

A Summary of SSRI Open Lecture, delivered on September 22, 1998

Position of Women in Sri Lankan Sinhala Society and Its Social Background

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Distinct changes are taking place in almost every society in the world today. However, many countries with rich cultural traditions still preserve their cultural identity amidst the rapid social and other changes. Sri Lanka is one such country with a changing culture on the one hand and on the other, with some of the traditional values still being preserved. The attitude of the society today, towards women, also have changed to a great extent. However, some basic factors related to women's life and expectations of the society towards their behaviour seem to remain unchanged.

In early Sinhala society, in general, women were not looked down upon. This was mainly due to the influence of Buddhism. Buddhist background in the Sinhala society did not lower the position of women. Compared to some other eastern countries, women in the Sinhala society enjoyed more freedom and received recognition from the society. With the western influence on Sinhala society in the 19th century, women's position gained more prominence. With the Buddhist background in the Sinhala society there was no negative attitude towards education of females. Even the socio-political factors were favourable enough towards the education of children without gender difference. In the Sinhala society, though the male child was very much accepted there is no discrimination against a female child. Very often, economic factors are the only reasons where a male child is given preference over a female child in receiving education.

With no barriers under the socio-political background in the Sinhala society,

females received higher education and as a result, the life of women in Sri Lanka today, includes wider fields of activity and employment and further independence, more participation and stronger contribution to the country's economy.

In general, many women in modern Sinhala society, have become independent and they tend to take independent decisions. Even though the society still has some restrictions towards the women's independence, with the Buddhist cultural background in the country, women can enjoy a fair amount of freedom and achieve their social and economic progress along with the males in the society. Even though some unfortunate conditions exist, mainly due to poverty and economic instability, women in general, in modern Sinhala society, with their educational background, with their positions in employment and with the support given by the social-cultural background are acting as progressive and independent people.

Women's importance cannot be disregarded or under-valued by any society. It is encouraging to see that many countries today, including Sri Lanka, pay more attention to women's position in society and their well-being.