

## Gender Inequality in Sri Lanka

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### Abstract

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*Gender equality is both a core concern and an essential part of human development. However, in no society do women yet enjoy the same opportunities as men. They work longer hours and they are paid less, both in total and pro rate. Their choices as to how they spend their time, in both work and leisure, are more constrained than they are for men. These disparities generate substantial gaps between how much women and men can contribute to society, and how much they respectively share in its benefits. As a conceptual tool, gender is used to highlight various structural relationships of inequality between men and women as manifested in the labour markets, income, economic resources, education and training. Discrimination is especially obvious in political leadership and decision-making positions and in economic top management. The objective of this study was to analyse how gender inequality indicate that different dimensions in Sri Lankan context. Study was based on secondary data gathered from literature survey which are directly related to the issues addressed in this study. The study was revealed that disadvantage and marginalization of women and discrimination against them is a global phenomenon. Everywhere in the world, there are still considerable differences in living conditions and upward social mobility opportunities between men and women due to unequal factors. In Sri Lankan context traditional women have much less social, economic, political and domestic power than men. However, they have played considerable role inside the family as homemakers. Especially rural women spend much time every day on agricultural and domestic tasks. However, after the independent, successive governments have invested heavily in education, health, and welfare programmes. As a result, both men and women enjoy relatively high standards in health and education. From this view, the status of Sri Lankan women has been changed last few decades. Though, poor women are facing several problems due to unequal factors of political participation, labour force participation and decision-making process. To overcome those disparities mobilization of women as equal partners in all developmental process therefore needs the priority attention of policy makers.*

*Key words: Gender, Inequality, Feminism, Mobilization, Development*

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### Introduction

Considering to the Social Stratification gender has been considered as a dimension of stratification, yet this inequality is evident in all lifestyles. Within the discourse of feminism and amidst the development debate, gender is an incessantly theorized concept that is defined vigorously from a variety of different standpoints. As a conceptual tool, it is used to highlight various structural relationships of inequality between men and women as manifested in the households, in labour markets, in personal relationships, in ideologies and in socio-political structures. Measure to the extent of discrimination, the Gender Inequality Index (GII), introduced in the Human Development Report, 2010. Gender disparities is measured by Gender Inequality Index in three dimensions viz. reproductive health (measured by the maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births and adolescent fertility per 1,000 women aged 15-19), empowerment (measured by parliamentary representation and the percentage of people who have at least lower secondary education in the age group of 25 years and over), and labour market (labour force participation rate for the 15-64 age group). GII in 2012, Sri Lanka is positioned 74<sup>th</sup> out of 186 countries.

According to the GII in 2012, (Table 01) high gender disparities persist in Sub-Saharan Africa (0.577), South Asia (0.568) and the Arab States (0.555). In South Asia, the three driving factors are low female representation in parliament (18.5%), gender imbalances in educational achievement (28% of women have completed at least secondary education,

compared with 50% of men) and low labour force participation (31% of women are in the labour force, compared with 81% of men).

**Table 01: Gender Inequality Index - 2012**

Regions	Gender Inequality Index Value 2012	Maternal Mortality Rates 2010	Adolescent Fertility Rate 2012	Seat in National Parliament % Female 2012	Participation Rate Labour Force	
					Female 2011	Male 2011
Arab Status	0.555	176	39.2	13.0	22.8	74.1
East Asia and the Pacific	0.333	73	18.5	17.7	65.2	80.6
Europe and Central Asia	0.280	28	23.1	16.7	49.6	69.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.419	74	70.6	24.4	53.7	79.9
South Asia	0.568	203	66.9	18.5	31.3	81.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.577	475	105.2	20.9	64.7	76.2
Sri Lanka	0.402	35	22.1	5.8	34.7	76.3

Source: UN(2013)

In Sri Lanka, Successive governments have invested heavily in education, health and welfare programmes and this has been associated with the country achieving levels of life expectancy and literacy that are comparable to other regional countries. As a result both men and women enjoy relatively high standards in health and education, much in contrast to most other developing countries. However, despite these positive social development indicators, the country's overall level of women gender empowerment is below the average level of developing countries, especially because of the extremely low involvement of women in politics and low female participation in the labour force. Sri Lanka National Human Development Report 1998 on published by UNDP has indicated, "by modern standards, the level of gender development and gender empowerment is low in the country as a whole..." (*Sri Lanka National Human Development Report - 1998*).

In this background the study was conducted to analyse how gender inequality indicate that different dimensions in Sri Lankan context.

## Methodology

Study was based on secondary data gathered from literature survey which are directly related to the issues addressed in this study.

## Result and Discussion

### The Definition of Gender

Social Stratification is the basic concept of Sociology, the term used by Sociologists to describe the pattern structures of inequality that are present in all societies. Most important social divisions are clearly identifiable to sociologists such as class, caste, gender, ethnicity and age. It is only in recent decades that gender has been considered as a dimension of stratification, yet this inequality is evident in all lifestyles.

