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**Representation in Politics:  
Women and Gender in the Sri  
Lankan Republic**



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## Introduction

Sri Lanka has, along with India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, in the last forty years, been touted as testifying to gender equality when it comes to women's political representation due to the striking presence of its women leaders. The two figures of Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Chandrika Kumaratunga have become emblematic of women's representation in Sri Lanka especially for the West. In 1960, Bandaranaike gained global renown as the first democratically elected woman Prime Minister in the modern world. In 1994, her daughter, Kumaratunga, was elected as the country's first woman Executive President. Yet in stark contrast to such pre-eminence, only a fistful of women politicians, 2.34% of all political representatives, represent women as a collective sex/gender that constitutes 52% of the Sri Lankan population.<sup>1</sup>

The scope of politics is, of course, vast and varied: it embraces a wide spectrum of social structures from Parliament to local government; from trade unions to social movements, to the media engaged in promoting socio-political change and raising the political consciousness of citizens. Politics, for Sri Lankan women have also spanned action, for instance, by the Women's Franchise Union in 1927, the Eksath Kantha Peramuna in the late 1940s, the Northern and Southern Mothers' Fronts in the 1980s, and the women cadre of the LTTE in more recent times. This chapter confines itself to a consideration of formal electoral politics given that the political institutions in the republic set the parameters

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'sex/gender' is used to indicate the argument that men and women are both biologically and socially constructed beings within what Sandra Harding conceptualises as a sex/gender system in societies that trigger gender inequality and inequity, patriarchal institutions and the oppression of women. See S. Harding, 'Why Has the Sex/Gender System Become Visible Only Now?' (2004) *Discovering Reality* (Synthese Library) 161: pp.311-324.

within which the representation of women is possible, determined and advanced.<sup>2</sup>

The issue of women's representation in politics in Sri Lanka has been researched and written about extensively since the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> This chapter therefore does not aim to provide an overarching view of women's representation within political and public structures,<sup>4</sup> or a genealogy of women in the Sri Lankan political landscape,<sup>5</sup> or a comprehensive feminist review of legal discourses on women's representation, or for that matter, even consider the informal interventions made by women into politics.

Rather, the objective of this chapter is to explore political representation within the Sri Lankan republic *vis-à-vis* its women citizens and gender issues. Firstly, to what extent has the state been representative of women as a collective? To what extent has the state represented the interests of women as a collective sex/gender? Secondly, what are the dominant political representations of women within the state? What do women politicians in Sri Lanka represent? What are the problems relating to such representations?

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<sup>2</sup> The formal political structure in Sri Lanka comprises of an Executive President, a Parliament of 225 members, 8 Provincial Councils, 12 Municipal Councils, 38 Urban Councils, 257 *Pradeshiya Sabhas*.

<sup>3</sup> See C. Kodikara (2009) *The Struggle for Equal Political Representation of Women in Sri Lanka*, A Stocktaking Report for the Ministry of Child Development and Women's Empowerment and the United Nations Development Programme, available at: <http://www.undp.lk/Shared%20Documents/WPE%20Final%20Annex%20PDF.pdf> for an extensive bibliography up to 2009. Since then, see K. Liyanage & S. Rajendran, 'Increasing Women's Representation in the Central Province of Sri Lanka – Trends and Problems', and P. Liyanage, 'Women in Politics in Sri Lanka – The Left Movement', papers presented at the 13<sup>th</sup> National Convention on Women's Studies, 27<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> July 2012, Centre for Women's Research, Colombo.

<sup>4</sup> See W. de Silva, 'Political Participation of Women in Sri Lanka (1985 – 1995)' in CENWOR (1995) *Facets of Change – Women in Sri Lanka 1986-1995* (Colombo: Centre for Women's Research).

<sup>5</sup> See C. de Silva, 'A Historical Overview of Women in Sri Lankan Politics' in S. Kiribamune (Ed.) (1999) *Women and Politics in Sri Lanka – A Comparative Perspective* (Kandy: ICES).

In Sri Lanka, however, the concept of a republic does not have its genesis in social revolution or in political theory but rather, in constitutional reform from the point of independence.<sup>6</sup> Within modern political theory, the concept of a republic has ignited deliberations on parliamentary republics based on the sovereignty of the institutional structure to the supremacy of the written word as a constitutional republic; from representative democracies based on the sovereign right of the people in electing their leaders to presidential republics of direct representation and to procedural republics based on liberalism where right is taken to be prior to good.<sup>7</sup>

But at the core of all theoretical conceptualisations of a republic lies the idea of the sovereignty of the people exercised through political representation. Our focus, in particular, is on considering the political representation of women as a collective identification despite the latitude of the concept to encompass heterogeneity (constituting differences of race, religion and ethnicity; class, economic status, language, education, profession and geography; age, sexual / gender status and orientation, disability and health amongst other factors).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> L.I. Keerthisinghe, 'Wither Sri Lanka after Forty Decades of being a Republic?' *The Sunday Leader*, 17<sup>th</sup> August 2012, available at: <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2012/06/10/whither-sri-lanka-after-four-decades-of-being-a-republic/>; A. Welikala, 'The Sri Lankan Republic at Forty: Reflections on the Constitutional Past and Present' *Groundviews*, 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2012, available at: <http://groundviews.org/2012/05/25/the-sri-lankan-republic-at-forty-reflections-on-the-constitutional-past-and-present/>

<sup>7</sup> M.J. Sandel (1996) *Democracy's Discontents: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP).

<sup>8</sup> While identification is undertaken for the strategic purpose of writing this chapter, the danger in considering women as a collective identity or identification founded solely on sex/gender is that it ignores and obscures the differences of other intersecting identities. S. Evens (1979) *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf); b. hooks, 'Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women' (1986) *Feminist Review* 23: pp.125 – 138.

Thus this chapter<sup>9</sup> rests on the somewhat rudimentary assumption that a democratic republic should constitute of political institutions that represent men and women in equal if not near equal numbers; moreover that they should also represent not only the shared interests of both men and women, but also their gender-specific interests,<sup>10</sup> as well as their heterogeneous interests as a sex/gender.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, this chapter approaches Sri Lankan women's political representation (materially and ideologically) from gendered and feminist perspectives. It will rely on numbers, legal discourses, theoretical concepts and parliamentary speeches to do so.

### **Women's Representation: Beginnings and Stereotypes**

Sri Lanka gained universal voting rights in 1931, and for the most part, has a reputation for a political culture that is founded on heavily contested electoral politics, marked by sporadic flares of violence.<sup>12</sup> In addition to being a majority in voter turnout, women have been present in electoral politics since 1931 with the entry of the first woman State Counsellor, Adeline Molamure (a Sinhala woman representing Ruwanwella) to the State Council through a by-election on the death of her father; followed in 1932 by a Tamil woman State Counsellor Naysum

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<sup>9</sup> The chapter was based primarily on literature surveying; but it has also been augmented by interviews with politicians, women political activists, lobbyists, and party members and by our own experiences as political observers.

<sup>10</sup> Gender-specific interests refer to the common interests of women or men as a sex/gender; these are based on sex and gender differences.

<sup>11</sup> Diversified interests or heterogeneous interests refer to the differing individual interests of women or men within a sex/gender (which could be based on ethnicity, religion, age, language, educational ability, sexual orientation, etc.).

<sup>12</sup> Aside from electoral aggression, Sri Lanka has been in the grip of intermittent communal rioting, two violent student revolutions of 1971 and 1988/1989 crushed brutally by the respective governments of the time, and the lingering ethnic conflict of over twenty-five years, 'concluded' militarily in 2009.

Saravanamuttu (representing Colombo North) after her husband was unseated by an election petition. These legislators were observed as characterising local political interests of prominent families representing their communities in an era when there was no official recognition of political parties; but a transition period portending independence from British colonialism.

During the ascendancy of the Left parties in government (from 1947-1977), more women who were committed to the different strands of the socialist cause were able to come into Parliament. These include Florence Senanayake and Kusumasiri Gunewardena of the LSSP<sup>13</sup> who entered the First Parliament,<sup>14</sup> Tamara Illangaratne (Independent), Doreen Wickremasinghe (CP), Vivienne Gunewardena<sup>15</sup> (NLSSP), and Soma Wickramanayake (LSSP). Historically, given their socialist ideological leanings and their submersion in class politics, many of these women seem to have made a strong case for women's rights while in Parliament.<sup>16</sup>

From the two parties that have predominantly straddled Sri Lankan politics for over sixty years, Wimala Wijewardena was the first woman elected to Parliament from the SLFP in 1956 (and became the first woman minister in the country) while Wimala Kannangara came in from the UNP in 1965. On the whole, the consistent presence of women from the SLFP and the UNP can be

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<sup>13</sup> The Lanka Sama Samaja Pakshaya (LSSP) was established in 1935 and is the oldest political party in the country, though its political power is seen to have diminished considerably today.

<sup>14</sup> Under the Soulbury Constitution (1947) in terms of which Ceylon obtained independence, Parliament was a bicameral legislature comprising the House of Representatives and the Senate. This replaced the State Council, the unicameral legislature under the previous Donoughmore Constitution (1931).

<sup>15</sup> The only Leftist woman MP to become a Deputy Minister (Local Government and Administration).

<sup>16</sup> De Silva (1999); K. Pinto Jayawardena & C. Kodikara (2003) *Women and Governance in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: ICES); W. Muthiah, S. Thiruchandran & S. Wanasinghe (Eds.) (2006) *Socialist Women of Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Young Socialist); P. Liyanage (2012).

observed only after 1965. The second Tamil woman, Ranganayaky Pathmanathan (UNP) was elected to Parliament only in 1977 followed by Rita M. Pulendran (UNP) who was appointed in 1989 after her brother was killed by the LTTE. In contrast, the first Muslim woman Member of Parliament, Ferial Ashraf (SLMC), was elected only in 2001 after the death of her husband in a helicopter crash. This was alongside Anjan Umma who was appointed on the National List of the JVP. No woman represented Jaffna until 2004 when Pathmini Sithamparanathan was elected from ITAK. There has been no representation of women from the Indian Tamil community, or any Burgher or Malay women hitherto. Table 2 at the end of this chapter shows that the percentage of women in the State Council / Parliament did not exceed 3.8% until 1977.

