenologies and they are in no way exclusive systems in the sense of so many conventional social science theories and models. In my usage phenomenology is a position which sees all human orientations to reality as constructions. These constructions are the significant realities and are not to be swept aside in favour of other constructions (e.g. rationalist social science theory). No particular construction is necessarily more "true" or "real" than another and all constructions reveal dimensions of the nature of human being and existence.

The theories or perspectives which many anthropologists present are not excluded from a phenomenological orientation but themselves become objects of investigation as also the imaginative constructions of human beings and necessarily no more nor less valid than those constructions and lived realities that anthropologists study.

The orientation I develop in this volume is no stranger to anthropological practice. Evans-Pritchard in his Nuer studies (and also Lienhardt) pursues a similar direction, one which is obscured by its too easy categorization as an example of British structural functionalism. If there is a coherent tradition which can be so glibly labeled ("death by categorization"), it is Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown who are its chief architects with their commitment to empiri-

cism and scientific rationalism. Evans-Pritchard, in contrast, was not concerned with the complete recording of reality and with organizing it within his won presuppositions – the ambition of Malinowski – but with exposing how human beings formed the realities of their living to conscious experience. How well Evans-Pritchard did this is not at issue here. The general point I want to establish is that a phenomenological orientation asserts the authority of the ethnographic context and does not subordinate it to theoretical predilections drawn from some other contexts of experience.

I must add that such an orientation, at least in my usage, is automatically holistic. That is, it does not compartmentalize human experience according to the canons and divisions of normal social science. In this sense the phenomenological holism to which I tend is not that of a Maussian or Durkheimian kind. These accept the divisions and add one more, the social, which is then treated as incorporating and subsuming of the others and prior to them. The position I move towards here is one which resists assigning any one specific domain of human experience, which may be independently defined as "economic", "social", "psychological", "political" or "cultural" singular determining significance. My approach is avowedly antagonistic to reductions of these kinds. Thus I am equally critical of those approaches that reduce complex reality to the constructions of an individual psychology as of those, like Durkheimian sociologists, who assert the primacy of the social. Therefore, I am as uncomfortable with I. M. Lewis's social functionalist explanations of possession as I am of Obeyesekere's psychologism. The two are equally reductionist and refuse the complexity of human experience. The point is that all understanding of human action must be a psychological understanding as much as it is a sociological understanding. Durkheim effectively realizes this in his work on religion where he must import very crude psychological assumptions in order to support his sociological statements. Obeyesekere addresses such a paradox by recommending a dialectical approach which focuses on the dynamic interaction between individual psychological, social and cultural processes. This solution maintains the terms of conventional social science, however, even as it tries to overcome them.

A phenomenological approach involves a radical suspension of the analytical categories of normal social science. It demands a turning back to the world of lived human experience and taking what people do and say seriously. This does not mean that they are taken as expressions or idioms of something else – usually of the assumptions and hypotheses of social and psychological theories

constructed at great historical and contextual distance from the realities being examined. Rather, the forms of life encountered are explored for their assumptions, logics and so on. This demands that the ethnographer must open himself or herself completely to the possibilities of experience and understanding that are presented for inspection. Anthropologists have long claimed that this is the spirit of their scientific orientation. A phenomenology is consistent with this kind of anthropological project. Furthermore, it expands a potential of anthropological ethnography not just to evaluate prevailing arguments in social science and the humanities against other orientations to reality but to demonstrate the contribution of these other orientations to a general understanding of human action.

A Celebration of Demons is a record of my attempt to understand exorcist apprehensions of reality and to comprehend the power of their practice in what I grasped as their logic. When I wrote the book I was conscious of the fascination non-Western ritual forms and healing practices had for the West. They held out alternative solutions to human anguish and avenues for personal liberation. Moreover, they challenged the canons of a Western scientific rationalism which many held to be not only at the root of individual suffering but also the source of much destruction emanating from the West. Some of the post-modern developments in current anthropology are an extension of such critiques. There is no doubt that the kind of anthropology which Victor Turner inspired, and which continues to influence me, gathered impetus in its attack on scientific rationalism and its demand that other approaches, like those of Freud and especially Jung who drew so much from civilizational sources outside the West, should be addressed. While I am largely in agreement with the attacks on the social science versions of scientific rationalism I am also critical of the counter directions. These often appear in my reading to engage concerns which are emergent in a Western historical process and not necessarily from those historical worlds from which many of the counter directions claim to draw.

Perhaps it is time to replace the knowledge and practice of Sinhalese exorcists into the context of wider debate. But this text remains an attempt to present the contribution which Sinhalese exorcists make to the understanding of humankind and resists efforts to subordinate their understanding to other forms of knowledge which negate or obscure what I regard to be the importance and significance of their ritual work.

BRUCE KAPFERER

Foreword

Sri Lanka has become a major focus of international anthropological attention, due to the research and writings of a number of extremely gifted anthropologists, both native and foreign. Earlier important studies (Leach 1962; Yalman 1962, 1964) had discussed Sinhalese religion and ritual in terms of Gallo-structuralism and British empiricism. H. L. Seneviratne's *Rituals of the Kandyan State* (1978) has provided us with a lapidary description and analysis of the Kandyan Sinhalese theory of society as a balanced hierarchy embracing social and natural orders and made annually visible in the complex and colorful *Asala* festival, "perhaps one of the largest ever held in the Buddhist world" (p. 70). Other Sri Lankan and British and American scholars, such as Pieris, Tambiah, Obeyesekere, Gombrich and Ames, have made rich ethnographic and elucidative contributions on which Bruce Kapferer, the author of this volume, was fortunate to have been able to draw.