Within the discourse of feminism and amidst the development debate, gender is an incessantly theorized concept that is defined vigorously from a variety of different standpoints. As a conceptual tool, it is used to highlight various structural relationships of inequality between men and women as manifested in the households, in labour markets, in personal relationships, in ideologies and in socio-political structures.

The simplest and most widely accepted explanation of division and inequalities between men and women is the biological one.

Inequality between men and women used by social scientists and biologists to refer to certain biological categories: identification of sex is based on a variety of factors, including chromosomal patterns, hormonal makeup, and genital structure. The determination of sex is considerably more complex than is generally understood (Ruth, 1998: 17).

This emphasizes the biologically given fact of ‘sex’ men are stronger, superior in intelligence and physically adapted for and outgoing role. Women are soft, caring, and built mainly for childbearing. Different male and female behavior can be attributed to differences in sex. This type of explanation is known as biological determinism, although one of the notable sociologist, Talcott Parsons has also leaned in this direction. Thus, men play ‘instrumental’ role and women play ‘expressive’ role within the family (Parsons and Bales, 1955: 23-24).

From this point of view, sex refers to biological differences related to reproduction. Sex depends on whether we were born with distinct male or female genitals and a genetic program that released either male or female hormones to stimulate the development of reproductive system.

Sexuality has long been considered highly personal subjects. There is clearly a biological component, but it is far too complicated to be wholly attributable to biological traits. It must be understood in terms of the social meanings, which humans ascribe to it (Giddens, 2010: 579). The term *gender* refers to non-biological, culturally and socially produced distinction between men and women and between masculinity and femininity. In general, sociologists use the term ‘sex’ to refer to the anatomical and psychological differences that define male and female bodies. Gender, by contrast, concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between male and females. Gender is linked to socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity; it is not necessarily a direct product of an individual’s biological sex. Gender is more than biology; it is a socially constructed set of distinctions and evaluations that reflects power and cultures as well as social functions. All societies use gender as an organizing principle, dividing the chores and rewards of social life into men’s and women’s roles (Calhoun et al, 1997: 240)

According to this definition, gender can be defined as the set of characteristics, roles and behavior patterns that distinguish women from men which are constructed not biologically but socially and culturally. Yet gender differences are rarely neutral-in almost all societies, gender is a significant form of social stratification. Gender is a critical factor in structuring the types of opportunities and life chances faced by individuals and groups, and strongly influences the roles they play within social institutions from the household to the state. But many sociologists begin from the assumption that human behavior is largely directed and determined by culture, that is the learned recipes for behavior shared by members of a society. Thus, norms, values and roles are culturally determined and socially transmitted. From this point of view, gender roles are product of culture rather than biology.

Ann Oakley, a British sociologist and a supporter of the Women's liberation Movement, comes down strongly on the side of culture as the determinant of gender roles. She has argued that differences of personality follow the biological differences of sex.

Only the everyday observation of men and women in society is needed to 'prove' that differences of personality follow the biological differences of sex. Men are more aggressive and independent than women; they are braver, more outgoing and extroverted, confident in their own ability to control and manipulate the external environment. Women are more sensitive and perceptive in their relationship with other people; they are more dependent on these relationships. They are introverted and domesticated and emotionally labile (Oakley, 1972: 43)

According to the Oakley's view, men and women role can be identified as result of a process of gender role socialization. Gender role socialization is basically carried on by parents, who choose blue for boys and pink for girls. It is reflected in cards, presents and hospital nametags. From birth the physical handling of boys and girls is different. Boys are encouraged to look around and stimulated to be active; girls are hugged, protected and encouraged to be passive and 'take care'. Boys develop physical strength and girls cultivate fragility and weakness. Women are encouraged in to domestic roles. Notions of romance, marriage and motherhood all tend to pressure girls in to these roles which can they exclude other possibilities in their lives which are available to men. They may give up at school and see marriage as an important goal, or they may find it difficult to enter professions on the same terms as men. Social expectation is that they will break off their career to have children and look after them. Resisting this role is seen as form of deviance. Men are not seen in this way.

According to the above explanation can be concluded 'sex' and 'gender' are different concepts considered by sociologists. Gender is not as straightforward a concept as many believe. First, it is distinct from sex, the physical and psychological features that differentiate females and males. As opposed to being a biological designation, gender is a social construction-the differentiation and institutionalization of the expected characteristics, norms, and behaviors associated with being female or male in any specific social context. Gender also refers to the rank ordering of this social division, and subsequent statuses, on interlocking societal levels. The distinction between female and male spheres operates in the family, the economy, religion, political systems, educational institutions, and culture.

## **Gender Inequality**

The term sex refers to the biological differences that define male and female bodies. Men and women clearly vary in many biological characteristics such as average height, weight, amount of body fat, amount of body hair and genitals. Biological differences of men and women are universal concept. However, gender is nonbiological, culturally and socially created distinction between men and women. Despite the advanced that women have made in countries around the world, gender differences continue to serve as the basis for social inequalities. Investigating and accounting for gender inequality has become a central concern of sociologists. Considering the gender inequality in traditional societies men and women are much more equal than in industrial societies. In many small-scale hunting and gathering societies, for instance, men and women play complementary roles, and their lives revolve around many shared activities. No one has a great deal of wealth or power, and men and women often view their relationships in terms of integration and balance. In horticultural and

agricultural societies, however, the balance of power shifts to men and men begin to dominate women in the economy and other institutions of society. The transition to industrialism changes the relationship between the genders even more. Industrialization created sharp differences in the social worlds inhabited by men and women.