Women's political representation in the Senate<sup>17</sup> also included women from its inception with Adeline Molamure who was elected by the House of Representatives of the First Parliament (subsequent to her stint in the State Council), and Cissy Cooray who was an appointed member. Later on, Adeline's daughter Sita was also appointed to the Senate, making them the first mother-daughter duo in politics. Another distinct phenomenon of the time was that of political couples.<sup>18</sup> These marital and family combines strengthened and consolidated power, firstly within prominent families and then later on, within political parties. All in all, there have been seven woman Senators during the twenty-four years of its existence with Sirimavo Bandaranaike starting her career in electoral politics after first entering the Senate. At the level of local government, this period also saw Ayesha Rauf, the first woman to be elected to the

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<sup>17</sup> The Senate, the Second Chamber of Parliament (in operation from 1947 to 1971), constituted of thirty members elected by the House of Representatives or appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Prime Minister.

<sup>18</sup> Examples include Adeline and A.F. Molamure, Kusumasiri and Philip Gunewardena, Tamara and T. B. Illangaranta, Vivienne and Lesley Gunewardena as well as Kusuma and K.M.P. Rajaratna.

Colombo Municipal Council in 1949, going on to become the Deputy Mayor.

Table 1 also shows that since 1931 there have been a total of 59 women representatives in Parliament. Fifty women were Sinhalese, 6 were Tamil, 2 Muslim and 1 Anglo-Sri Lankan. Of the 59 women elected, 5 were appointed to represent various districts (without a by-election) in the lead-up to the constitutional changes of 1978. Since then, 6 women have been appointed to Parliament on the National List. Thirty-eight women parliamentarians have been involved in another profession before entering politics, the most common being teachers or administrative secretaries; thereby negating “the common perception of these women politicians as uneducated, inexperienced nonentities” as expressed by one of our respondents (a women’s rights activist). In fact, all current women parliamentarians (bar one) have been working in some capacity or another before entering politics.

Chandra de Silva contends that historically women came into electoral politics on the basis of what was identified as a ‘stop gap situation,’<sup>19</sup> when women relatives of male members were nominated to contest by-elections or elections, or were appointed by a political party to replace these members due to death or dislodgment arising from electoral petitions. Thus from early times, women politicians were primarily recognised and represented in relation to their family affiliation to well-known male politicians, *and considered as representatives of family-led constituencies; not of the interests of women as a collective sex/gender.* For instance, Adeline Molamure replaced her father on his death, Naysum Saravanamuttu’s husband, a former Mayor of Colombo, was unseated on an election petition, and Sirima Bandaranaike was the widow of S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike and daughter of ex-Senator Barnes Ratwatte. From the Left, Kusumasiri Gunewardena was the wife of Philip Gunewardena and Doreen Wickramasinghe was the wife of the Communist Party

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<sup>19</sup> De Silva (1999).



leader S.A. Wickramasinghe. Of course, there were interesting exceptions of women who came in on their own (*sans* political family connection at the time), such as Wimala Wijewardena and Wimala Kannangara (though they too had some social connections).

With the heightening of the ethnic conflict from the 1980s onwards and the assassination of politicians in a number of high profile instances, the phenomenon of ‘widows, wives and daughters’ coming into politics ‘over the dead bodies’ of their family members were felt to be more pronounced.<sup>20</sup> However, it is important to re-assess this popular stereotype<sup>21</sup> in representing women politicians, as stereotypes not only exist in the individual mind but at a collective level as well. Table 1 shows that of the total 59 parliamentary representatives, 34 women have come into electoral politics to either replace a male family member or due to some connection with a male political relative. Yet despite the common perception of dead men opening doors for women, only 18 women representatives have actually taken on the mantle of parliamentary politics as a direct outcome of death. Interestingly, 24 of the 59 women representatives do not seem to possess any explicit family connection to politicians.

Analysis of Table 1 thus overturns the stereotypes concerning the representation of women politicians (as devoid of her own political agency due to family connections or status as a replacement; or as lacking in education or formal experience). Furthermore, even though historically, women in politics have been portrayed as capitalising on family affiliations, this is not a political phenomenon associated solely with women contestants. In fact, political parties actively seek out

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<sup>20</sup> Pinto Jayawardena & Kodikara (2003).

<sup>21</sup> The danger in representing women as stereotypes is that they are then often taken to be the dominant ‘reality’ and accepted uncritically, and not as a category that has been socially or culturally constructed. W. Enteman, ‘Stereotyping, Prejudice and Discrimination’ in P. Lester (Ed.) (1996) *Images that Injure – Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media* (London: Praeger).

candidates (both women and men) with family political connections as an easy strategy to garner what they believe to be an existing vote bank.<sup>22</sup> Thus whether male or female, a number of our respondents have pointed out that new entrants to politics who have existing family connections to politics have an advantage. This reliance on political connections to consolidate votes has become even more marked under the proportional representation (PR) system of the 1978 Constitution and the preferential voting feature established in 1989. Nepotism is thus not only a customary political stipulation but it has also become an acceptable political practice.

### **Representation of Women: Constitutional Supports and Challenges**

As observed by one of our respondents (a party leader), the two republican constitutions instituted in the 1970s reflect the social movements and political developments of the period. The 1972 Constitution was drafted to pacify the Sinhala Buddhist forces, for instance, by repealing Section 29 of the previous Soulbury Constitution (that protected ethnic and religious minorities from discriminatory legislation). The First Republican Constitution therefore combined ethnic nationalist ideas with a socialist ideology.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the 1978 Constitution was intended to revise the perceived excesses of the existing electoral and governance system (evoked by the first-past-the post-system) and to bring a degree of stability through the inclusion of the proportional representation scheme, a mechanism that

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<sup>22</sup> This was clearly evident from the interviews with political party officials and women's organisations working to increase women's nominations at the 2011 local government elections.

<sup>23</sup> R. Coomaraswamy, 'The Politics of Institutional Design' in S. Bastian & R. Luckham (Eds.) (2003) *Can Democracy be Designed? The Politics of Institutional Choice in Conflict-torn Societies* (London: Zed Books): p.149.

was felt would reflect the wishes of the majority of voters.<sup>24</sup>

The 1970s was also a period of political interest and fermentation *vis-à-vis* women's status, roles in development and women's civic rights, with local and international consciousness reaching a highpoint as a result of the United Nations sponsored International Year of Women (1975) and the subsequent International Decade of Women (1975-1985). However, such interest was not seen to be reflected in the constitution-making of the era. Thus while the two Sri Lankan constitutions incorporated elements of internationally accepted norms of citizenship, they did not absorb the developing international standards on women's rights. Germanely to the 1970-72 constitution-making process, in which the principal political objective was the establishment of a republic by repudiating the British Crown, Rosemary Hunter observed in relation to the Australian debate on republicanism that,

“The constitutional sphere is not one where women are obviously oppressed, and the problems we do experience there, such as disproportionately low political representation and the construction of citizenship in masculine terms, are not ones that would be necessarily resolved by a shift from a monarchical to a republican form of government.”<sup>25</sup>

It may therefore be important to consider what Hunter means by the construction of citizenship in masculine terms in the context of the Second Republican Constitution (1978) since this is what affects us today.

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<sup>24</sup> It was felt that the first-past-the-post system does not provide an accurate representation of the overall vote given that in some historical instances, despite the winning parties obtaining a majority of seats in Parliament, they did not command the majority of votes in the country.

<sup>25</sup> R. Hunter, 'Working the Republic: Some Feminist Reflections' (1996) *Journal of Australian Studies* 20(47): pp.57-66.

While ‘masculine’ may be too essentialist a term,<sup>26</sup> it is possible to see that the 1978 Constitution was built on certain overriding legal/theoretical/ideological assumptions about life that left out what were considered to be minority or lesser experiences. For instance, the 1978 Constitution enshrines the assumption and affirmation of a general principle of formal equality of all citizens on the basis that like should be treated alike<sup>27</sup>. Article 12(1) on the right to equality strives to ensure that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to the equal protection of the law. In addition, Article 12(2) goes on to specify that there should be no discrimination on grounds of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, and place of birth, thereby recognising categories that may be open to disadvantage and discrimination. However, age has been excluded from the list of discriminatory categories. Nor does the constitution provide for non-discrimination on other vital grounds such as gender, marital status, maternity, disability, parental status, sexual orientation, transgender status or being HIV positive. In this instance, the scope of the constitutional provisions may have been constrained by the extent / state of technical knowledge and ideological considerations of the time.

Constitutions tend to conceptualise citizenship in terms of formal equality without recognising that formal equality can often operate as an inclusionary / exclusionary mechanism. Thus Article 4(e) of the 1978 Constitution confers the right to vote on all citizens over eighteen years of age as an exercise in sovereignty. This provision is effective only to the extent that men and women are able

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<sup>26</sup> Assigning inanimate objects with attributes of femininity and masculinity essentialises sex/gender differences as pure, total and irrevocable, when in reality they are merely social constructions.

<sup>27</sup> S. Goonesekere (n.d.) *The Concept of Substantive Equality and Gender Justice in South Asia*, available at: <http://www.unwomensouthasia.org/2011/“the-concept-of-substantive-equality-and-gender-justice-in-south-asia”-by-savitri-w-e-goonesekere/>.

to exercise their vote.<sup>28</sup> For numerous reasons, including electoral violence and the practice of staggered elections (at provincial and local government levels), as well as a possible disillusionment with the political process, the overall voter turnout has been decreasing over the last few years, conveying an erosion of public confidence in the political culture and institutional framework that form the context for the meaningful exercise of this right. Furthermore, not all citizens are able to exercise their sovereignty through voting. Disadvantaged groups such as migrant workers (60% of whom are women) and displaced peoples (most of whom are Tamils and Muslims) are *de facto* denied the fundamental right to vote due to a lack of supportive provisions that enable their vote.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the sovereignty of these groups has yet to be formally and substantively protected. This suggests that formal equality of treatment is conceptually inadequate to deal with the specificities of disadvantage imposed due to sex or ethnicity.