Kapferer's book is a pioneering study in the emerging field of performance studies – represented, to my knowledge, by but a single university in the United States, the Department of Performance Studies at New York University, which aims to bring the social sciences and arts together to shape theory and methods and is cross-cultural and interdisciplinary in perspective. Kapferer's approach is, however, less eclectic and cleaves more closely to traditional anthropological concerns, combining structuralist, semiotic and processual concepts and procedures into an original and powerful mode of analysis which takes aesthetic features of ritual into full theoretical account. For him, aesthetics involves the study of the processes of producing and experiencing ritual performances. He views the demon exorcism ceremonies of the Sinhalese working class and peasantry as a set of intersecting "scores" orchestrating a range of performative genres – drumming, dance movements, gesturing, singing of sacred texts, the manipulation of ritual paraphernalia (masks, costumes, offering-baskets, coconut palm leaves), food preparation, feasting, improvised "low comedy", and the like, which themselves pass irreversibly through

major phases. For each phase certain genres are dominant and critical: for example, chanting, singing, dance and music prevail in the "midday to midnight period", reaching a climax at midnight, when "the terrible sense of the demonic builds in the quickening rhythm and tempo of the music and the movement of the dance . . . and often culminates in the demonic possession of the patient". Contrastingly, a sequence of dramatic acts begins after midnight in the important *Mahasona* (Great Cemetery Demon) exorcism, which amount to a comedic, indeed "profane", "obscene", Rabelaisian "put down" of the hitherto menacing and darkly numinous mood of demonic possession. There begins a comedic dialogue between dancers and drummers, full of "puns, spoonerisms, profanities, sexual innuendo . . .". These shifts in genre, mood and tempo are in no way arbitrary. They are responsive to cosmological beliefs, paramount among which is the idea of a hierarchy of all living beings, which places deities above humans, and humans above animals. The health and welfare of human society and the individual, the smooth functioning of the natural and cultural orders, the purity of society's places and times, a right relationship between and among all classes of living beings depend upon the recognition of and willing acquiescence in this cosmic arrangement of beings, persons and things arranged in order of rank, grade and class. For Sinhalese (not only the lower classes, but the middle and upper classes too), reality is mapped by this determinate, asymmetrical ordering of invisible and visible entities, at whose obscure summit is the Buddha (though, in a sense, he is outside all "chains of being" whatsoever in a locus of Absolute Nothingness – as the Kyoto School of Buddhist philosophy might define nirvanic emptiness). The "real" is hierarchical, in Kapferer's reading of Sinhalese thought. He argues that demons are masters of "illusion". They cause illness (both what Westerners might call "mental" and "physical" illness) by deluding human beings that they (the demons) occupy a higher place in the unalterable hierarchy of beings than they do, are in fact not demons but deities (who also possess the power of generating illusions, but only for some ultimately edifying purpose). Subversion of hierarchy is to substitute chaos for cosmos, illness for health, disorder for order, falsity for truth, pollution for purity, delusion for plain sensory evidence, vainglory for humility, solipsism for awareness of others, negation for affirmation of social interaction, and so on.

Kapferer contends that there is a deep link between cosmology and aethetics. For example, the nature of the music and dancing during the midnight watch produces the almost Kierkegaardian

obsession with the demonic, the condition in which the self is aware of nothing but its own experiences and states, and hence, since men and women are defined in Sinhalese terms as "relational" beings, is in alienated terror. This is explained as the hallucinatory power conceded in the scheme of things to demons, who can make things appear not only other than they are but also twist reality itself by subverting human behavior. Yet within the frame of exorcizing ritual, the "show" of demonic behavior itself becomes a means directed towards the ultimate therapeutic intention of such ritual. For it makes manifest to the "real" senses of the patient and onlookers the "real" intention of demons, which then becomes accessible to the remedial action of the ritual process. To disclose, as Western depth psychologists well know, is to expose to therapeutic action. The unknown is the dangerous: while demons can clothe their deception in glamorous numinosity, they have power. When they are manifested – as Mahasona is revealed (paradoxically) in his masked representations – they can be humiliated, which is a crucial part of the patient's "treatment". Demons seek to hide themselves from "reality", that is, from exposure of their "true" place in the cosmic hierarchy. Once they are "caught out", they have nowhere to go, except into ridiculous disgrace. In parallel fashion, the patient is brought out of her/his demonic obsession/possession and restored to the world of social relationships and recognition of "others". Thus the comic is the performative genre through which the "normal" hierarchical order is restored as the model for "reality". When demons are mocked into their proper place in the scheme of things, they cease to be awesome and become ridiculous.

In the course of his scrutiny of the rites, Kapferer discusses Sinhalese interpretations of key symbols and concepts, and relates rites to myths which explain them to the participants' satisfaction. His critical examination and investigation of the processual normative and aesthetic structures of the *Mahasona* exorcist rites are, to my knowledge, the best work anywhere available on the performative sequencing of an institutionalized ritual ensemble. His discussion of the peculiar affinity of such aesthetic modes as music and dance with the cultural construction of the "demonic" is unsurpassed, and recalls Kierkegaard's description of the "dumbness" of demonical possession (Journals: New York, Harper and Row, 1959:136): "Christ cast out a devil and it was dumb . . . have you never been so indescribably distressed, that the power of sorrow over your whole being was almost like the powers of nature: then you have experienced what it means to be dumb, experienced the

feeling of being unable, even though your life were at stake, to express the agony that rocked deeply within you, and selfish of itself made you dumb – in order that you might not rid yourself of it. For that is how infinite sorrow is egotistical; it makes a man dumb in order to keep him in its power." Yet music in Sinhalese exorcism also has its redressive and restorative modes.