The origins of gender inequality have long history. Substantial inequality between women and men has existed for only about 6000 years. The anthropological record suggests that women and men were about equal in status in nomadic hunting and gathering societies. As well as the archeological record from Old Europe tells a similar story. In Old Europe between 7000 and 3500 B.C.E., men and women enjoyed approximately equal status throughout the region. However, 4300 and 4200 B.C.E., all this began to change. Old Europe was invaded by successive waves of warring peoples from the Asiatic European northeast (the Kurgans) and the deserts to the south (the Semites). Both the Kurgans and Semitic civilizations were based on a steeply hierarchical social structure in which men were dominant (Brym and Jhon, 2005: 303).

Plow agriculture originated in the Middle East around 5000 years ago. As a result, large-scale farming using plows harnessed to animals men's strengths and so greatly enhanced male power and authority. Plow agriculture required that strong adults remain in the fields all day for much of the year. It also reinforced the principle of private ownership of land. Because men were on average stronger than women, and because women were restricted in their activities by pregnancy, childbirth, plow agriculture made men more powerful socially (Brym and Jhon, 2005: 305).

In the agriculture era, economic production was organized around the household men may have worked apart from women in the fields, but during the early phase of industrialization men's work moved out of the household and in to the factory and the office. Most men became wage or salary workers. Some men assumed decision-making roles in economic and political institution. Yet while men went public, most women remained in the domestic or private sphere.

So we see that gender inequality derives not from any inherent biological features of men and women but from three main socio-historical circumstances: the arrival of far-ranging warfare and conquest, the development of plow agriculture, and the assignment of women to the domestic sphere and men to the public sphere during the early industrial era. In this, background distinction between male and female spheres operates in the family, the economy, religion, political systems, educational institutions, and culture. Everywhere in the world, there are still considerable differences in living conditions and upward social mobility opportunities between men and women due to unequal factual access to employment, income, economic resources, education and training. Discrimination is especially obvious in political leadership and decision-making positions and in economic top management.

### **Theoretical Perspectives of Gender Inequality**

Despite the advanced that women have made in countries around the world, gender differences continue to serve as the basis for social inequalities. Investigating and accounting for gender inequality has become a central concern of sociologists. Many theoretical perspectives have been advanced to explain men's enduring dominance over women-in the realm of economics, politics, the family and elsewhere.

Discuss the gender differences it can be identified two competing theories: the essentialist and the social constructionist (Richardson et al, 1997: 31). The first theory argues gender is

inherent in our biological makeup and is merely reinforced by society. According to this view, gender differences can be seen as a reflection of naturally evolved dispositions. Essentialist Notions of Gender argue that the distinctions and separate spheres assigned to women and men are inevitable and natural. The assumption of essential and innate differences between the sexes follows from the idea that females and males are biologically determined “natural” opposites (Kuumba, 2003: 10).

That is because it views gender as a part of the nature of “essence” one’s biological makeup. Sigmund Freud offered an early and influential essentialist explanation of male- female differences. He believed that differences in male and female anatomy account for the development of distinct masculine and feminine gender roles. Furthermore, Sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists have offered an essentialist theory. They also point of view gender differences in behavior are based in biological differences between women and men (Brym and Jhon, 2005: 290).

However, sociologists have lodged four main criticisms against essentialist arguments such as those of Freud and the sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists.

01. Essentialists ignore the historical and cultural variability of gender and sexuality.
02. Essentialist tends to generalize from the average, ignoring variations within gender groups
03. No evidence directly supports the essentialists’ major claims.
04. Essentialists’ explanations for gender differences ignore the role of power

( Brym and Jhon, 2005: 291-292).

Second argues gender is constructed mainly by social influences. According to this argument, gender differences can be identified as a reflection of the different social positions occupied by women and men. Sociologists call this perspective Social constructionism because it views gender as “constructed” by social structure and culture (Kuumba, 2003: 09).

Furthermore, explaining the gender inequality, sociologists have discussed this concept in terms of several perspectives such as functionalism, conflict theory, symbolic interactionism, and feminism.

### **Functionalist Approach**

The functionalist Approach sees society as a system of interlinked parts, when in balance, operate smoothly to produce social solidarity. Thus, functionalist and functionalist-inspired perspectives on gender seek to show that gender differences contribute to social stability and integration (Giddens, 2010: 614). From the functionalist perspective, gender inequality has a positive function for the society as a whole. Broadly considered, gender inequality is a mechanism for dividing labour and allocating rewards among the members of a society. It channels women in to domestic spheres and nurturing occupations and channels men in to the paid labour force, commerce, and government. Writers who argue that the division of labour between men and women is biological based. Women and men perform those tasks for which they are biologically based suited. Thus, the anthropologist George Peter Murdock saw it as both practical and convenient that women should concentrate on domestic and family responsibilities while men work outside the home. Man with his superior physical strength, can better undertake the more strenuous tasks, such as lumbering, mining, quarrying, land clearance, and house building. Women is at no disadvantage, however, in lighter tasks which can be performed in or near the home. (Murdock, 1949: 07).