Similarly, Article 90, which establishes the qualifications for election as a Member of Parliament, gives the right to all citizens over eighteen to stand for political office. Yet going by the numbers (see next section), women have not experienced the realisation of this right on equal terms with men in terms of results; in other words, they have not achieved substantive equality<sup>30</sup> or more precisely, *de facto* equality or to be even more precise, gender equity.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> R. Lister (1997) *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (London: Macmillan).

<sup>29</sup> M. Wickramasinghe (forthcoming) *Towards Gender Equity / Equality: A Scan of Gender Sensitive Laws, Policies and Programmes in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: ILO).

<sup>30</sup> Goonesekere (n.d.)

<sup>31</sup> Gender equity originates in the recognition that men and women have differing interests, needs and priorities depending on their biological sex and their gendered life experiences. Furthermore, different groups of women and men prioritise different issues from one another. Thus, 'achieving gender equity' requires fulfilling these differential and heterogeneous interests. Wickramasinghe (forthcoming).

This is despite the fact that Article 12(4) allows for special legal provision to be made for the advancement and protection of disadvantaged groups, which includes women, children or disabled persons. Yet the state has hardly used this, for instance, to reserve quotas for women in respect of political representation despite continuing evidence of gender inequality. One reason for this may be the fact that the state as a republic does not conceptualise women as the majority of the Sri Lankan populace. In fact, women are conceptualised as an innately vulnerable special group (alongside children or disabled persons); rather than as a collective political identity in the sense defined by Sonia Kruks:

“What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is *qua* women, *qua* blacks, *qua* lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of ‘universal humankind’ on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect ‘in spite of’ one’s differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself *as* different.”<sup>32</sup>

This then is an argument going beyond equality: to acknowledge, understand, and account for primary differences, historical situations of powerlessness, and the social structures and ideological forces that perpetuate disadvantage.

If Article 12(4) is to be meaningful for women, it needs to be strengthened so as to ensure that the clause allowing special provisions cannot be disputed through the constitutional provisions on non-discrimination. A recent determination of the Supreme Court (SC (SD) Nos. 2-11

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<sup>32</sup> S. Kruks (2001) *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics* (New York: Cornell UP): p.85..

of 2010)<sup>33</sup> took the view that this section cannot be used as a ‘weapon’ in order to depart from the basic principles laid down in Article 12(1) (the equality clause).<sup>34</sup>

Furthermore, fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution do not apply retrospectively to laws that were in existence prior to the enactment of the Constitution. Thus discriminatory laws that were in existence prior to the constitution such as Muslim Personal law cannot be challenged on the ground of violation of the fundamental rights chapter. Fundamental rights can also be superseded in the interest of national security, racial harmony, national economy, public order, and the protection of public health and morality.

As it relates to political representation, citizenship in Sri Lanka then can be seen as ‘gendered’<sup>35</sup> in such a way that most women are denied access to the fuller scope of citizenship and rights that are available to men. For women to achieve full citizenship, the state would need to subscribe to legal premises that are inclusive of both gender equity and equality – to recognise and legitimise both commonality and differences.<sup>36</sup> A step towards acknowledging the sex/gender difference (even if not going so far as to re-conceptualise the state and citizenship from a position of difference) would be to fulfil the state’s obligation of transforming the state policy on women, articulated in the Sri Lanka Women’s Charter (approved by Cabinet in 1993) into legislation so that it becomes legally binding.

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<sup>33</sup> Supreme Court Special Determination on Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Bill (SC (SD) 10/2010).

<sup>34</sup> M. Wickramasinghe & C. Kodikara (2012) *Changing Minds – Nominations and Votes for Women – A Participatory Evaluation* (internal document) (Colombo: UN Women’s Fund for Gender Equality / Women and Media Collective).

<sup>35</sup> Lister (1997); N. Yuval-Davis (1997) *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage).

<sup>36</sup> Lister (1997).

Despite these gaps and inconsistencies, the state has consistently pledged allegiance to international standards on gender equity / equality; successive governments have subscribed to various dominant discourses on women's political participation; signed and ratified a number of international conventions and standards; and correspondingly, individual political parties have pledged to increase women's political representation. These international instruments include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT); UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) as well as its Optional Protocol; the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women; and the UN Millennium Development Goals.

However, it needs to be cautioned that UN standards do not always have mechanisms of enforcement. They are thus often reliant on the ethical, moral or political obligations of the state for execution. Consequently, attempts at transforming international standards into legislation have given rise to bitter allegations of the infringement of the people's sovereignty.<sup>37</sup> For example, an attempt to enact the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women through domestic legislation in the form of the Women's Rights Bill was abandoned due to accusations that the measure promoted 'Western' values claimed to be at variance with the local culture.

Similarly, efforts by women's organisations in 1995 to penalise marital rape and liberalise abortion on behalf of women as a sex/gender have failed, mainly due to opposition from minority parties in Parliament (who had

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<sup>37</sup> Pinto Jayawardena & Kodikara (2003).



interestingly gained political power under PR)<sup>38</sup>. Thus, women have not been able to rely on the republican state to deliver on their rights in the face of other dominant identity interests and politics (especially when founded on religion and ethnicity). Nor have minority women benefitted from gender-equal legislative change as evinced by the following instance when general law came into conflict with customary law. When the state raised the age of marriage for men and women to eighteen years of age in 1995, no corresponding change was made in the Muslim law on the grounds that the Muslim community was entitled to be governed by their own laws, usages and customs. Muslim girls/women were thus conceptualised first and foremost in terms of their ethnicity rather than in terms of their sex/gender. The state did not think it fit to provide girls/women the option of subscribing to either general law or customary law as a way of resolving the apparent clash between legal uniformity and differences of culture. Yet in one instance, legislative reform that sought to rectify prevailing gender inequality led to unforeseen consequences, when the arbitrary gender equalisation of penal laws resulted in the criminalisation of sexual relations between women where previously lesbianism had not been in the statute books as a crime.<sup>39</sup>

In this context, it is worthwhile noting that nearly 52% of Sri Lanka's formal laws are either partially compliant or fully non-compliant with the CEDAW benchmarks according to a review of benchmarks on legal compliance on gender equality based on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) published by UNDP.<sup>40</sup> Thus there seems to be a

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<sup>38</sup> The PR system allowed for a number of new identity-based political parties like the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) and Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) to enter electoral politics.

<sup>39</sup> See Penal Code (Amendment) Act No 22 of 1995, Section 18 that replaced Section 365a of the principal enactment.

<sup>40</sup> H. Cheema, 'Diversity within Family Laws may Undermine Women's Rights in Sri Lanka' in (2010) **Benchmarking National Legislation for Gender Equality: Findings from Five Asian**

persistent gap between what is articulated at the level of discourse or policy and what takes place at the material level in terms of political culture and practice. The extent to which women have been able to bargain with the state is clearly dependent on contesting forces and prevailing blocs of power. Bina Agarwal conceives these multifarious contestations within the state in the following terms:

“The State itself can be seen as an arena of gender contestation between parties with varying understanding and commitment to reducing (or reinforcing) gender hierarchies. These contestations can be between state officials within a department, between different tiers of the state apparatus (such as policymaking and policy implementing bodies), and/or between different regional elements of the state structure...”<sup>41</sup>

In Sri Lanka, the foundations for these contestations have been related to culture but only when it comes to women’s rights. The sex/gender identity of a woman is regarded as subservient to her cultural identity, thereby reasserting the burden on women to be markers of culture.<sup>42</sup> However, it is possible to see a double standard when it comes to traditional penal and commercial laws, as many of them have been allowed to expire without the reference to a cultural argument.<sup>43</sup>

Given this analysis, the Sri Lankan state can be described as ‘Janus-faced’<sup>44</sup> – with the power to enact laws and

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*Countries* (Bangkok: Human Development Report Unit UNDP Asia-Pacific Regional Centre).

<sup>41</sup> Agarwal cited in Pinto Jayawardena & Kodikara (2003); B. Agarwal (1994) *A Field of One’s Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (Cambridge: CUP): p.79.

<sup>42</sup> R. Muttettuwagama, (1997) *Parallel Systems of Personal Laws in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Muslim Women’s Research Action Forum / WLUML).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> R. Coomaraswamy, ‘*Reinventing International Law: Women’s Rights as Human Rights in the International Community*’ (1997) Edward A. Smith Lecture, Harvard Law School, available at:

formulate policies in favour of women and which advances the rights of women, and at the same time having the power to reinforce existing gender discrimination, stereotypes and biases.

### **Women's Representation: Current Numbers and Concerns**

The UNDP's latest *Gender Inequality Index and Related Indicators* of 2011 give Sri Lanka's an overall *Gender Inequality Index* value of 0.419.<sup>45</sup> However, women constitute only 5.8% MPs in Parliament while the female-male ratio in Parliament is a dismal 0.056.<sup>46</sup> In comparison, India's ratio is 0.119, Pakistan 0.226, and in Bangladesh 0.228, Nepal 0.496, Maldives 0.069 and Afghanistan 0.382 respectively. These higher values in other South Asian countries are attributed to quotas and reservations for women at varying political levels.

A look at the three tiers of government in Sri Lanka, Parliament, Provincial Councils and local government (see tables at the end of this chapter) demonstrate the following points.

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<http://library.law.columbia.edu/urlmirror/11/ReinventingInternationalLaw.htm>.

<sup>45</sup> "The Gender Inequality Index (GII) reflects women's disadvantage in three dimensions – reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market – for as many countries as data of reasonable quality allow. The index shows the loss in human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in these dimensions. It ranges from 0, which indicates that women and men fare equally, to 1, which indicates that women fare as poorly as possible in all measured dimensions", cited in United Nations Development Program (2011a) *Gender Inequality Index*, in *Human Development Indicators*, available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/gii/>.