Music and dance are clearly basic codes controlling the therapeutic process. Yet Kapferer is not content with an "emic" explanation of exorcism, one making use of indigenous categories of organization and explanation. Instead he draws on the "etic" explanations (aspiring to universal, comparative efficacy) of George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), the distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of Chicago, a leading figure in the Deweyan tradition of pragmatist instrumentalism. Mead argued that voluntary conduct is constructed in a sequence of adjustments in which a person responds to himself as well as to what else he perceives. He discriminates between the Me, the object one forms of oneself from the formal or accepted standards of society mediated through significant "others", and the I, the response of the unique individual to his perception of the concrete historical situation in which he finds himself. The Me is multiple, consisting of the sum-total of the role-statuses, the self is conditioned by others to occupy or interiorize. The succession of I's responding to Me "images" forms the basis of individuality. The self constantly refers to the standpoint of the salient group in which he/she occupies status-roles. Kapferer argues that demonic possession occurs when, for some reason, the I is radically detached from the Me and is solipsistic, aware of nothing but its own experiences and states. Initial possession, to the contrary, according to Kapferer, is characterized by absorption of the I in the Me, or in Durkheimian terms, the substitution of collective representations for individual representations. Here the transcendental displaces the individual self. But in demonic possession, the multiple social "selves" are nullified and the patient is encysted in her/his I, a condition reminiscent of the Western concept "schizophrenia", in which there is held to be a separation between thought process and emotions and the generation of delusions and hallucinations.

Kapferer sees the processual structure of exorcist rites in Sri Lanka as directed to the "resocialization" of the patient, who "becomes as a little child", a social *tabula rasa*, who must be reinscribed with the multiple *personae* representing the Me, the cluster of social "selves". He recognizes that there are many cultural "kinds" of demons – and hence many modes of withdrawal

from participation in the social fields and networks of Sri Lankan cultural existence. But he postulates that a pan-human process underlies all specific Sinhalese modes of ritual redressal through exorcism myths, rituals and symbols. In all societies individual human beings construe their pathways through life, he would argue, in terms of adjusting to a series of bodily conditions, perceptions of objects, enculturated images and learned behavior *vis-à-vis* subjectively important others, beginning with members of one's own family. Pressures to self-control are present from the beginning; it soon becomes subjectively advantageous to anticipate the social structure of the situation in which the I will be involved, and thus to cooperate and oppose successfully. Feedback is therefore an important attribute of self-control, and feedback depends in social life on the help of social conventions, society's crude means of securing predictability. In Meadian terms, the fact that all participants in a given sociocultural system control themselves from the same perspective – which he describes as "the Generalized Other" – makes the intercalibration of social action possible. Kapferer presents a substantial sample of case studies of exorcism rites. His concern is with the social construction of illness and its definition in context, and the process of this as it is mediated culturally.

This magnificent book reveals clearly how the very "weakness" of demons "in structure", and the manifestation of "their extreme disordering power when they are freed from a subordination in the structure of hierarchy" are linked to the marvelous aesthetic efficacy of the rites. For demons are masters of "illusion" and hence masters of art, particularly art in performance. The fascination for Sinhalese (particularly those of the lower classes) of these rituals, with their sumptuous costumes, terrifying masks, transvestite episodes, masterful drum rhythms, swirling and tumbling dances, thematic code-switchings, trancings and possessions, transitions from fear and trembling to slapstick laughter, consists not solely in the high religious meanings conveyed through symbolic action but also in that possibly more mysterious domain, play and entertainment. To entertain is, etymologically, "to hold between", that is, to place in a "liminal" condition, on a threshold between mundane spaces and times. Normative structures of everyday are pushed aside, except in so far as they are "symbolically" and "ludically" represented, as in the comedic episodes, where they form an intrinsic part of the demonic scenario. Demons, then, are supreme entertainers; they allow workers to enter into a "subjunctive" realm where all is magical possibility, where gods and demons mingle (often literally, through possessions) with mortals, and

fantasies both standardized and personal may be enacted in thought, word and deed. Kapferer wonderfully captures for us the mood, the life, smack and color of exorcist rituals, while revealing the great design, the cosmological schema, which forms the solemn ground for the ludic figure and which vouchsafes and allows the latter its lustrous, illusory moment of therapeutic chaos.

VICTOR TURNER

Preface

This is a study of major Sinhalese demon ceremonies or exorcisms performed in and around the town of Galle in southern Sri Lanka. These rites richly display many of the ideas by which Sinhalese Buddhists, and urban working class and peasants especially, comprehend their world. I explore through exorcism aspects of the social and political life of Sinhalese, the nature of the Sinhalese Buddhist religious system and most specifically the logic of exorcism cure. I describe one rite in particular, the ceremony of the Great Cemetery Demon, and extend from this into a discussion of the way exorcism ritual effects key transitions and transformations in identity, experience, meaning and action. The analysis develops an approach to ritual which stresses the critical importance of considering performance and especially the role of the aesthetic. Music, dance and comic drama are key aesthetic forms in the splendid performances of demon ceremonies and I examine their role in the organization of ritual experience and the communication of its vital import.

Exorcisms are not to be understood by confining them within the interpretational or theoretical scheme of a particular subdiscipline in anthropology. They are healing rites, but to restrict their understanding to the types of problems which conventionally arise within the field of medical anthropology, for example, is to risk overlooking many significant aspects of them which are of relevance to other fields of enquiry within and outside anthropology. Within the limits of my own training as an anthropologist, I have tried to adopt a perspective which examines the phenomenon of the demonic and exorcism in its own terms and which reveals them as being of multiple interest not only for the understanding of Sinhalese culture, but also for understanding dimensions of human action and experience more generally, whether in Sri Lanka or elsewhere.