Talcott Parsons, a leading functionalist thinker, concerned himself with the role of the family in industrial societies. He was particularly interested in the socialization of children, and argued that stable, supportive families are the key to successful socialization. In parson's view, the family operates most efficiently with a clear-cut sexual division of labour in which females act in expressive roles, providing care and security to children and offering them emotional support. Men, on the other hand, should perform instrumental roles-namely, being the breadwinner in the family. This complementary division of labour, springing from a biological distinction between the sexes, would ensure the solidarity of the family (Parsons and Bales, 1955: 23).

Another, functionalist John Bowlby, argued that the mother is crucial to the primary socialization of children. Bowlby mentioned that a child's well-being and mental health can be best guaranteed through a close, personal and continuous relationship with its mother. If the mother is absent, or if a child is separated from the mother at a young age a state referred to as maternal deprivation the child runs a high risk of being inadequately socialized. This can lead to serious social and psychological difficulties later in life, including anti-social and psychopathic tendencies. Bowlby mentioned that the long-term consequences of maternal deprivation might include the following: delinquency, reduced intelligence, increased aggression, depression, and affectionless psychopathy (Bowlby, 1953).

### **Conflict Perspective**

Conflict theory is introduced by Marx and it was Marx's friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels who did more than Marx to provide an account of gender equality from a Marxist Perspective.

Conflict theorists say that gender inequality benefits men because it relegates women to lower positions in the system of social stratification. According to the conflict theory, the power of men to shape society to their ends means that women will inevitably be a subordinate group. According to that view Marxist Feminists argue sexism is merely a by-product of Capitalism (Ruth, 1998: 187). Engels saw female subordination as a result of the emergence of private property, in particular the private ownership of the forces of production. Monogamous marriage developed to protect the institution of private property. He argued that capitalism intensifies patriarchy – men's domination over women – by concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a small number of men (Giddens, 2010: 616).

### **Symbolic Interactionist Perspective**

Symbolic interactionist perspective has discussed gender inequality in the terms of the gender role socialization. They explain gender inequality as the product of social learning that tends to reproduce itself across generations. This socialization makes it seem "natural" that men are in the favored positions in the economy and women are in the domestic sphere of life (Curry et al, 1997: 244).

### **Feminist Perspective**

Feminist perspectives in relation to gender inequality contrast markedly with one another. Competing school of feminism have sought to explain gender inequalities through a variety of deeply embedded social process, such as sexism, patriarchy, and capitalism. In the introduction to the first edition the book *Feminist Frameworks*, Alison Jaggar and Paula

Rothenberg outline four basic feminist frameworks or theoretical orientations: (i) liberal feminism (ii) Marxist feminism (iii) radical feminism (iv) socialist feminism (Ruth, 1998: 491).

### **Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminism (some call it moderate feminism), which essentially seeks opportunities for women's advancement in the existent society through institutional changes in education and the workplace. They seek equal opportunities within the system and work towards equal opportunities in 'employment', 'education', and 'health' (Patel, 1995: 576).

Liberal feminists look for explanations of gender inequalities in social and cultural attitudes. They do not see women's subordination as part of a larger system or structure. Instead, they drew attention to many separate factors, which contribute, to inequalities between men and women. For example, in recent decades liberal feminists have campaigned against sexism and discrimination against women in the workplace, education institutions, and the media. They tend to focus their energies on establishing and protecting equal opportunities for women through legislation and other democratic means. In the UK, liberal feminists, who argued that enshrining equality in law is important to eliminating discrimination against women, actively supported legal advances such as the Equal Pay Act (1970) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) (Giddens, 2010: 616). From this point of view, liberal feminism aims at bringing about equality between the sexes, within the framework of existing system. They identified inequality as being dependent on the unequal division of labour between women and men (Suguna, 2009: 02).

### **Socialist and Marxist Feminism**

Socialist feminism developed from Marx and Engels. It has been critical of liberal feminism for its perceived inability to see that there are powerful interests in society hostile to equality for women. Socialist feminist have argued that gender inequality has been emerged due to patriarchy and capitalism (Ruth, 1998: 187). They revealed that, which locates the source of women's oppression in the general problems of a capitalist society and the remedy, therefore, in its dissolution.

Engels emphasized that under the capitalism, material and economic factors underlay women's subservience to men, because patriarchy has its roots in private property. Engels argued that capitalism intensifies patriarchy – men's domination over women – by concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a small number of men (Giddens, 2010: 617).

Socialist feminists have argued that the reformist goals of liberal feminism are inadequate. They have called for the restructuring of the family, the end of 'domestic slavery' and the introduction of some collective means of carrying out childrearing, caring and household maintenance. Following Marx argued that these ends would be achieved through a socialist revolution.