<sup>46</sup> Ratio of seats held by women in Parliament as against men: United Nations Development Program (2011b) *Sri Lanka: Country Profile*, in *International Human Development Indicators*, available at: <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LKA.html>.

In Parliament, women's representation is currently 5.8% (see Table 2). There have not been any significant changes in the representation of women over sixty-three years, except that there are more women in Parliament since 1989 for the reason that the overall number of members in Parliament increased from 101 to 225. Even though the percentage of women in Parliament also increased marginally, this cannot, by any means, be compared to galloping male representation. It is however possible that in instances where there have been sharp electoral divisions between the two main parties in the polity, women may have fared marginally better under the first-past-the-post system. For instance, in 1956 and in 1977 respectively, when the SLFP and the UNP came into power with landslide votes, there were marginal increases in women's representation. There was also an increase in the period after the institution of the new constitution in 1978 when the governing party (UNP) began to appoint women relatives to Parliament to capitalise on the voter base of dead members.

When it comes to political representation by appointment, what could well have been used by parties to support Article 12(4) of the constitution on special provisions is the National List. Yet, since 1989, there have only been a minimal number of women (limited to one or none each term) on the National List until the 2010 election, which saw the entry of three women to Parliament. These women seem to have been selected by political parties for very political reasons: family representation to preserve a vote-base (Anoma Gamage); new celebrity entrants to garner a presumed fan-base (Malini Fonseka); and an old party stalwart who has supported the SLFP for decades (Kamala Ranatunge).

Within Provincial Councils (established as a second tier of government in response to demands for devolution of

political power by the Tamil community),<sup>47</sup> the representation of women is even lower. Of a total number of 417 Provincial Council members across the country in seven councils (except the Northern and Eastern Provincial Councils) elected at the 2008 / 2009 elections, there were only 17 women. This constitutes 4.1% of the total elected (see Table 3). Currently, of a total of 4466 elected members to local authorities, there are 90 elected women making them 2.01% of the total number elected (see Table 4).<sup>48</sup>

The dearth of women's nomination by political parties has been commonly identified as the reason for this poverty in numbers. In recent times, however, women have found their way into the nomination lists of the surging number of smaller parties and independent lists headed by men under PR.<sup>49</sup> A number of women candidates who contested through independent groups in 2011, were not able to win any seats. This is because these groups have begun to nominate women simply to fill the requirements of the nomination list; these women candidates do not win; nor are they expected to win.

In comparison, women who are outsiders to mainstream politics, and who have contested independently of major parties have fared no better. The Sinhala Tamil Rural Women's Network (STRWN) based in Nuwara Eliya was among the first independent women's groups to contest

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<sup>47</sup> The Provincial Councils were instituted in 1987 through the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution and the Provincial Councils Act No. 42 of 1987.

<sup>48</sup> See C. Kodikara (2012a) *Women in Local Government from 2006 to 2011: A Comparative Analysis of Representation of Women and Nominations for Women* (Colombo: ICES).

<sup>49</sup> Sometimes these candidates / groups contest as one-off political strategies, especially if they have been denied nomination from their own parties; or as a means of infringing on the votes of other parties and individual candidates rather than in a serious effort to get elected. They also field candidates in 'dummy' lists on behalf of larger parties so that their agents can gain greater access to polling and counting centres on election day: Wickramasinghe & Kodikara (2012).

for the Provincial Council elections in 1999. STRWN<sup>50</sup> decided to contest elections mainly to address the marginalisation and pauperisation of vegetable cultivators in the area; but failed to win a single a seat. This was also the fate of two other independent women's groups. One contested the Colombo Municipal Council elections in 2002 with a list constituting various professional categories of women. The other women's group contested the Kurunegala Pradeshiya Sabha in 2006.

Yet simply gaining nominations even from the major parties do not guarantee election as evinced again at the 2011 local government elections. While island-wide official statistics on nomination disaggregated by party are not available, a baseline survey of nominations by the UPFA and UNP in the five districts of Badulla, Galle, Moneragala, Kurunegala, and Trincomalee, indicates that out of 46 nominations for women by the UPFA, 11 women got elected, and out of 66 nominations for women by the UNP, only 2 women got elected.<sup>51</sup>

The reasons for the under-representation of women in politics are many, and have been extensively analysed in a number of studies.<sup>52</sup> We therefore focus mainly on the barriers resulting from the electoral / institutional framework put in place by the 1978 Constitution and the resultant political culture.

The current PR system with its preferential voting mechanism has come under criticism from a number of respondents from women's groups for creating a political culture that is inimical to women's entry into politics. Sunil Bastian argues that the initial motivation for introducing PR was to create a stable government, to stop individual MPs from crossing over and to further the

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<sup>50</sup> A community-based organisation working on issues of poverty alleviation, micro credit, health, education, environment and peace, with a membership of approximately 29,000 members.

<sup>51</sup> Kodikara (2012a).

<sup>52</sup> De Silva (1995); Liyanage & Rajendran (2012); Kiribamuna (1999); Pinto Jayawardena & Kodikara (2003).

interest of capital.<sup>53</sup> Increasing the representation of minorities or women was not part of the agenda of electoral reform. While PR did result in increasing ethnic minority representation within political bodies, it had no significant impact on the representation of women except negligibly at parliamentary level. The electoral threshold which was originally fixed at a minimum of 12.5% or one eighth of the total number of valid votes received by a party was later reduced to 5% due to concerns expressed by minority parties. While the 5% cut off point opened the door for a number of smaller parties to get elected, it has still proved to be too high for independent women's groups seeking to win a few seats at local government level.

The reason for this could be attributed to the particular type of PR adopted in Sri Lanka. Though the number of seats per district increased under PR, the electoral unit also became larger, coinciding with the 'district' conceptualised for administrative and development purposes. This means that candidates have to canvass for votes within a much larger electoral unit. While this has proved to be difficult and expensive for any contestant, women have found it even more so given their historically low economic status in general. Furthermore, under the open list PR system or the preferential voting mechanism, the voter has the ability to influence which of the candidates on the party list should be elected, by first voting for the party and then casting three preferences for three candidates on the list. Importantly, this reinforces the notion that within Sri Lankan politics people's representation is signified first by the party and then by the political representative. This has, however, added a new level of intense electoral competition between members of the same party in addition to competition between parties involving the need to fund full-scale media campaigns and, of late, the practice of 'give-away gifts' to voters.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Bastian (2003).

<sup>54</sup> Respondents who contested local government elections talked of

The poverty of numbers in nomination lists reflects the fact that despite the platitudes and pledges of mainstream political parties, they have been disinclined to nominate women as representatives of a sex/gender.<sup>55</sup> Rather, as noted by one of our respondents (a party official), potential candidates are selected on their capacity to command votes – irrespective of their sex. This seems a rational and impartial observation that subscribes to the concept of formal equality as discussed above. However, it does not acknowledge the fact that women as a sex/gender are disadvantaged in this equation given that a majority of women face structural and attitudinal drawbacks and discrimination. Consequently, women’s capacity to commandeer votes may be hindered other than in exceptional instances. Thus, formal equality by emphasising sameness in treatment without considering impact and circumstances denies the significance of disadvantage that could result in different outcomes, when people placed in different circumstances were treated in the same manner.<sup>56</sup>

On the other hand, instances considered to be advantageous in obtaining nominations from mainstream political parties at the last local government elections included being an incumbent in a local council; having a close family relationship to a retiring local council member or a party power-holder; the capacity to bring over the voter base of an opposing party (by crossing over); the backing of a party stalwart / organiser; and the post-war, multi-ethnic areas where there was political apathy and a disinterest on the part of men to contest.<sup>57</sup>

Once nominated however, contestants, aside from the reasons discussed above, have also found it difficult to

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ruling party members, in particular, introducing a ‘bribe culture’ where constituents are given advance payoffs of items ranging from roofing, water tanks, chairs, to rice and milk powder etc., on the eve of the election in order to provoke an overnight swing in votes.

<sup>55</sup> Kodikara (2009); Pinto Jayawardena & Kodikara (2003).

<sup>56</sup> Goonesekere (n. d.).

<sup>57</sup> Wickramasinghe & Kodikara (2012).



compete equally with male contestants within their parties. One reason is the apparent patriarchal party culture based on social practices and camaraderie between male party members, which is advantageous towards men.<sup>58</sup>

The voters, on the other hand, have continued to disregard women candidates as suitable politicians notwithstanding continuous media campaigns by women's organisations appealing to voters to vote for women.<sup>59</sup>

### **Women's Representation: the Continuing Demand**

The demand for affirmative action as a crucial remedy to address the under representation of women in political institutions in Sri Lanka has been articulated since the late 1990s, both by women's organisations as well as the National Committee on Women. For instance, when constitutional reform was still on the political agenda in the late 1990s, women's organisations lobbied for constitutional reform. Even as such reform became unlikely, women's groups focused their energies on legal reform. Recent attempts at advocacy have been on two fronts, with political parties and with the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reform.<sup>60</sup>

In 2003 and 2006, women's organisations engaged with the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reform (PSCER) by making written submissions and giving oral evidence before the Select Committee on a quota for women at local government level.<sup>61</sup> The Interim Report

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<sup>58</sup> Respondents (including a defeated local government contestant from the UPFA) talked of male bonding arising from 'drinking parties' and overnight stays at funeral houses in villages - social practices that generally do not include women or are gender segregated.

<sup>59</sup> Kodikara (2009).