One of the great benefits of engaging in ethnographic research in Sri Lanka is the high quality of available ethnographies and the many excellent articles and books published by local and overseas

scholars about what is a highly complex cultural scene. Without the work of such scholars as M. B. Ariyapala, Ralph Peiris, Edmund Leach, Michael Ames, S. J. Tambiah, Gananath Obeyesekere, Kitsiri Malalgoda, H. L. Seneviratne, Nur Yalman and Richard Gombrich to name but a few, even the limited scope of the study I have attempted would have been a far more difficult exercise than it has been. The advantage to readers of this book is that they can evaluate some of the analytical statements I make, some of which are likely to appear controversial, against the independent cultural evidence collected by other scholars.

The research for this book was carried out between 1970 and 1976, and supported by several small grants. A three-month study of Galle town in 1970 was made possible by a Nuffield Foundation Small Grant and a longer twelve-month study in the same locale, between August 1971 and September 1972, was supported by the British Social Science Research Council. I am grateful to both these foundations for their financial assistance and to the Universities of Manchester and Adelaide, who granted small amounts of money, as well as research equipment, for shorter stays in Galle of between four and six weeks in 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976 and 1977.

Many people in Sri Lanka afforded me their companionship, hospitality and intellectual stimulation, and without their help my various stays on the island would have been far less enjoyable and considerably less the personal learning experience I regard them to have been. My warmest thanks go to Mr. Dharnapala Hewa and his delightful family who, almost as soon as I set foot in Sri Lanka, gave me a room in which to sleep and introduced me to the warmth and many kindnesses of their household. I treasure the discussions I had late into the night with Mr. Hewa on the complex ideas underlying Sinhalese Buddhism. The games of Carrom with his children, who consistently thrashed me, provided me with much-needed relaxation. I am similarly grateful to Mr. A. Navaratnam and his family for their friendship and hospitality. Mr. L. Kuruppu, then A. G. A. Galle, was most helpful and he and Mrs. Kuruppu were always interesting and welcoming company. Dr. Lalith Dias and Mrs. Malsiri Dias also gave freely of their assistance in the early stages of fieldwork. Mrs. Dias, who was then Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Colombo University and now is working with the United Nations in Sri Lanka, gave me many insights into Sinhalese society, as did Professor Laksiri Jayasuriya, then also of the Department of Sociology at Colombo University and now Professor of Social Work at the University of Western Australia.

I owe a considerable intellectual debt to many other scholars, colleagues and friends both in and outside of Sri Lanka. Mr. Sunimal Fernando, an anthropologist then at the Department of Sociology, Peradeniya Campus, University of Sri Lanka, gave me the enormous benefit of his extensive cultural knowledge and anthropological skills. His friendship and intellectual stimulation will always be highly valued by me. Mr. I. V. Edirisinghe, at the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo, was always willing to discuss with me aspects of my work and regularly helped in my research. Daya Dissanayake and Lakdasa Dissanayake were regular companions, and their sense of humor and general compassion towards others was always engaging and helpful. Finally, I benefited greatly from the friendship and criticism of Mr. Mahen Vaithianathan whose knowledge of Hindu and Buddhist cultures I found both penetrating and invaluable.

Mr. Chandra Vitarana, my research assistant and confidant, took my research as his own. He has a firm commitment to, and fascination with, his own culture, which is continually productive of valuable insights. Those ideas which readers might discern of interest in this book are often ones which Chandra suggested in his urgency to understand his own culture. My knowledge of Sinhala is very imperfect and I cannot claim a marvelous facility with the language, although exorcists listened and responded with patience to my fumblings. Chandra's knowledge of colloquial Sinhala was invaluable, and, especially, his sense for the subtle nuances of working-class and peasant speech which in my view only someone like Chandra could have. Chandra is deeply part of the working-class and peasant world. Time and again his knowledge proved more accurate and sensitive than that of others whose formal education and other socially generated advantages far exceeded his.

Much of my interest in Sinhalese culture was generated by Professor Nur Yalman. When I first arrived in Sri Lanka, I went on a short trip with Professor Yalman around the island, and he opened up many interesting facets of the island's culture. The discussions I had with him then must have appeared strange (I was fresh from an urban study in Zambia), and I suspect he will be amused at the "about face" which this book represents. I will always appreciate his generosity to a neophyte in the study of Sinhalese culture.

Of the scholars outside the context of Sri Lanka who have contributed extensively to the argument in this book, I must single out Don Handelman of the Department of Sociology, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem; Victor Turner of the Department of

Anthropology, University of Virginia; and Terence Turner of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago. It has been during the course of a long friendship and intellectual association with Don Handelman that the analytical framework for this study developed. In many places it is difficult to separate his ideas from my own. Although he bears no responsibility for the errors and failure in logic readers might detect, he certainly must have responsibility for much of the analytical worth in this study. Terence Turner took the trouble to make a detailed critique of a draft of this book. His extremely stimulating ideas provoked me into rethinking major parts of the analysis and drew to my attention many aspects of my own ethnography which I had not seen. This book in certain respects is the result of a dialogue with him, and one which I hope will continue. I was drawn to my interest in ritual through the work of Victor Turner, whose influence on the kinds of questions I raise goes back to the days of my first research in Zambia and my later experience while teaching in the Department of Anthropology, University of Manchester. He has been a constant source of encouragement and stimulation while I was grappling with demons and struggling to understand the complexity and magnificence of the rites to ward off their attack. I continually learn from his ideas. His wife Edie, an anthropologist in her own right, also gave freely of her ideas and encouragement.