### **Radical Feminism**

Radical feminism is the belief that men are responsible for and benefit from the exploitation of women. The analysis of patriarchy – systematic domination of females by males – is of central concern to this radical feminism. Radical feminists often concentrate of the family as

one of the primary sources of women's oppression in society. They argue that men exploit women by relying on the free domestic labour that women provide in the home.

Radical feminism recognizes the oppression of women as a fundamental political oppression wherein women are categorized as an inferior class based upon their sex. It is the aim of the radical feminism to organize politically to destroy this sex class system (Ruth, 1998: 492)

The use of patriarchy as a concept for explaining gender inequality has been popular with many feminist theorists. To note Kate Millett, Patriarchy is facilitated by a rigid sexual division of labour, pushes women in to subordinate, and exploited positions. Patriarchal values penetrate in to the whole process of socialization, create roles and set behaviors of individuals – as masculine and feminine (Kaushik, 1993: 9).

Radical feminist differ in their interpretations of the basis of patriarchy, but most agree that it involves the appropriation of women's bodies and sexuality in some form. Shulamith Firestone, an early radical feminist writer, argues that men control women's roles in reproduction and childrearing. Because women are biologically able to give birth to children, they become dependent materially on men for protection and livelihood. This biological inequality is socially organized in the nuclear family. Firestone speaks of a 'sex class' to describe women's social position.

The sex class system may have originated in fundamental biological conditions, this does not guarantee once the biological basis of their oppression has been swept away that women and children will be freed. On the contrary, the new technology, especially fertility control, may used against them to reinforce the entrenched system of exploitation (Firestone, 1970: 10) Radical feminists point to male violence against women as central to male supremacy. According to them, domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment are all part of the systematic oppression of women, rather than isolated cases with their own psychological or criminal roots.

Furthermore, they have mentioned interactions in daily life such as non-verbal communication, patterns of listening and interrupting, and women's sense of comport of public contribute to gender inequality.

Considering to the gender inequality in theoretically it refers to the differences in status, power and prestige enjoyed by women and men in various context. In explaining gender inequality, functionalists mentioned that gender differences and the sexual division of labour contribute to social stability and integration. Conflict approach argued that capitalism intensifies patriarchy – men's domination over women – by concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a small number of men. As well as they emphasized female subordination as a result of the emergence of private property, in particular the private ownership of the forces of production. Feminist approaches reject the idea that gender inequality is somehow 'natural'. Liberal feminists have explained gender inequality in terms of social and cultural attitudes, such as sexism and discrimination. Radical feminists argue that men are responsible for the exploitation of women through patriarchy – the systematic domination of females by males. Black feminists have seen factors such as class and ethnicity, in addition to gender, as essential for understanding the oppression experienced by non-white women.

### **Gender Inequality in Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka is widely acclaimed as having established excellent human development at a relatively lower level of economic growth. Successive governments have invested heavily in education, health and welfare programmes and this has been associated with the country

achieving levels of life expectancy and literacy that are comparable to other regional countries. Sri Lanka is ranked 92<sup>th</sup> out of 186 countries in the Human Development Index (HDI) published by the UN in the Human Development Report, 2013. HDI is a composite measure that captures the three basic aspects of human development viz. longevity, knowledge and a decent standard of living. It is devised to rank countries by the level of human development. Sri Lanka is grouped in the High Human Development category, occupying the third position and first among the South Asian countries in the HDI. With a score higher than the South Asian average of 0.558, Sri Lanka ranks high in life expectancy, literacy rates and other social indicators (Table 02).

**Table 02: A Comparison of Human Development Achievements in Sri Lanka and Other Countries – 2012**

Country Group	Human Development Index (HDI) Value	Life Expectancy at Birth (Yrs)	Adult Literacy Rate (2011)	Mean Years of Schooling	Expected Years of schooling	Gross National Income (GNI) per Capita
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	<b>0.715</b>	<b>75.1</b>	<b>90.6</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>5,170</b>
Arab states	0.652	71.0	72.9	6.0	10.6	8,317
East Asia and the Pacific	0.683	72.7	93.5	7.2	11.8	6,874
Europe and Central Asia	0.771	71.5	98.0	10.4	13.7	12,243
Latin American and the Caribbean	0.741	74.7	91.0	7.8	13.7	10,300
South Asia	0.558	66.2	62.8	4.7	10.2	3,343
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.475	54.9	61.6	4.5	9.3	2,010

Source: UN(2013)

In Sri Lanka, both men and women enjoy relatively high standards in health and education, much in contrast to most other developing countries. However, despite these positive social development indicators, the country’s overall level of women gender empowerment is below the average level of developing countries, especially because of the extremely low involvement of women in politics and low female participation in the labour force. Sri Lanka National Human Development Report 1998 on published by UNDP has indicated, “by modern standards, the level of gender development and gender empowerment is low in the country as a whole...” (*Sri Lanka National Human Development Report - 1998*)

According to the comparable data given in the table below, (table 03) the problems lies in the poor female representation in the national parliament (5.8%) and low female participation in the labour force (34.7%). These figures show that women’s capabilities are grossly undervalued and under-utilized in Sri Lanka.