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> The PSCER was originally established in 2003 but reconstituted in 2006 after a change of government.

of the Select Committee,<sup>62</sup> recognised the need to increase women's representation in political institutions, but inopportunately makes only a weak recommendation to the effect that: (i) political parties should include provisions in their policies to ensure nominations of women candidates in order to guarantee better representation of women in Parliament, Provincial Councils, and local government bodies, and (ii) necessary legal provisions be formulated to make it mandatory that every third candidate nominated by a party secretary from the National List to be a woman candidate.<sup>63</sup>

The Committee recommended that the 'ward system' be re-introduced for local government elections. The Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Bill which was subsequently gazetted and tabled in Parliament in 2010 provided that, "25% of the total number of candidates and additional persons whose names appear in each nomination paper...*may* consist of women and youth."<sup>64</sup> Women's organisations welcomed this as an earlier version of the Bill tabled in Parliament in 2008 had no mention of a quota for women and had also completely dropped the 40% youth quota, which had been in place since 1990. The Bill was subsequently withdrawn and it is unclear whether it will come before Parliament again.

Given the paucity of women in local government politics, this provision falls far short of what is needed to increase women's representation at local level. Firstly, the quota is a combined quota for women and youth with no specific guarantee of a reserved quota for women. Conceptually, women continue to be categorised as 'a special group' (see previous section), this time alongside youth, despite being more than half the population. Secondly, it is only a discretionary provision, which has no legal consequences in the case of non-compliance. It therefore, neither legally

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<sup>62</sup> This was dated 5<sup>th</sup> June 2007.

<sup>63</sup> Interim Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Electoral Reform, 5th June 2007.

<sup>64</sup> Section 22(4)(2b) of the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Bill (emphasis added).

binds political parties nor holds them politically accountable.

There is no doubt that political parties have discursively recognised the problem of women's under-representation as evinced by their political rhetoric, going to the extent of committing to increasing women in politics in their election manifestos. Yet, concrete action continues to remain elusive. In comparison, the European Union, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States provide public subsidies for political parties with the aim of enabling disadvantaged groups.<sup>65</sup> In addition, there are Women's Funds to specifically target women candidates.<sup>66</sup> In Ireland there is new legislation in the offing to encourage the selection of a greater number of women candidates by political parties who will face a cut of half their state political funding if they do not have at least 30% women and 30% men candidates at the next general election.<sup>67</sup>

In the absence of a quota, a number of women's organisations have, in recent times, consistently lobbied political parties to include more women on their nomination lists. Their campaigns have characterised women's political representation as a fundamental right; highlighting the injustice of numbers when it comes to women's political participation as a sex/gender; and requesting the public to vote for women on this basis – so as to rectify a historical wrong. In fact, the 2011 local

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<sup>65</sup> R. Austin & M. Tjernstrom (Eds.) (2003) *Funding of Political Parties and Electoral Campaigns* (Stockholm: International IDEA).

<sup>66</sup> J. Ballington, 'Gender Equality in Political Party Funding' in *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> "When citizens of this country look at our national Parliament, they should see something more akin to their own reflection looking back at them" - Phil Hogan, Minister of Environment, Community and Local Government (2012) '*Hogan brings groundbreaking legislation before the Seanad*', available at:

<http://www.environ.ie/en/LocalGovernment/Voting/News/MainBody,29339,en.htm>; M. Minihan, 'Groups welcome passing of Bill on gender quotas', *The Irish Times*, 20<sup>th</sup> July 2012, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2012/0720/1224320450882.html>

government elections saw at least four programmes / campaigns by separate women's networks to increase nominations.<sup>68</sup> These programmes identified women aspirants for local political office and introduced them to the local leadership of mainstream political parties; some of them also engaged with the national level leadership on the need to give more nominations to women. However, the incumbency of sitting members emerged as the biggest obstacle to increasing women's nominations. The average percentage of nominations for women by the UPFA, UNP, and JVP in the districts of Badulla, Galle, Kurunegala, Moneragala and Trincomalee collectively was only 3.4%, 4.8% and 7.5% respectively. The TNA had the best nominations record with 16.5% of nominations for women in the district of Trincomalee.<sup>69</sup> But in reality, beyond the symbolic inclusion of one or two women in nomination lists, the major parties have not taken steps to seriously address the under-representation of women even at local government. It is therefore important to reiterate this gap between policy discourses and political practice.

The absence of affirmative action for women at any level of government in Sri Lanka stands in stark contrast to what has been described as a 'quota fever,'<sup>70</sup> or an international consensus on the need for increased representation of women in elected political bodies. To date more than 100 countries have adopted some form of

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<sup>68</sup> The 2011, local government elections were held in the five districts of Trincomalee, Galle, Moneragala, Badulla and Kurunegalla. Four separate programmes, led by the Women and Media Collective (WMC) and the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES); International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADAR); the Centre for Women and Development in Jaffna; and Women for Peace and Good Governance worked, firstly, to obtain nominations, and secondly, seats for women candidates at local government elections via a number of political parties.

<sup>69</sup> Kodikara (2012a).

<sup>70</sup> D. Dahlerup, 'Comparative Studies of Electoral Gender Quotas', paper presented at the International IDEA Workshop on *The Implementation of Quotas: Latin American Experiences*, Lima, Peru, 23<sup>rd</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> February 2003.

reservation or quota for women at least at local level.<sup>71</sup> Of 29 countries that have reached or exceeded the target of 30% women in parliament, at least 24 have used quotas.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, South Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan have a constitutional quota in their national parliaments.<sup>73</sup> Quotas have become almost a norm in post-war and transitional contexts where there are fresh opportunities for change when new constitutions and legislative structures are being put in place. When South Africa made the transition from apartheid to democracy in 1994, the African National Congress voluntarily adopted its own internal quota for women in electoral lists due to strong pressure from women within the ANC. Rwanda currently boasts the highest number of women in parliament as a result of a quota for women in both houses of parliament. Other countries that have put in place quotas in the aftermath of war include Afghanistan, Liberia, Burundi and Iraq.<sup>74</sup>

We are therefore left with the question: what might be at the root of the resistance to quotas / affirmative action in

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<sup>71</sup> M.L. Krook, 'Campaigns for Candidate Gender Quotas: A New Global Women's Movement', paper presented at *Women's Movements Worldwide: Flourishing or in Abeyance?* Roundtable, International Political Science Association, World Congress, Fukuoka, Japan, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2006.

<sup>72</sup> R. Majumdar, 'South Asian Women Parliamentarians Take the Lead' (2012) *Asia – Weekly Insight and Analysis from the Asia Foundation*, available at: <http://asiafoundation.org/in-asia/2012/07/11/south-asia-women-parliamentarians-take-lead/>.

<sup>73</sup> "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 marginalised 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): see C. Kodikara, 'A Perennial Struggle: Women's Political Representation in Sri Lanka' *Groundviews*, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011, available at: <http://groundviews.org/2011/01/14/a-perennial-struggle-womens-political-representation-in-sri-lanka/>.

<sup>74</sup> Waring (2010).

Sri Lanka? Is it because of a dominant subscription to formal equality while merely paying lip service to substantive equality / gender equity? Is it because the Sri Lankan republic has historically privileged abstract individual rights over the specificities of sex/gender and other identities in conceptualising equality in citizenship? Is there a rigid refusal on the part of dominant power blocs to recognise inequality and discrimination of groups whether based on gender or ethnicity? Or is it because of dominant representations, prejudices and stereotypical perceptions about women and politics that prevent the issue being approached realistically? The answer may lie in all of the above as well as how women have been politically represented and how women representatives represent themselves politically.

### **Representation by Women Representatives**

“The issue of women’s participation in politics is no longer in contention. What is central to the debate now is how to make their participation effective enough to influence the governance agenda and make it responsive to women’s interests, needs, and concerns.”<sup>75</sup>

In keeping with this point made by Miria Matembe at the South Asia Women Parliamentarians’ Conference in July 2012, the struggle for representation within political structures discussed in this chapter so far should not obscure the fact that feminist demands for political representation is not merely a demand for numerical representation but also a demand ranging from political voice to policy outcomes.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Cited in Majumdar (2012).

<sup>76</sup> S. Hassim (2009) *Rethinking Gender Politics in a Liberal Age: Institutions, Constituencies and Equality in Comparative Perspective* (Geneva: UNRISD): p.2.

Yet there is no straightforward line between getting women into political office and the pursuit of policies of gender equality/equity by those women representatives. Women do not necessarily constitute a distinct political constituency and women representatives are not necessarily organised around women's interests. But do they even possess perspectives or viewpoints on issues that promote gender equity and equality?

Even during 1994-2000 when both the President and the Prime Minister of the country were women (with considerable executive and legislative power at their disposal), there was no evidence of meaningful leadership designed to address women's critical concerns. For instance, when the Penal Code was amended in 1995 (a hundred years after its enactment), in response to demands by women's organisations it was the then Minister of Justice who took the issue on board.

Women cabinet ministers in successive governments since 1972 have preferred to take on social service and welfare issues or children's issues rather than tackle hard political problems pertaining to women, according to one of our respondents (a retired parliamentary official), who had an administrative ring-seat in Parliament for many years.

Parliamentary debates on gender issues, in fact, provide insights into the ideological views of women members; did they possess visions to change gender power relations or did they perpetuate perceptions of inequality and discrimination? During the debate around the Prevention of Domestic Violence Bill in Parliament in 2005, many women MPs did not speak at all on the issue – signalling clearly that they did not consider themselves as representatives of women's or gender issues, and through extension, perhaps even women as a sex/gender. One of the few women who did speak, Sujatha Alahakoon (JVP) expressed deep anxieties about the impact of the Bill on the sanctity of the family:

“This word domestic violence is too heavy for our society. This is the reason for it. We are not a western country. When we hear the word domestic violence it inspires fear in us about the most important institution, the most noble institution and at the same time the institution which ensures the continuity of our society – the family. There is violence everywhere – in our schools, in our universities, even in this institution (parliament)... The solution to this problem is not to take these disputes to the police or to the courts. But to another proximate social unit – then we will be able to protect our society. If we are able to address this problem through an open and amicable dialogue, it is my belief that it would be better.”<sup>77</sup>

This declaration essentially repudiates the very existence of domestic violence in families in favour of preserving the family unit as a social structure. Interestingly, it does not do so in favour of children but in the implied interest of social stability on the basis of Sri Lanka’s non-western status. In fact, she seems to advocate de-criminalising violence when it is within the family. The violated woman / others are obscured, silenced, and denied. The fact that the Bill had been drafted because ‘open and amicable dialogue’ had already failed was completely ignored by this parliamentarian.