My colleagues at the Universities of Manchester and later Adelaide have listened patiently to my material. In particular, I thank Wes Sharrock, Martin Southwold, Richard P. Werbner, John Comaroff, Roy Fitzhenry, Kingsley Garbett and John Gray. Michael Roberts has been extremely helpful. While I was in the field and later back in Adelaide he continually offered useful criticism and pointed me in new directions. His knowledge of the cultural and sociopolitical history of Sri Lanka has been invaluable. Tom Ernst, also then in the Anthropology Department at Adelaide University, has discussed with me most of the arguments in this book. His disagreement and questioning have forced me to clarify and sharpen many of my ideas. Jeff Collmann, Michael Muetzelfeldt, Jadran Mimica and Andrew Lattas, all then of the Adelaide Department, contributed extensively through their enthusiastic discussions and clarification of some of the ideas I present in the following pages. Sylvia Sharpe also assisted greatly. Her interest in comedy, drama and the performing arts in general, was a constant source of stimulation while I was preparing a first draft. Georges and Marie-Claude Papigny took the photographs which are included in this book. The photographs are a vital adjunct to my

description and, therefore, any acknowledgement to their work displayed on these pages cannot be great enough. They have generously allowed their work to contribute to my own. They worked closely with me for a period of six weeks and made many excellent observations, which I have added to my own. We are preparing for future publication a full photographic record of exorcism ritual.

Numerous others have contributed at various stages of my writing. These include Jonathan Friedman, Roger Keesing, Hilda Kuper, Jane Fajans, Ivan Karp, Lew Langness, John MacAloon, Roberto da Matta, Mervyn Meggitt, Sally Falk Moore, Barbara Myerhoff, Shelley Rosaldo, Marshall Sahlins, H. L. Seneviratne, Tony Stephens and Anselm Strauss.

This book was completed in early 1979 but since then has been considerably revised.

The final version of the book was written while I was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, California, in 1980–81. My Fellowship was supported by a National Science Foundation Grant BNS78–24671. The relaxed atmosphere of the Center was ideal for writing, and I thank all the staff, especially the Director, Gardner Lindzey, and the Librarian, Margaret Amara, whose encouragement and willingness to search out references is much appreciated. The greatest benefit of the Center, however, were the stimulating criticisms and ideas of Charles Altieri, Toby Gross, Louis Harlan, Luc de Heusch, Adam Kuper, Barbara Laslett, Paul Reissman and Renato Rosaldo. None of them complained about the many interruptions I must have caused to their work while they contributed to my own.

The influence of my teachers, particularly Clyde Mitchell and the late Max Gluckman, is evident in this study. I have dedicated the book to the late Professor Chandra Jayawardena, Foundation Professor of Anthropology at Macquarie University, whose untimely death meant the loss of a great teacher and a close personal friend. It was Chandra who developed my interest in anthropology, who encouraged me to pursue fieldwork in Central Africa and later in his home country of Sri Lanka. Chandra always coupled considerable ethnographic skill with major theoretical insights and his work was a model to other anthropologists in his country of adoption, Australia. But one of his most attractive qualities, and a source of much inspiration to others, was his healthy and often creative disrespect for orthodoxies and conventional wisdom. I trust that some of this quality has found its way into this volume.

My wife, Judith, has lived with exorcisms for nearly ten years now, and with me appreciated their artistry. I have been most

fortunate to have her as a constant discussant and to have the advantage of her own sociological training and expertise. Ultimately, however, my greatest debt must be to the many berava exorcists who gave freely of their knowledge and their considerable practical sociological insight into the culture of their own society. In my view they are deserving of the highest respect. I hope they will forgive the errors in this book and will continue to assist other scholars through the labyrinthine path of their art.

For technical and economic reasons diacritical marks have been omitted from the transliteration of Sinhala and Sanskrit words appearing in the text. The glossary of transliterated words at the end of this book gives the appropriate diacritical marks.

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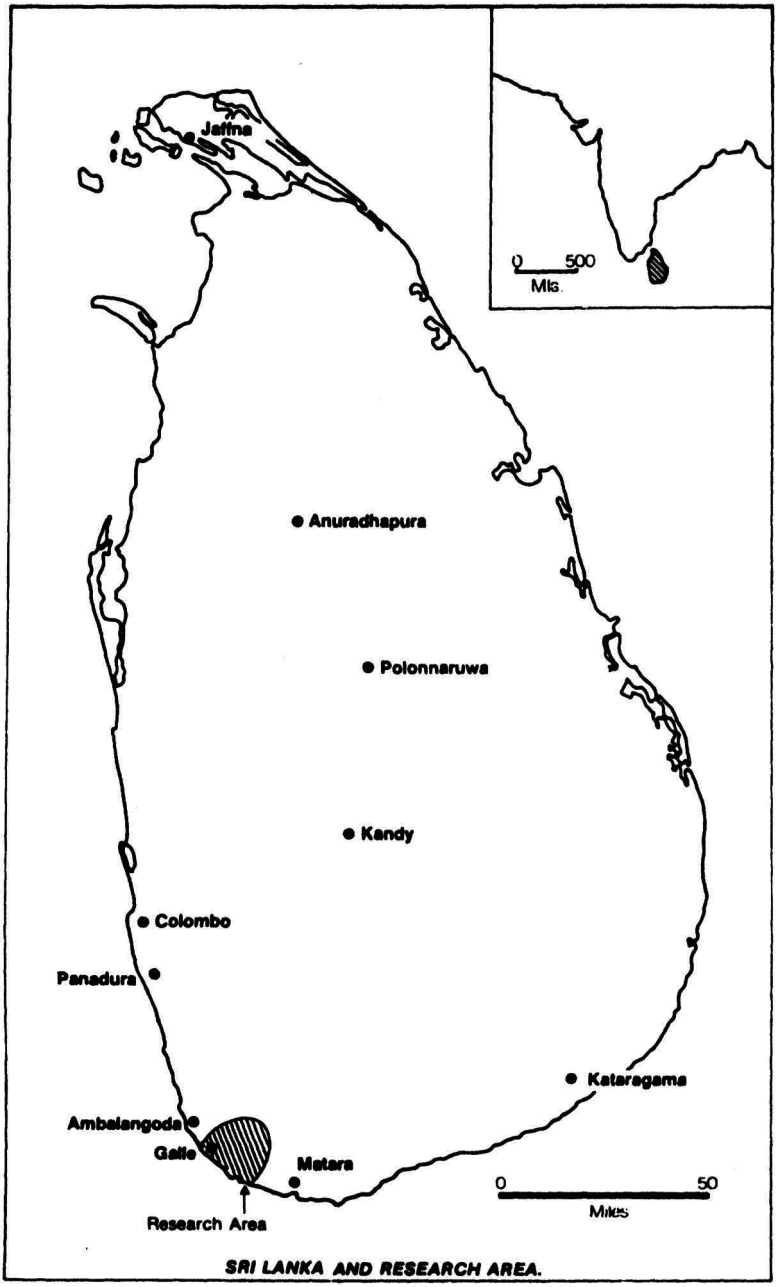

