

COMMERCIALIZATION OF AGRICULTURE AND THE PERSISTING
SUBSISTENCE ORIENTATION OF PEASANT LIFE;
CONTRADICTION OR COMPLEMENTARY ?

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The general tendency among academics in Sri Lanka has been to view the process of change as a gradual or a rapid transition from subsistence-oriented production to market-oriented farming. Though there is no doubt that the general pattern of change has been a movement towards commercialism, it is factually incorrect to assume that subsistence orientation of peasant life has been fast disappearing in the face of increasing commercialization of peasant production. Quite contrarily, it is argued here that increased commercialization has resulted in the reinforcement of the subsistence orientation of rural small producers. If this is not the case, then, the small producers would not have survived the unfavourable rural terms of trade; they have survived and continue to survive mainly because of this hidden, or perhaps unseen dimension of peasant life, namely, subsistence-production which exists side by side with commercialized production. While this appears to be a general characteristic of the Sri Lankan peasantry, irrespective of the kind of commodity produced, there seems to be an inverse relationship between the size of holding and the degree of subsistence orientation. However, further intensive data needs to be gathered, before a detailed analysis can be undertaken.