This is in stark contrast to the statement made by Upeksha Swarnamali in 2011, who dauntlessly spoke on her own experience of wife battery; appealing for the assistance of all 225 parliamentarians to eradicate domestic violence.

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<sup>77</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2005: Col.1022, cited in C. Kodikara (2012b) ‘*Only till the Rice is Cooked? The Domestic Violence Act, Cultural Narratives and Familial Ideology in Sri Lanka*’, ICES Working Paper No.1 (Colombo: ICES).



“After my experience of violence, I reflected on it and I tried to find out more about this. I found that 60% of Sri Lankan women are beaten and 44% of pregnant women are also beaten. These women are traumatized and suffer because of men’s violence against them. I want to assist such women. I hope that all parliamentarians will join me to address this problem. Domestic violence should be eradicated from this country.”<sup>78</sup>

Despite political parties giving a free vote on the issue of abortion when it was debated in relation to the Penal Code Amendments of 1995 in Parliament, R. M. Pulendran (UNP) expressed her opposition to abortion on the ground that it would cause conflicts between men and women; and thereby weaken the institution of the family. She also stated that that relaxing the controls on abortion would lead to promiscuity, especially among the young.<sup>79</sup> This speech also upholds the institution of the family and seems to feed off the various assumptions and stereotypes pertaining to abortion.

On the other hand, former Minister of Health and Women’s Affairs, Renuka Herath (UNP), the only other woman MP who spoke on abortion, referred extensively to the Women’s Charter, which was brought before Parliament during her time. Overall, she supported the amendments to liberalise abortion, quoting a UN publication. She also noted that care should be taken to ensure that such measures would not promote rape in society. In addition, she defined the time limit during which abortion should be permitted as ‘before the foetus was transformed from a collection of cells into a child.’ The parliamentarian also supported stronger punitive measures against those who commit violence against women, advocated sex education in schools and measures to increase awareness that contraception was essential if

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<sup>78</sup> Kodikara (2012b).

<sup>79</sup> S. Abeysekera, ‘Abortion in Sri Lanka in the Context of Women’s Human Rights’ (1997) *Reproductive Health Matters* 9: pp.87-93.

the problem of unwanted pregnancy was to be addressed.<sup>80</sup>

Thus some women parliamentarians, along with some of the more progressive male representatives supported these bills, sometimes backed with research on the topic.<sup>81</sup> Other women representatives seem unable or unwilling to grapple with these reformist bills formulated to address long overdue social needs (safety from violence within the family and the freedom to abort a pregnancy when detrimental to the mother's health).<sup>82</sup> However, their speeches were mostly rhetorical, not hinged on factual evidence. Overriding rationales in their arguments were the protection of the family notwithstanding the injury to women, and the need to establish a non-Western cultural identity at the expense of women's health. These are arguments that have been used against Sri Lankan women frequently: the cultural thread extending from the anti-imperial to religious rights and the family thread steadfast in conceptualising women as dependents.<sup>83</sup>

It seems therefore pertinent, at this juncture, to return to a few essentialist questions: are women representatives to undertake women's issues and gender concerns because they are women? Moreover, are they to represent a gender-sensitive perspective because they are women? If so, what about the party interests that the Sri Lankan PR system requires them to represent?

Of course, pursuing an agenda of gender equity/equality maybe difficult when women are few and isolated in

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Y. Tambiah, '(Im)moral Citizens: Sexuality and the Penal Code in Sri Lanka' in A. J. Canagaratna (Ed.) (2004) ***Ethnicity, Pluralism and Human Rights: Neelan Tiruchelvam Commemorative Conference Papers*** (Colombo: ICES), records the parliamentary discourse by male parliamentarians.

<sup>82</sup> While a watered down version of the Prevention of Domestic Violence Bill was passed, the Penal Code amendment on abortion was withdrawn.

<sup>83</sup> Tambiah (2004); Abeysekara (1997).

political institutions as in Sri Lanka, even when they do possess a consciousness of women's oppression and disadvantage. Ultimately whether male or female, elected members are accountable to their political parties and it is only rarely that parties have displayed a proactive interest in women's issues or allowed a free vote in Parliament. This may have led to women representatives downplaying their sympathies on these issues; given that, as Shireen Hassim points out, inclusion (in politics) is an ambivalent position, as it seduces women by its promise of power but also implicates them in the operations of power.<sup>84</sup>

In the recent history of parliamentary politics, Rosy Senanayake (UNP) is another woman who has raised women's concerns, including the need for a quota for women in political institutions. The argument for a minimum quota or reservation of 30% of women in political institutions is based on the assumption that a critical mass of women can begin to challenge party structures and develop mechanisms of support.<sup>85</sup> To this effect, women's parliamentary caucuses, cutting across party lines, have sought to identify and prioritise vital issues for action, and build confidence and support among women MPs in order to raise these issues in political forums. In Sri Lanka, while women from across party lines have come together from time to time as a caucus,<sup>86</sup> they have not followed up on these initiatives; possibly due to the paucity of women representatives and the lack of party support.

Outside the formal political structures, the campaigns conducted by women's organisations at the 2011 local government elections were, in fact, silent on the role of women representatives once elected: should they be political delegates (representing the standpoints and preferences of their constituencies) or political trustees

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<sup>84</sup> Hassim (2009).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid: p.11.

<sup>86</sup> The UNDP, for instance, played an important role in the Women's Parliamentary Caucus of 2006 that led to a submission calling for a quota system to the PSCER.

(having the autonomy to express their own views according to their own judgments)?<sup>87</sup> Moreover, what should their role be *vis-à-vis* the women's networks and organisations that supported them?

The activists who steered the programmes did not necessarily view their women representatives as either political delegates or political trustees. They were, in fact, quite clear that simply increasing women's representation in the republic would not logically lead to the fulfilment of women's rights or the needs of women as a sex/gender.<sup>88</sup> Hence, the programmes trained potential women candidates not only in political leadership, local governance, campaigning and electioneering, but also women's rights and gender issues with the expectation of sending gender-sensitive women to elections.

Here, it is important to distinguish between assumptions about the championing of women's rights and the assumption about a 'feminisation of politics.' For instance, a study by Kamala Liyanage records the assumptions about expectations from women politicians that they would understand local government issues (of safe drinking water, garbage disposal, unauthorised building constructions, public toilets, day-care centres, domestic violence, drugs, alcohol and security) better given their gender roles in the family and community.<sup>89</sup>

At the same time, Liyanage's interviewees had also assumed that women's 'different characteristics and behaviour patterns' would create a more 'decent atmosphere' in political institutions.<sup>90</sup> Such a 'feminisation' is expected through the sheer presence of women in politics. This discourse seems to emanate from

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<sup>87</sup> A. Rehfeld, 'Towards a General Theory of Political Representation' (2006) *Journal of Politics* 68: pp.1–21.

<sup>88</sup> This was stated unequivocally by respondents who conducted some of these programmes.

<sup>89</sup> Liyanage's interviewees include elected and defeated LG candidates, administrators and activists: Liyanage (2012): p.5.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

an understanding of a deterministic argument of women based on biology, which conceptualises of women (and men) possessing 'innate' moral characteristics. The extension of this essentialist argument is that this makes women morally superior by nature as opposed to men who are then implied as being 'naturally' bad.<sup>91</sup> The problem of such an understanding is that it does not account for arguments of social construction / conditioning and sees gender/sex identities as bipolar, permanent and homogenously defined without any possibility of change.<sup>92</sup>

This exemplifies a drawback of the argument of difference, which then lapses into essentialism. This is the reason why there is a need to theorise women's representation and the representation of women from standpoints that appreciate commonality and difference, the individual and the collective, and the equal and equitable.

## Conclusions

This chapter looked at women's political representation in Sri Lanka from the varying angles of numerical representation, policy discourses, substantive gains, ideological perceptions and socio-political practices.

The promise of the early history of electoral politics in the country beginning in the 1930s has not blossomed into the equal political representation of women. Neither was the burst of activity around the United Nations appropriation of the cause of women's rights in the 1970s

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<sup>91</sup> J.R. Martin, 'Methodological Essentialism, False Difference, and Other Dangerous Traps' (1994) *Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19(3): pp.630–657; T. de Lauretis, 'The Essence of the Triangle, or Taking the Risk of Essentialism Seriously: Feminist Theory in Italy, the US and Britain' (1989) *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 1(2): pp.3–37.

<sup>92</sup> A. Oakley (1972) *Sex, Gender and Society* (London: Temple Smith).

and 80s reflected in the two republican constitutions. Suffice to state that they do not contain any overt bars or barriers to women's political participation. The Second Republican Constitution, though promoting formal equality, is indecisive when it comes to special provisions on the basis of equity and therefore has not translated into substantive gains for gender equity. Consequently, it is essential that the state is committed to women and gender issues from combined perspectives of commonality and difference so as to attain outcomes of gender equality and equity.

On the one hand, the republican state has pledged allegiance to international standards on gender equity / equality; successive governments have subscribed to various dominant discourses on women's political representation; individual political parties have pledged to increase nomination for women. On the other hand, as far as numerals are concerned, women's representation has remained between 3.8% and 6.5% in Parliament, between 3.2% and 5.00% in the Provincial Councils, and 1.5% and 2.5% in local government authorities for the last forty years. Thus, there seems to be a stark fissure between policy and practice, and between discourse and action.

While political parties have not hesitated to exploit women's connections to prominent male politicians and families (especially in the event of death during the recent violent history of the country), this is not exclusive to women. It seems to be the general political practice in political parties so as to maximise on a particular vote base. The perception and representation of women entering Parliament only in the event of dead relatives needs to be questioned in the face a considerable number of women parliamentarians over the years that have no explicit family connections.