SRI LANKA AND RESEARCH AREA.

1

Introduction

> If evil is coextensive with the origin of things,
> as primeval chaos and theogonic strife, then the
> elimination of evil and of the wicked must
> belong to the creative act as such.
>
> Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, 1967

When demons intrude upon the social world of the Sinhalese, they disturb its ordering. They manifest their presence and their disorienting and disruptive powers in the illness of individual Sinhalese and threaten to overturn and reorder the world, encompassing victims of demonic attack. Demons introduce an abnormal ordering of the world, confounding reality as it should, in a normal view, be comprehended and experienced. Demons order disorder.

This book is about the culturally constituted modalities of the normal and the abnormal as these are constructed by Sinhalese Buddhists through reference to demons and the nature of the demonic. In the conception of Sinhalese, suffering, misfortune, disease and illness can find their own particular ordering, their meaning and experience, within a world commanded and structured by malign demonic forces. Most significantly, the demonic, that morbid possibility of being, is emergent within those processes which define the ideas and actions of the healthy and unafflicted. The abnormal, that which is strange and threatening, rests and can become active in the midst of the normal. Life and death for Sinhalese Buddhists are joined in a single dialectical process, each negating the other, but founded upon essential contradictions underlying a greater cosmic unity. Demons, creatures of disorder and harbingers of death, take root and achieve their own particular vitality in some of the cultural ideas and principles through which the world of human beings and its incorporation within an encompassing cosmic whole finds its normal ordering.

I am here concerned with demons and the demonic as they become manifest in the everyday social action and experience of Sinhalese and with the specific definition of reality which the idea

of the demonic imposes and describes. My ultimate analytical focus is upon the major ceremonies which Sinhalese arrange to exorcise demons, to restore individuals to a sense of well-being, and to return to normality the order of a world threatened by demonic intrusion. Demon exorcisms are one practical means whereby Sinhalese can act directly upon their world of meaning and experience and can alleviate some of its inherent possibilities for suffering and illness. These ceremonies are also occasions during which Sinhalese Buddhists can explore for themselves and in public the realms of the abnormal and the normal, and the ideas, actions and experiences appropriate to what are culturally conceived of as different accents upon reality.

I essay ethnographically an approach to ritual which attends to its social and political context, to the logic of ideas which are incorporated and organized within ritual performance, and to ritual performance as the modus operandi of these ideas and of their transformation. Central to my analysis is the importance of the role of the aesthetic in exorcism ritual, for example, of music, song, dance and drama. It is through the aesthetic of exorcism that a "world" of experience and meaning takes form and is potentially transformed. Altogether, through a focus on exorcism ritual I explore aspects of the complex relation of ideas to action, both the circumstances in which specific ideas come to govern and direct action in the world, and the transformational dynamic of ideas and action and the identities and relationships formed through them.

The early chapters of the book discuss the situation of demon exorcisms within Sinhalese society, and those broad social categories for whom the idea of the demonic appears to have greatest force. I examine the circumstances which may lead to the apprehension and comprehension by Sinhalese of their personal experience and of a social and political world in terms of a demonic idea. In everyday life the cultural ideas relevant in the ordinary worlds of routine social interaction are continually being shaped in the course of social interaction as they are shaping this interaction. Moreover, in most everyday activities key cultural ideas which might relate to social action are not always at the forefront of conscious reflective awareness. They are taken-for-granted and unexamined aspects of everyday life. But in a social process which engages a demonic conception of personal and social experience, the cultural idea of the demonic moves into a dominant and determinant relation to action. Major demon ceremonies, the inner dynamic of which I examine in the later chapters of the book, are performed under conditions where the ordinary and routine practices

and characterizations of everyday life are created as problematic, and where many dimensions of a "prereflective", taken-for-granted world, are thrown open to examination. In exorcism, action and experience are constituted within and, initially at least, controlled and determined by the idea of the demonic. My discussion of the ritual process of exorcism examines some of the ways in which a demonic idea can gain its terrible force and illusory power in experience and in action. It is precisely because of the particular relation of ideas to action in ritual, exorcism being one dramatic example of this, that the analysis of the ritual process is of wider anthropological and sociological significance.

The definition of cultural phenomena is always a hazardous activity. In the case of ritual, it is unlikely that such a rich, complex and varied cultural form could fit neatly into the Procrustean bed of anthropological definition. I think the following definition does relatively little violence to the phenomenon as it might be widely observed. I define ritual as a multi-modal symbolic form, the practice of which is marked off (usually spatially and temporally) from, or within, the routine of everyday life, and which has specified, in advance of its enactment, a particular sequential ordering of acts, utterances and events, which are essential to the recognition of the ritual by cultural members as being representative of a specific cultural type.