**Table 03: Gender Inequality in Sri Lanka and other Regions**

Regions	Gender Inequality Index Value	Seat in National Parliament % Female	Labour Force Participation Rate	
			Female 2011	Male 2011
Sri Lanka	0.402	5.8	34.7	76.3
Arab Status	0.555	13.0	22.8	74.1
East Asia and the Pacific	0.333	17.7	65.2	80.6
Europe and Central Asia	0.280	16.7	49.6	69.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.419	24.4	53.7	79.9
South Asia	0.568	18.5	31.3	81.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.577	20.9	64.7	76.2

Source: UN(2012)

Identifying the gender inequality in Sri Lanka, the women of ancient society were employed in various capacities while attending to the duties at their own homes, as well as they attended their duties as wives and mothers while contributing to the economic prosperity of their homeland. They played a very important role in the principle source of livelihood – paddy cultivation. They were involved in every aspect and every stage of it from sowing to harvesting and from threshing to cooking. It is because of Sinhala women’s heritage of shouldering responsibilities. In addition, traditional society they worked in pleasant cooperation with their men work in every economic activity the society ventured. They had a traditional share of work in paddy cultivation. In the “chena” cultivation, they played a dominant role (Munasinghe, 2004: X).

Now Sri Lankan women they enjoy a relatively higher status than their counterparts in many other developing countries. Especially access to free education and health services without discrimination have caused to enhance the women’s social status.

**Table 04: The Status of Women in Sri Lanka: The Macro Scenario**

<u>Total Population ('000) 2009:</u> 20,450 (100.0%) Male : 10,148 (49.6%) Female : 10,302 (50.4%)	<u>Life Expectancy (2007)</u> Average: 74.0 Years Male : 70.3 Years Female : 77.9 Years
<u>Literacy Rate (2010)</u> Average : 91.9% Male : 93.2% Female: 90.8%	<u>Labour Force (2010)</u> Total : 8,107,739 (100%) Male : 5,317,553 (65.6%) Female:2,790,186 (34.4%)
<u>Employed Population (2010)</u> Total : 7,706,593 (100%) Male: 5,131,986 (66.6%) Female: 2,574,608 (33.4%)	<u>Labour Force Participation Rate (2010)</u> Total : 48.1% Male: 67.1% Female:31.2%
<u>Women’s Representation:</u> Parliament : 5.6% (2008) Provincial Councils : 4.2% (2008) Local Councils : 1.8% (2010)	

## Gender and Education in Sri Lanka

Over the last few decades, national policies and practices have considerably improved the participation of women in education. Free primary, secondary and tertiary education and equal access to an extensive network of state schools, has made a significant contribution to the attainment of high female literacy rates, high levels of primary school enrolment and gender parity in overall educational attainment. Female literacy rates which stood at 55.5% in 1953 and 67.3% in 1963 recorded substantial progress to reach 90.8% in 2010. The gender gap in the literacy rate has declined steadily from 25 percentage points in 1953 to 3 percentage points in 2010. Universal access to education has had a noticeable impact on the attainment of gender equity in general education. For instance, the proportion of the population that has completed secondary education (completed grade 10) for both sexes in 2009/2010 show similar trends. The 12,526 female students enrolled in the local universities represent 58% of the total university admissions for the academic year 2009/2010 (Feminization of Poverty in Sri Lanka, Marga Institute- 2010).

In addition, Sri Lanka National Human Development Report mentioned that status of young girl's education in Sri Lanka, while many countries globally still need to do much to improve their education, Sri Lankan girls perform better than boys. In 2012, there were 591,087 youth at the O/L, of whom close to 51 percent were female and 49 percent male. Among 468,880 youth at the A/L, the portion of young women rose to 56.4 percent of the total. The National Youth Survey 2013 confirmed this trend of more women than men advancing to higher education (Sri Lanka National Human Development Report – 2014, 20).

## Gender and Labour Market in Sri Lanka

Compare with male, labour force participation of female is very low. In 2010, females accounted for 33.4% of the employed labour force (table 10). In Sri Lanka, women have traditionally played an important role in the labour force, almost from the very beginning of the plantation economy in the nineteenth century. However, introducing the policy liberalization of 1977, female employment has grown rapidly in the manufacturing and services sectors, while increasing numbers have left the country to work abroad, particularly in West Asia. At the same time , the open economic framework has provided new opportunities for female employment in the private sector (Gunathilaka, 1999: 2-3).

The impressive gains made by women in the field of education are manifested in the growing number of females entering the labour force. During the period 1995/2010 for instance, the number of females employed grew from 1,656,166 in 1995 to 2,068,667 in 2000 and 2,465,265 in 2010 (Feminization of Poverty in Sri Lanka, Marga Institute- 2012) .