Women's organisations and political activists have continually expressed their demands on electoral reforms and a women's quota; independent women's groups have

contested elections; feminist groups have run media campaigns asking for votes for women, based on a women's rights discourse. But these have had limited success within the Sri Lankan state: perhaps for the reasons that women do not necessarily compose a distinct political constituency; women's rights organisations do not comprise a power bloc; and that women representatives have not necessarily taken it upon themselves to represent women's and gender interests. In fact, until recently there does not seem to have been any cohesion between the political voices of women representatives (especially in Parliament) and the political action of women's groups.

Recent experiences at local government elections have shown that simply including women on nominations lists (in this instance through political campaigning based on the goodwill of political parties) will not necessarily lead to women being elected given the lack of other structural, socio-political supports and attitudinal backing. Not only does this reinforce the urgent need for a quota, but the fact that the quota should be in the form of the reservation of seats for women (rather than at the point of nomination) on both electoral and national lists, at least until such time that the electoral process becomes more contestant-friendly.

The representation of women's issues in Parliament has been few and far between. Furthermore, a majority of women parliamentarians have not necessarily evinced a progressive understanding of the women's issues and concerns. Prevailing conservatism *vis-à-vis* the family unit and culture have been exploited at the expense of women's rights and gender equity/equality. Thus, it is doubtful that attaining gender parity in numbers will guarantee the women's and gender agenda being supported, or leading to progressive political and social change – until and unless women representatives and male representatives become conscientised and convinced about fighting for gender equity / equality. Only then can

the constitutional aspiration of a democratic republic be fulfilled.



### Women in the National Legislature (1931 – 2011)

General Election	Name	Term	Party	Electorate	Ethnicity	Position in Government	Education / Profession	Family Connection
<b>State Council 1931</b>								
	<u>Molamure Adelene</u>	1		Ruwanwella By- election 1931	S		Senator	Father
	<u>Saravanamuttu Naysum</u>	1		Colombo North By- election 1932	T			Husband
<b>State Council 1936</b>								
	Saravanamuttu N (b)	2		Colombo North				
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Parliament 1947</b>								
House of Representatives	<u>Senanayake Florence</u>	1	UNP	<u>Kiriella</u>	S		Teacher	
	<u>Gunawardena Kusuma</u>	1	LSSP	<u>Avissawella</u> By- election 1948	S	Deputy - State Affairs	BA Teacher	Husband (unscated)
	<u>Ilangaratne Tamara</u>	1	SLFP	Kandy By- election 1949	S			Husband (unscated)
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Parliament 1952</b>								
House of Representatives	<u>Gunawardena K</u>	2	LSSP	<u>Avissawella</u>	S			
	<u>Wickramasinghe Doreen</u>	1	CP	<u>Akuressa</u>	A		B A	
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Parliament 1956</b>								
House of Representatives	<u>Gunawardena K</u>	3	LSSP	<u>Kiriella</u>				
	<u>Gunawardena Vivienne</u>	1	LSSP	Colombo North	S		B A Teacher LG Politician	
	<u>Wijewardane Wimala</u>	1	SLFP	<u>Mirigama</u>	S	Minster - Health		
	<u>Rajaratna Kusuma</u>	1	JVP	<u>Welimada</u> By- election	S		Teacher	Husband

				1957				
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Parliament March 1960</b>								
House of Representatives	<a href="#">Rajaratne K</a>	2	JVP	<a href="#">Uva Paranagama</a>				
	<a href="#">Kannangara Wimala</a>	1	UNP	<a href="#">Galigamuwa</a>	S	Minster – Rural Development		
	<a href="#">Wickramanayake Soma</a>	1	LSSP	<a href="#">Dehiowita</a>	S		Teacher	
<b>5<sup>th</sup> Parliament July 1960</b>								
House of Representatives	<a href="#">Rajaratne K</a>	3	JVP	<a href="#">Uva Paranagama</a>				
	<a href="#">Wickramanayake S</a>	2	LSSP	<a href="#">Dehiowita</a>				
	<a href="#">Goonewardene V</a>	2	LSSP	<a href="#">Borella</a> By-election 1964				
<b>6<sup>th</sup> Parliament 1965</b>								
House of Representatives	<a href="#">Rajaratne K</a>	4	JVP	<a href="#">Uva Paranagama</a>			Teacher	
	<a href="#">Kannanagara W</a>	2	UNP	<a href="#">Galigamuwa</a>		Deputy Health		
	<a href="#">Bandaranaike Sirima R D</a>	1	SLFP	<a href="#">Attanagalla</a>	S	Prime Minster Minister - Foreign Affairs, Defense, Planning, Economy and Plan & Implementation	Senator	Husband (killed)
	<a href="#">Obeysekere Sivagami</a>	1	SLFP	<a href="#">Mirigama</a>	S	Minister - Health		Husband
	<a href="#">Ratwatte Mallika</a>	1	SLFP	<a href="#">Balangoda</a> By-election	S		Teacher	Husband (unseated)
	<a href="#">Rajapakse Leticia</a>	1	SLFP	<a href="#">Dodangaslanda</a> By- election 1967	S			Husband
<b>7<sup>th</sup> Parliament 1970</b>								
House of Representatives (1970 – 1972) National State Assembly	<a href="#">Gunawardena V</a>	3	LSSP	<a href="#">Dehiwela/Mt. Lavinia</a>				

(1972 – 1977)								
	<u>Illangaratne T</u>	2	SLFP	<u>Galagedera</u>				
	<u>Bandaranaike S R D</u>	2	SLFP	<u>Attanagalle</u>				
	<u>Obeysekere S</u>	2	SLFP	<u>Mirigama</u>				
	<u>Ratwatte M</u>	2	SLFP	<u>Balangoda</u>				
	<b><u>Abhyawardhana Kusala</u></b>	1	LSSP	<u>Borella</u>	S		BA	
<b>8<sup>th</sup> Parliament 1977</b>								
National State Assembly 1977 – 1978	<u>Kannangara W</u>	3	UNP	<u>Galigamuwa</u>		Rural Development 1977 Shipping, Aviation & Tourism	LG politician	
	<u>Bandaranaike S R D</u>	3	SLFP	<u>Attanagalle</u> Till 1980				
	<b><u>Herath Renuka</u></b>	1	UNP	<u>Walapane</u>	S	1987 Deputy Cultural & Indigenous Medicine 1980 Health & Women's Affairs	Teacher	
	<b><u>Ratnayake Amara Piyaseeli</u></b>	1	UNP	<u>Wariyapola</u>	S	District Kurunegala 1988 Deputy Transport	Teacher	Husband (killed)
	<b><u>Ranasinghe Sunethra</u></b>	1	UNP	<u>Dehiwela/Mt Lavinia</u> By-election	S	1983 Health / Colombo Hospitals & Family Health 1983 Women's Affairs & Teaching Hospitals 1989 Educational Services	Private Secretary	Father (death)
Parliament 1978-1989	<b><u>Daniel Sriyani</u></b>	1	UNP	<u>Hewaheta</u> (Appointed)	S		Secretary	Brother
	<b><u>Pathmanathan Ranganayaki</u></b>	1	UNP	<u>Pottuvil</u> (Appointed)	T	District Minister - <u>Batalore</u>	Secretary	Brother (death)
	<b><u>Senadheera Daya Sepali</u></b>	1	UNP	<u>Karandeniya</u> (Appointed)	S			Husband (death)
	<b><u>Wijesiri Lohini</u></b>	1	UNP	<u>Harispattuwa</u> (Appointed)	S			Husband (resignation)
	<b><u>Abeywickrama Keerthilatha</u></b>	1	UNP	<u>Deniyaya</u> (Appointed)	S		Secretary	Husband (death)
	<b><u>Karunaratne Samantha</u></b>	1	UNP	<u>Rambukkana</u> (Appointed)	S		PR Officer / P Secretary	Father (death)
<b>9<sup>th</sup> Parliament 1989</b>								

Parliament	<u>Bandaranaike S R D</u>	4	SLFP	<u>Gampaha</u>		Leader of Opposition		
	<u>Abeyweera Sumintha P</u>	1	SLFP	<u>Kalutara</u>	S			Father (killed)
	<u>Dharmawardana Sujatha</u>	1	UNP	<u>Puttlam</u>	S		Sales Manager	
	<u>Herath R</u>	2	UNP	<u>Nuwara Eliya</u>		Minster – Health & Women's Affairs / Parliamentary Affairs		
	<u>Jayasena Sumedha G</u>	1	SLFP	<u>Moneragala</u>	S		Teacher	Husband (death)
	<u>Karunaratne Chandra</u>	1	UNP	<u>Badulla</u>	S	State – Women's Affairs		
	<u>Karunaratne S</u>	2	UNP	<u>Kegalle</u>	S	State - Reconstruction, Rehabilitation & Social Welfare		
	<u>Pulendran R M</u>	1	UNP	Vanni	T	1990 State - Education	Secretary / Director	Husband (killed)
	<u>Ranasinghe S</u>	2	UNP	Colombo		Non-cabinet – Educational Services		
	<u>Ratnayake Hema</u>	1	SLFP	<u>Badulla</u>	S		Teacher	Husband (killed)
	<u>Ratnayake A P</u>	2	UNP	<u>Kurunegala</u>		1990 State - Home Affairs 1993 Public Administration		
	<u>Daniel S</u>	2	UNP	National List				
	<u>Amarakeerthi Daya</u>	1	SLFP	Galle From 1993	S			
<b>10<sup>th</sup> Parliament 1994</b>								
Parliament	<u>Bandaranaike S R D</u>	5	PA	National List		Prime Minister		
	<u>Kumaratunga Chandrika B</u>	1	PA	<u>Gampaha</u> Elected as President Nov1994	S	Prime Minister -Defence, Finance and Planning / Buddhist Affairs, Ethnic Relations and National Integration	BA	
	<u>Jayasena S G</u>	2	PA	<u>Moneragala</u>		Deputy Buddha Sasana		
	<u>Abeyweera S P</u>	2	PA	<u>Kalutara</u>		Deputy Internal & External Trade, Commerce & Food		
	<u>Rajapaksa Nirupama</u>	1	PA	<u>Hambantota</u>	S	Deputy Women's Affairs		

