

Scope and Limits of Women's Empowerment in Sri Lanka

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Large number of categories like gender, class, caste, ethnicity, elite and so on have often been used by social scientists to describe, analyze and understand the social reality (includes both realized and potential) . The simultaneous use of all such categories has created more confusion and complexity and, therefore, the use of one category at a time has been considered most appropriate. Gender is the most popular and widely used category through which attempt has been made for encapsulated understanding of the social reality. The use of such a category has inspired strong feminist movement for political action in most parts of the world. In the process movement for politico-administrative action gained primacy over the academic analysis and scientific research irrespective of the fact that women's image has been depicted as paragon of divine (power, wealth and intellect) in the ancient literature in South Asian part of the world. It has been projected that the full human entity can be formed only through the unity of male and female, not by highlighting and depicting disparities. Moreover, the language and literature in South Asia did not reflect male chauvinism as has been the case of Western part of the world wherein language and literature reflected strong bias against women and, therefore, strong feminist movement was imperative in that part of the world.

Certain social ailments germinated in the social system over a period of time, particularly with the alien influence and discrimination against women became the order of the present day society. Hence, the women's empowerment remained most important component of the social reformation movement. That is why, large number of legislative measures have been undertaken for elimination of discrimination against women and their empowerment. All such measures were aimed at empowerment of women. Moreover, the empirical evidence in economic, social and political fields reveals that little success has been achieved in regard to gender equality and women's empowerment. The figures show that the Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) in Sri Lanka are at 0.700 and 0.286 respectively. It is, therefore, obvious that the pace of women's empowerment is very slow, but somewhat impressive comparing with other countries in South Asia. The paper concludes that the poets had been proved more progressive than philosophers and policy-planners in regard to gender sensitivity and, therefore, governmental policies and strategies are very important in elimination of gender disparities. The appropriate policy and strategy may certainly herald a change in prevalent social practice. In turn, a change in social practice may reinforce appropriate policy and strategy. Moreover, democratization and empowerment of women are having positive association. The democratic polity has accelerated the process of empowerment and social inclusions of women. Thus, the paper suggests that there must be national a policy for introducing disaggregated practice for the empowerment of women.

Key words: Scope; Limits; Women; Empowerment; Sri Lanka

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