Women's labour force representation has increased dramatically in recent decades, but a pattern of gender inequality on the job continues. *Sri Lankan National Human Development Report* has mentioned that young women's participation in the labour market is less than half that of young men, a gender gap (table 05) that persists despite young women's higher level of education. Low involvement in the older age cohort of 25 to 29 years implies that young women face difficulty getting jobs even after completing their studies.

**Table 05: Labour Force Participation Men and Women in Rural and Urban Areas in Sri Lanka**

Age Group	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>47.2</b>	<b>66.8</b>	<b>29.9</b>
15-19	14.8	20.8	8.7
20-24	54.7	73.6	37.7
25-29	64.6	94.0	39.4
<b>Urban</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>63.4</b>	<b>26.4</b>
15-19	10.9	14.8	6.7
20-24	54.0	67.2	40.5
25-29	61.0	92.6	36.3
<b>Rural</b>	<b>48.0</b>	<b>67.5</b>	<b>30.6</b>
15-19	15.7	22.2	9.1
20-24	54.9	5.2	37.1
25-29	65.3	94.3	40.1

Source: Sri Lanka National Human Development Report - 2014

Women still tend to be channeled in to traditionally feminine occupations and to earn less than men even though they may perform comparable jobs. On the other hand, gender inequality in the workplace is the concentration of females in low-level jobs and males in high-level jobs. Since much of what defines women's low labour force participation is deeply cultural, changes in gender relations are necessary over the long run, supported through appropriate programmes in educational institutions and workplaces.

**Table 06: Employment Status of Women in Sri Lanka**

Category	Year	Total No.	Women No.	% of Women
<b>Representation in the Executive</b>				
Secretaries to Ministries	2007	56	5	8.9
Additional Secretaries	2000/2001	99	24	24.2
District Secretaries	2006	25	4	16.0
Divisional Secretaries	2006	315	72	22.9
<b>Women representation in the Law Field</b>				
Representation in the Judiciary	2000	234	45	19.2
Representation in the Legal Draftsmen's Department	2007	17	14	82.4
Representation in the Attorney General's Department	2007	143	49	34.3
Lawyers in Sri Lanka	2006/2007	7,443	2,981	40.0
<b>Women in the Decision Making Positions</b>				
Members of Sri Lanka Administrative Service	2007	1,876	664	35.4
Members of Sri Lanka Scientific Service	2006	269	101	37.5
Members of Sri Lanka Planning Service	2006	650	190	29.2
Members of Sri Lanka Accountants Service	2002	1,000	257	25.7
Members of Sri Lanka Engineering Service	2007	10,273	1,353	13.2
Members of Sri Lanka Medical Council	2007	18,783	8,144	43.4
<b>School Staff (Government Schools only)</b>				
School Principals	2005	7,563	1,590	21.0
School Teachers	2005	189,234	131,170	69.3
<b>State Sector, Semi Government Sector &amp; Provincial Public Sector Employees</b>				
State Sector	2002	295,734	86,547	29.3
Semi Government Sector	2002	247,845	58,825	23.7
Provincial Public Sector	2002	292,071	165,932	56.8
Private Sector Employees	2005	644,591	321,807	49.9
<b>Defense Personal</b>				
Navy	2005			1.2
Army	2005			2.6
Air Force	2007			6.0
Police	2005			8.8

Source: Sri Lankan Women Partner in Progress, Department of Census & Statistics, Sri Lanka -2007

Table 06 sets out data on the gender-disaggregated occupational structure of employment in the Sri Lankan economy. It can be seen that although roughly males account for two thirds of total employment, they occupy nearly 75 per cent of executive posts and 65 per cent of decision-making position. At the same time women are still under represented in the profession of Engineering (13.2%) executive professions. The only occupations in which females are employed in significant numbers are the school teachers (69.3%). The data indicates that by the large, outside the public service, the majority of women are employed in low skill occupations. As evident in Table 12, nearly 50 per cent women worked mainly in the private sector and their representation in State sector is 29 per cent. Job opportunities for women are limited to a defense sector. The data shows women have a few space of Air Force and Police (6% and 9%) Navy and Army section their involvement is very low.

## Women Unemployment Rate in Sri Lanka

The number of unemployed persons in 2011 was estimated at 4.2% or approximately 342,000. The overall unemployment rate for females at 6.8% is twice that of the male unemployment rate (2.7%). In keeping with the progressively declining unemployment rate, the female unemployment rate fell from 8.4% in 2008, 7.7% in 2010 to 4.2% in 2011. Unemployment is more pronounced among the educated group, with 15.8% of females with “AL and above” qualifications being unemployed. It is significant that the unemployment rate among the educated females is twice that of their male counterpart (Annual Report Central Bank of Sri Lanka-2011).

Overall, the data indicates the majority of the women in the lowest income quintile are engaged in unskilled manual operations and in seasonal jobs. Most women are looking job as teachers, nurses or clerks in the state sector. Employment in manufacturing industry is clearly the most viable choice for an increasing number of women, and their numbers have exceeded that of males.

## Gender and Politics in Sri Lanka

In 1931 Sri Lanka became one of the first countries in South Asia to give women the right to vote. In the post independence period, Sri Lankan women also made rapid progress in relation to health, education and employment. However, political participation and representation of women in political institutions have remained stagnant in the 60 years since Sri Lanka achieved independence.

