



Breaking the Ashes: The Culture of Illicit Liquor in Sri Lanka

Michele Ruth Gamburd

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"I'm going to break the ashes," yelled one daily drinker to another as their paths crossed early in the morning in the Sri Lankan village Michele Ruth Gamburd calls Naeaagama. The drinker's cryptic comment compared the warming power of alcohol?in the form of his first shot of kasippu, the local moonshine?with the rekindled heat of a kitchen fire. As the adverse effects of globalization have brought poverty to many areas of the world, more people, particularly men, have increased their use and abuse of alcohol. Despite Buddhist prohibitions against the consumption of mind-altering substances, men in Naeaagama are drinking more, at a younger age, and the number of problem drinkers has begun to grow.

In *Breaking the Ashes*, Gamburd explores the changing role of alcohol. Her account is populated with lively characters, many of whom Gamburd has known since visiting the village for the first time as a child. In wonderfully clear prose Gamburd offers readers an understanding of the cultural context for social and antisocial alcohol consumption, insight into everyday and ceremonial drinking in Naeaagama, and an overview of the production of illicit alcohol. *Breaking the Ashes* includes a discussion of the key economic aspects that fuel conflicts between husbands and wives, moonshine-makers and police. Addressing Western and indigenous ways to conceptualize and treat alcohol dependence, Gamburd explores the repercussions?at the family as well as the community level?of alcohol's abuse.

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