

## The Rape, the Reason, the Response: A Critique of the Representation of Rape

T.N.K. Meegaswatta<sup>1</sup>

This paper is an attempt to critically analyze the cultural and gendered discourses that underlie the representation of sexual violence against women in Sri Lanka. While gender-based sexual violence takes many forms, this paper specifically focuses on rape, given the growing number of incidents and increased media and public attention towards rape in the recent past. The analysis focuses on the rape and murder of an eighteen-year-old school-girl in Jaffna, in the light of the unprecedented attention the incident received from media as well as the public. As in the rape and fatally wounding of a young woman on a moving bus in Delhi more than two years ago, this brutal crime shocked the entire nation and sparked an unforeseen response from ordinary citizens from all walks of life. Media representations of the incident ranged from informative reports to opinion articles that shed light on the contemporary discourse on rape and the ideologies and dominant narratives that underpin its narrative. An analysis of a number of online articles on the incident (expert opinions, features, interviews, factual accounts)utilizing the theoretical frameworks of discourse and performativity of gender offered by Michel Foucault and Judith Butler respectively, indicates that cultural and gendered scripts of patriarchy has played a significant role in the articulation of Vithya's rape through various media outlets. Enmeshed within the patriarchal discourse of rape and mediated through the lens of gender, culture, race, and politics, the representations of the rape and murder of Vithaya Sivaloganathan fail to see rape as structural symptom of gender inequality in patriarchal traditions that celebrate male sexual conquest and entitle men to control women's bodies. Instead, the focus is on the racially, culturally and politically mediated apologetics of rape that appeal to an essentialist conceptualization of the male and female, erosion of culture and post-war social mutation. Although the incident pushed the boundaries of existing discourse and effected transformations in terms of response, bound by language and dominant narratives of race and power, sexual violence against women and girls become yet another foot soldier in the national struggle for political rights.

*Key words: rape, sexual violence, representation, discourse, gender*

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<sup>1</sup>Department of Languages, General Sir John Kotelawala University, Sri Lanka.  
[thilini.meegaswatta@yahoo.com](mailto:thilini.meegaswatta@yahoo.com)