**Table 07: Women’s Political Representation in Sri Lanka**

Category	Year	Total No	Women No	% Of Women
<b>Parliamentarians</b>				
Ministers of Parliament	2007	107	3	2.8
Members of Parliament	2007	225	13	5.8
Members of Cabinet	2007	52	3	5.8
<b>Provincial Councillers</b>				
Ministers of Provincial Councils	2006	35	0	0.0
Member of Provincial Councils	2004	380	19	5
<b>Members of Local Government Councils</b>				
Municipal Councils	2006	330	10	3.0
Urban Councils	2006	379	13	3.4
Pradeshiya Sabha	2006	3,243	51	1.6

Source: The Sri Lankan Women Partner in Progress, Department of Census & Statistics, Sri Lanka -2007

According to the Table 07, women representation in political sector Cabinet Ministers 5.8%, Parliament 5.8%, Municipal Council 3%, Urban Council 3.4%, and Pradeshiya Sabha 1.6%. These figures show that women’s capabilities and decision making power are grossly undervalued and underutilized in Sri Lanka.

Women in Parliament, however small in numbers have held high positions in Parliament and the cabinet, two women have become Prime Minister and one has gone onto become the President in Sri Lanka. Sirimavo Bandaranaike became the world's first female head of government on 21 July 1960, holding the post for a non-consecutive 17 years. In her final term succeeding her daughter Chandrika Kumaratuna, in 1994, who went onto become Sri Lanka's first Modern Female Head of State and President.

In south Asia without Sri Lanka, the underrepresentation of women at local political bodies has been addressed through legally enforceable quotas for women. In fact, Sri Lanka remains the only country without any special measures to facilitate women's representation in local authorities. In Bangladesh, at least 25% of seats are reserved for women in Union Councils (1996 legislation); in India not less than 33% of seats are reserved for women and other marginalized groups in all panchayats or local bodies (1992 Constitutional amendment); in Nepal 20% of village and municipal councils are reserved for women (1990 Constitution); and in Pakistan 33% of seats are reserved for women at the union, tehsil (Municipality) and district level (2000 Devolution Plan). Obviously, all these countries have recognized the necessity for women's representation in local authorities as both a factor of development as well as a fundamental rights issue (<http://www.ft.lk/2011/01/22/a-perennial-struggle-women%E2%80%99s-political-representation-in-sri-lanka>).

According to the above explain of the gender inequality of Sri Lanka, traditional women have much less social, economic, political and domestic power than men. However, they have played considerable role inside the family as homemakers. Especially rural women spend much time every day on agricultural and domestic tasks. As paid or un paid labour, women may spend up to 19 hours a day performing essential chores such as sowing, weeding, harvesting, animal husbandry, cleaning, fetching water and firewood, baking, cooking, sewing, child rearing etc.

However, after the independent successive governments have invested heavily in education, health, and welfare programmes and this has been associated with the country achieving levels of life expectancy and literacy that are comparable to other regional countries. As a result, both men and women enjoy relatively high standards in health and education, the country's overall level of women gender empowerment is below the average level of developing countries, especially because of the extremely low involvement of women politics and low female participation in the labour force. With the change of government in 1977, they introduced Open Economic Policy as Structural Adjustments of the country. Structural Adjustment programmes affect different groups of women in different ways. Swarna Jayaweera has mentioned that,

Micro –studies indicate that the living conditions of women from low-income families have improved marginally over the last two decades of Adjustment. In addition, the Structural Adjustment Programmes unwittingly created new employment opportunities for women in the hospitality, migrant, export, garment, and informal sectors, despite patriarchal assumptions and the overall exclusion of accounting for women mainstream development planning. However, this is process of integration on unequal terms-where women are compelled to work in subordinate capacities and where the standards and levels of employment are low (Jayaweera, 1995: 15).

From this view, the status of Sri Lankan women has been changed last few decades. However, poor women are facing several problems due to unequal factors of political participation, labour force participation and decision-making process. Therefore, women empowerment is a challengeable task is facing by every developed or developing countries.

## **Conclusion**

The study was revealed that disadvantage and marginalization of women and discrimination against them is a global phenomenon. Everywhere in the world, there are still considerable differences in living conditions and upward social mobility opportunities between men and

women due to unequal factors. In Sri Lankan context traditional women have much less social, economic, political and domestic power than men. However, they have played considerable role inside the family as homemakers. Especially rural women spend much time every day on agricultural and domestic tasks. However, after the independent successive governments have invested heavily in education, health, and welfare programmes and this has been associated with the country achieving levels of life expectancy and literacy that are comparable to other regional countries. As a result, both men and women enjoy relatively high standards in health and education. From this view, the status of Sri Lankan women has been changed last few decades. Though, poor women are facing several problems due to unequal factors of political participation, labour force participation and decision-making process. To overcome those disparities mobilization of women as equal partners in all developmental process therefore needs the priority attention of policy makers.

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