						Deputy Tourism & Aviation		
	<b>Wanniarachchi Pavithra</b>	1	PA	<a href="#">Ratnapura</a>	S	Deputy Health, Highways & Social Services Deputy National Heritage	Lawyer	Father
	<b>Athulathmudali Srimanee</b>	1	DUNF (LF)	Colombo	S	Minister Transport, Environment & Women's Affairs	Administrative Secretary	Husband (killed)
	<a href="#">Herath R</a>	3	UNP	<a href="#">Nuwara Eliya</a>		Deputy Livestock Development and Rural Industries		
	<a href="#">Pulendran R M</a>	3	UNP	Vanni				
	<a href="#">Ratnayake A P</a>	3	UNP	<a href="#">Kurunegala</a>	S			
	<a href="#">Ratnayake H</a>	2	UNP	<a href="#">Badulla</a>		Deputy Livestock Development & Rural Industries		
	<b>Dissanayake, Amara Bandara</b>	1	UNP	National List	S		BA / Clerk	
<b>11<sup>th</sup> Parliament 2000</b>								
Parliament	<a href="#">Jayasena S G</a>	3	PA	<a href="#">Moneragala</a>		Women's Affairs		
	<a href="#">Wanniarachchi P</a>	2	PA	<a href="#">Ratnapura</a>		Policy Implementation		
	<b>Ashraff Ferial</b>	1	PA	<a href="#">Digamadulla</a>	M	Women's Affairs Eastern Reconstruction, Development and Rural Housing	Pharmacist	Husband (killed)
	<a href="#">Ratnayake A P</a>	4	UNP	<a href="#">Kurunegala</a>				
	<b>Ellawala Surangani</b>	1	PA	<a href="#">Ratnapura</a>	S			Son (killed)
	<b>Tennekoon Somakumari</b>	1	PA	<a href="#">Kurunegala</a>	S			Father (missing)
	<b>Fernando Yvonne Sriyani</b>	1	PA	<a href="#">Puttlam</a>	S			
	<b>Jayasinghe Chandrani Bandara</b>	1	UNP	Anuradhapura	S		Business	Father
	<b>Anjan Umma A D</b>	1	JVP	National List	M		Lecturer	
<b>12<sup>th</sup> Parliament 2001</b>								
Parliament	<a href="#">Ratnayake A P</a>	5	UNP	<a href="#">Kurunegala</a>				
	<a href="#">Jayasena S G</a>	4	PA	<a href="#">Moneragala</a>				

	<u>Wanniarachchi P</u>	3	PA	<u>Ratnapura</u>				
	Ashraff Ferial	2	PA	<u>Digamadulla</u>		Women's Affairs		
	<u>Anjan Umma A D</u>	2	JVP	<u>Gampaha</u>				
	<u>Jayasinghe C B</u>	2	UNP	<u>Anuradhapura</u>				
	<u>Tennekoon Somakumari</u>	2	PA	<u>Kurunegala</u>				
	<b>Perera Mary Larine</b>	1	UNP	<u>Puttlam</u>	S			Husband
	<b>De Mel Mallika</b>	1	PA	<u>Matara</u>	S			Husband
	<b>Mantilake Chitra Srimathi</b>	1	UNP	<u>Mahanuwara</u>	S			
<b>13<sup>th</sup> Parliament 2004</b>								
Parliament	<u>Jayasena S G</u>	4	UPFA	<u>Moneragala</u>		Women's Empowerment & Social Services		
	<u>Wanniarachchi P</u>	4	UPFA	<u>Ratnapura</u>		Samurdhi & Poverty Alleviation		
	Ashraff F	3	UPFA	<u>Digamadulla</u>		Minister - Housing & Construction, Eastern Province Education and Irrigation Development / Common Amenities		
	<u>Ratnayake A P</u>	6	UNP	<u>Kurunegala</u>				
	<u>Perera M L</u>	2	UNP	<u>Puttlam</u>				
	<u>Jayasinghe C B</u>	3	UNP	<u>Anuradhapura</u>				
	<b>Alahakoon Sujatha</b>	1	UPFA	<u>Matale</u>	S		Principal / BA	
	<b>Atukorale Thalatha</b>	1	UNP	<u>Ratnapura</u>	S		Lawyer	Brother (dead)
	<b>Sithamparanathan Pathmini</b>	1	ITAK	<u>Jaffna</u>	T		BA / Lecturer	Father
	<b>Kathiraman Thangeshwari</b>	1	ITAK	<u>Batticaloa</u>	T		BA / Government Officer	
	<u>Anjan Umma A D</u>	3	UPFA	<u>Gampaha</u>				
	<u>Rajapaksa Nirupama</u>	2	UPFA	<u>Hambantota</u> From 2005		Deputy Minister – Water Supply		
	<u>Herath R</u>	4	UNP	<u>Nuwara Eliya</u> From 2006				
<b>14<sup>th</sup> Parliament 2010</b>								

Parliament	Jayasena S G	5	UPFA	<u>Moneragala</u>				
	<u>Wanniarachchi P</u>	5	UPFA	<u>Ratnapura</u>				
	Rajapaksa N	3	UPFA	<u>Hambantota</u>				
	<u>Jayasinghe C B</u>	4	UNP	Anuradhapura				
	<u>Atukorale T</u>	2	UNP	<u>Ratnapura</u>				
	<b><u>Fernandopulle Sudharshi</u></b>	1	UPFA	<u>Gampaha</u>	S		Medical Doctor	Husband (killed)
	<b><u>Wijewickrama Sriyani</u></b>	1	UPFA	<u>Digamadulla</u>	S		Lawyer	
	<b><u>Senanayake Rosy</u></b>	1	UNP	Colombo	S		Beauty Queen Talk Show Host	
	<b><u>Swarnamali Upeksha</u></b>	1	UNP	<u>Gampaha</u>	S		Actress	
	<b><u>Maheswaran Vijayakala</u></b>	1	UNP	Jaffna	T			Husband (killed)
	<b><u>Fonseka Malani</u></b>	1	UPFA	National List	S		Actress	
	<b><u>Ranathunga Kamala</u></b>	1	UPFA	National List	S		Party stalwart	
	<b><u>Gamage Anoma</u></b>	1	UNP	National List	S		Company Director	Husband

**Table 2: Percentage of Women Elected to the National Legislature / Parliament 1947 – 2010<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total Elected</b>	<b>No. of Women Elected</b>	<b>% of Women</b>
1947	101	3	<b>3.0</b>
1952	101	2	<b>2.0</b>
1956	101	4	<b>4.0</b>
1960 (Mar)	157	3	<b>1.9</b>
1960 (Jul)	157	3	<b>1.9</b>
1965	157	6	<b>3.8</b>
1970	157	6	<b>3.8</b>
1977	168	11	<b>6.5</b>
1989	225	13	<b>5.8</b>
1994	225	12	<b>5.3</b>
2000	225	9	<b>4.0</b>
2001	225	10	<b>4.4</b>
2004	225	13	<b>5.8</b>
2010	225	13	<b>5.8</b>

<sup>1</sup> Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2007) and Kiribamune (1994:91), updated by Kodikara.



**Table 3: Women's Representation in Provincial Councils  
1993 - 2008/9<sup>2</sup>**

Province	1993			1999			2004			2008/ 2009 <sup>3</sup>		
	Total	W.o.m	%	Total	W.o.m	%	Total	W.o.m	%	Total	W.o.m	%
Western	104	7	6.7	104	2	1.9	104	6	5.7	104	6	5.7
North Central	33	4	12.1	33	1	2.9	33	1	3.0	33	1	3.0
North Western	52	3	5.7	52	3	5.8	52	4	7.6	52	***	3.8
Uva	34	0	0.0	34	1	2.9	34	1	2.9	34	1	2.9
Central	58	1	1.7	58	3	5.1	58	5	8.6	58	4	6.8
Southern	55	2	3.6	55	1	1.8	55	1	1.8	55	1	1.8
Sabaragamuwa	44	1	2.3	44	1	2.3	44	1	2.3	44	1	2.3
North <sup>4</sup>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	**	**	*
Eastern										37	1	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>417</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>4.1</b>

\* Elections not held. \*\* Elections to be held. \*\*\* Three women were elected when elections were held, however one woman Councillor passed away in September 2009 and was replaced by a male candidate.

<sup>2</sup> Source: Adapted from Department of Census and Statistics (2007). Statistics for 2008/2009 were personally compiled with assistance of officials at Department of Elections by Kodikara (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Although the normal practice is to hold Provincial Council Elections for all provinces on the same day, these elections were staggered over several months.

<sup>4</sup> The North and East were merged following the Indo-Lanka Peace Accord to form one administrative unit, having one provincial council, subject to the holding of a referendum in the Eastern Province on or before 1988 to decide whether the East should remain linked to the North. The referendum was never held, but the merger was challenged in the Supreme Court in October 2006, in a case filed by the JVP, where it was ruled that the merger of the North and East was unconstitutional. Following this decision, elections to the de-merged Eastern Provincial Council was held in May 2008.

**Table 4: Women's Representation at Local Government Level <sup>5</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Total</b>
1966	1.5
1970	2.1
1979	2.5
1982	<b>1.5</b>
1991	1.7
1997	1.9
2006	1.8
2008-2011 <sup>6</sup>	<b>2.01</b>

<sup>5</sup> Source: Department of Census and Statistics (2007) and updated by **Kodikara**.

<sup>6</sup> **Currently**, elected members of local government comprise members elected in 2008 (9 local authorities in Batticaloa), 2009 (one local authority each in Jaffna and **Vavuniya** respectively) and 2011 (322 local authorities).