There are doubtless many other features of ritual which could be included in a general definition. But I consider that any further elaboration of a definition of ritual could obscure, rather than clarify, key aspects of what ritual is about. Too often anthropologists become enmeshed in their definitions, so much so that a particular definition can take on a life of its own and become what it seeks to comprehend. Rappaport (1979) discovers the "liturgical order" of ritual, its formality and invariance, to be its principal and "obvious" characteristic. It is in the liturgical order of ritual that Rappaport extends an understanding of other obvious aspects of ritual (the communicative, expressive, informational, performative, sacred or "holy" aspects of ritual, and so on). His approach is undeniably productive of insight into the ritual process, but with his "over-definitional" orientation to cultural phenomena, Rappaport seems to me to have neglected what is perhaps *the* most obvious aspect of ritual.[1]

Regardless of how one defines the cultural phenomenon of ritual, ritual is a social practice where ideas are produced in a determinant and dominant relation to action, and it is a practice where action is continually structured to the idea. The various

definitional characteristics of ritual isolated and shared by anthropologists of different analytical persuasion implicitly contain the notion of ritual as a form in which ideas dominate. Tambiah (1981:119) lists the commonly recognized features of ritual as "formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundance (repetition)" and these, with Rappaport's related concept of invariance, might generally be understood as devices for the organization of the idea as dominant and determinant of action.[2]

Ritual practice is typically described as occurring in those contexts in which human beings commune and establish relationships with the supernatural. Supernaturals are in themselves and in the cosmic relations they form with each other, embodiments and objectifications of ideas. Religious rites are obviously occasions when the supernatural, or that constitutive of the "sacred", dominates and structures the relations of the human actors in its presence. But the supernatural is only one mode of the objectification of an idea. There are social practices outside the domain of religion, the sacred, or the supernatural, which involve the objectification and reification of ideas and which form action to these ideas. The list of such practices could be quite extensive and might include birthday parties, reunions, the organization of formal meals, the order of action in a court of law, and so on. Such contexts are likely to be described by outside observers and cultural members alike as being ritual or as having ritualistic qualities (see Moore and Myerhoff 1977).

I stress that in ritual, ideas, and not necessarily those framed or formed by the supernatural, are objectified and reified so much that they are made controlling and determining of action. Insofar as this is so, *action in ritual is made continually symbolic of the idea.* The ideas in ritual are abstractions from those relevant to, or implicit within, the action of the everyday world and are established apart from it while they might simultaneously reflect upon a routine ordinary world. It is the apartness and abstraction of ideas from their embeddedness in the action of everyday life which creates them as symbolic in a heightened and reified sense, and greatly empowers ideas to structure action to their terms. These aspects are vital in the formation of ritual as a particular "bracketing off" from the everyday world and as an organization of action in which the symbolic qualities of action are intensified.

Ritual, as a systematic organization of ideas in a dominant relation to action, can be regarded as both a model *of* and a model *for* action in the world (Geertz 1965). Thus it has been repeatedly described as a powerful agent in the reproduction, regeneration,

and even transformation of the world order as this is culturally defined. Ritual in its organization draws from that ensemble of ideas, beliefs, concepts and constructs which compose what anthropologists broadly refer to as culture, or that complex of social practices in which actions and ideas form an overall, if loose, unity. Ritual is one kind of social practice in which ideas (as a part of a relatively loosely textured cultural fabric which shrouds and can hide from human beings the objective terms of their existence) become systematically ordered. In ritual, ideas realize their full force, and can transform the world of experience and action in accordance with their illusory and mystifying potential.

I do not consider ritual to be simply expressive or reflective of major cultural ideas or of the social and political circumstances in which such ideas are embedded. Neither ideas nor the rituals in which ideas find their most abstract and explicit composition sit or rest upon the real objective conditions of human existence. An objective reality cannot so easily be separated from the ideas, principles and relations within which such an objective reality is embedded. It might be possible, for example, to isolate the "material" from the "non-material" terms of existence, the base from the superstructure, but the direction of analysis here views them as intertwined in a mutual and dialectical process of determinations. Rituals and the ideas they incorporate are active in the world, intimately engaged in structuring and restructuring the relations, actions and experiences of human beings. They are the products of the consciousness of human beings and of the fundamental conditions of their existence, but in turn, and as products of consciousness, they are vital in the reproduction of the conditions of existence in which a certain consciousness becomes possible.

I have referred to ritual as the production of ideas which are illusory and mystifying of the objective conditions of human existence. Ritual can be illusory in a general sense. This is so insofar as it makes statements about the world or achieves resolutions and transformations in terms of ideas which disguise the real and objective conditions of existence from its participants and/or is integral in the reproduction of those conditions the effects of which the practice of ritual is directed to alleviate or overcome. Sinhalese exorcisms can be seen as illusory and mystifying because they ultimately discover the source of individual and social disturbance in the demonic and seek to restore order by expelling demons from the world of human beings. Anthropologists or observers whose own conditions of existence are not those of the people whom they study may be able to discover such illusory and mystifying processes

in the cultures they examine. However, the analyst should not overlook the capacity of people within a particular cultural context to uncover those aspects of their cultural world whereby they delude and mystify themselves. For Sinhalese who recognize the possibility of the demonic, exorcism ritual is demystifying and disillusioning. To be subject to the demonic is to be deluded in a world of illusion. Exorcisms aspire to efficacy through their ability to dispel illusions and to restore individuals to a "real" sense of the world as it should normally be defined in the terms of Sinhalese Buddhist culture. This does not deny, from a standpoint outside of Sinhalese culture, that in the process of demystifying the world, Sinhalese exorcisms are also engaged in reproducing those conditions in which the illusory and mystifying nature of the demonic is an ever-present possibility.

The argument of the book builds towards a consideration of ritual *as performance*. I contend that any examination of ritual divorced from an attention to ritual performance is likely to be severely impoverished, regardless of the particular analytical problem which a student of ritual chooses to explore. In this I am in agreement with Mikel Dufrenne in his approach to aesthetic form or the Work. For him, the Work "is irreducible to its performances and yet only graspable through them or, rather, in them" (1973:27).

An understanding of the importance I attach to performance, and my specific use of the term, in the analysis of ritual can be developed by contrasting two major approaches to cultural form and practice applied in anthropology. These are, on the one hand, the particular structuralist and semiotic methods represented by the work of Lévi-Strauss and Roland Barthes (approaches which have not been applied to ritual as much as they might have been), and on the other hand, the approach elaborated in the rich ethnographic studies of ritual by Victor Turner. These latter studies are often labelled as examples of "symbolic anthropology". "Symbolic anthropolgy" strikes me as an unsatisfactory descriptive label. So many different theoretical orientations are embraced by the term, including structuralist and semiotic approaches, as to make it virtually useless. It is far less discriminatory than the terms "structuralism" and "semiotics". These terms, however, also include a variety of brands which stress widely different methodological commitments to the analysis of culture. Generally there is, to borrow from Geertz (1980), a "blurring of genres" and relatively clear unambiguous theoretical contrasts *appear* to be disappearing. This is more apparent than real, however, for fundamental contradictions in theoretical assumptions are being obscured in the

blurring.[3] The approaches of Victor Turner and, for example, of Lévi-Strauss represent distinct methodological perspectives on the analysis of culture (see Sperber 1975).[4] My own approach in some ways steers a course between them, and for this reason alone it is important to be aware of their opposition. But a broad account of this opposition also enables me to throw into sharper focus my own position regarding the analysis of performance and the related problem of meaning.

Broadly, the structuralist and semiotic perspectives to which I refer take their direction from Saussurian linguistics.[5] Culture, and the variety of forms in which it is manifested, is analyzed as a "text" independent of its situated production in practice. Form or "text" is regarded as relatively fixed, though attention is directed to the transformational and variational possibilities of the "text" as a property of the rules governing its underlying structure and the logic of its guiding principles. The meaning of the "text" is a function of the systematic interrelation of signs within the structure of the "text". This meaning is independent of any particular interpretation by cultural actors. The specific bracketing imposed by many structuralists is undoubtedly responsible for the achievement and advance which this method has yielded to cultural analysis. However, they are open to the kind of criticism expressed by Ricoeur, who regards them as having sacrificed "the message for the sake of the code, the event for the sake of the system, the intention for the sake of the structure, and the arbitrariness of the act for the systemacity of combinations within synchronic systems" (1976:6).

Turner, in contrast to the structuralist and semiotic approaches to which I refer, stresses performance. Accordingly, he is directed to the examination of meaning in the context of action and experience and extends this to a consideration of such aspects as reflexivity, the communication of meaning, and meaning as emergent through the concrete articulation of symbols in practice (see also Firth 1973; A. Cohen 1974; Moore and Myerhoff 1977). Parallels can be drawn between his approach and divers other schools of thought on the problem of meaning. Thus there are similarities between Turner and the philosophical tradition of phenomenology and hermeneutics, a tradition from within which Ricoeur bases his critique of structuralism and semiotics. This is a tradition to which Lévi-Strauss has expressed his opposition (Lévi-Strauss 1964, 1966, 1981; see also Kultgen 1975).[6] Turner's orientation to meaning might also be likened to the approach of the later Wittgenstein, who regards language, for example, as a "form of life" and meaning as emergent in use.

I emphasize these differences because my own approach to meaning is broadly in agreement with that of Turner, although it is more consciously shaped within the phenomenological paradigm of Husserl (1952) and its extension in the social phenomenology of Schutz (1963, 1967; Natanson 1974). Thus I view meaning as defined in a context of action and experience in which both subjective "intentional" (noetic) and objective (noematic) components of meaning are joined. For cultural actors "*. . . meaning is a certain way of directing one's gaze at an item of one's own experience*" (Schutz 1967:42). Meaning arises from a process whereby actors project their own action in relation to themselves and others in such a way as to intend further acts, and it is framed in accordance with typifications or ideal conceptions shared by cultural members as to how typical actors within a culture think or act in typical situations.

There are other major differences between Turner and some structuralist and semiotic approaches which bear upon both Turner's stress on performance and his broader orientation to meaning. The structuralist searches beneath the surface of actors' cultural practices and interpretations for the deeper structural code which systematically produces, through various transformations occasioned in the combinations of the coded elements, those variations manifest at the surface level of cultural practice. The actors themselves recede from analytical view, as do the historicity of the system and the positional location of actors within it. Conversely, Turner casts his analyses at the surface level of the actors' cultural interpretations and their practical social relations. Such "deeper" meanings as Turner discovers are found, for example, in the capacity of the practical articulation of symbols to resonate with individual emotional and experiential significance and simultaneously to connect actors with wider culturally and socially shared meanings and understandings in which individual emotions and experiences are shaped. Turner's analyses of ritual concentrate on its dramaturgical properties and revolve around such key terms as dynamics, flow and process. Cultural actors are always prominent in his descriptions, as is their position in a set of social relations and their historicity in a world of continual becoming which shapes and is shaped by the actions of cultural members. While for Turner the symbolic action of the ritual process is systematizing, it is also transforming, in the sense of changing the world order in which individuals are engaged, as well as changing their positions and standpoints within it. Turner focuses on the creative moments within ritual and explores them as generative of new ways of interpreting reality. It could be added, as a broad characterization,