



## GENDER EQUALITY IN SRI LANKA: A CASE STUDY ON DIPLOMACY

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In Sri Lanka, the favorable gender equality environment depicted in relation to social indicators like literacy rates is not similarly reflected in its overall and public sector labour force participation rates where the male participation count outnumbers the female count. Furthermore, research shows that despite the progress achieved over time, gender inequalities in the field of diplomacy continue to exist in many parts of the world (Aggestam & Towns, 2018). This research paper thus studies the evolution of gender equality in the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka with a special focus on the Sri Lankan women diplomats and the challenges they have faced since Independence. In terms of its methodology, the research adopted a qualitative methodology. Despite following a qualitative approach, it also utilized secondary quantitative data as supplements to the primary and secondary qualitative data gathered, in order to make the findings of the research credible. The research furthermore utilized theory triangulation when analyzing and interpreting the data collected. Thus, as its theories the research used liberal feminism and the gender structure theory by Barbara J. Risman while using 'gender essentialism' as its concept. The key findings of the research, while highlighting the existence of a considerable number of socio-cultural factors challenging Sri Lankan women diplomats, depict that since Independence, a significant progress has been achieved in relation to gender equality in the field of Sri Lankan diplomacy. The research furthermore concludes that although gender inequalities persist in the Sri Lankan diplomatic arena similar to the patterns visible in the country's overall and public sector labour force participation rates and that in the international diplomatic arena, in terms of gender representation, the female participation in Sri Lanka's diplomatic force outnumbers the male participation, in the recent years.

Keywords: Sri Lanka, gender equality, public sector, diplomacy, women diplomats.

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Context/Background

As famously defined by Simone de Beauvoir in the quote, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," 'gender' is understood as a social construct rather than a biological phenomenon (Beauvoir & Capisto-Borde, 2011, as cited in Lee, 2021, para. 3). Such social constructs thus determine the responsibilities assigned, access or control over resources, decision making opportunities and tasks performed by men and women which has thus led individuals, states and organizations to advocate for "gender equality". UNICEF (2017) defines 'gender equality' as "The concept that women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development" (Gender equality section). Gender equality is often interpreted as ending inequalities particularly against women since they are and had been in the past, the most vulnerable group in most societies. Many progressive efforts have been taken both internationally and nationally to achieve gender equality although there is much room for further improvement.

Sri Lanka, a small island state in the Indian Ocean, since the past has been considered as a country with a favourable environment in relation to gender equality and treatment towards women, compared to many of its South Asian neighbours. According to the Asian Development Bank (2016), as a result of Sri Lanka's history on investment in the social sectors since its independence, the country's social indicators such as the literacy rates among men and women and maternal and child mortality rates remain among the best within its region. According to the Gender Inequality Index (GII), Sri Lanka has been the least unequal of the countries in South Asia while being ranked 73rd globally among the 154 countries considered in 2015 (United Nations Development Programme, 2015, as cited in Asian Development Bank, 2016). The country has made great progress related to gender equality in education where the adult literacy rate (Female/ Male Age 15+) from year 2005 to 2012 has been recorded as 90/93 where the literacy gap between men and women has almost closed (United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015, as cited in Asian Development Bank, 2016). Furthermore, a similar trend is visible in the most recent rates where the male/female literacy rate in 2021 was recorded as 94/92 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2022).

The Asian Development Bank (2016) emphasizes on the anomaly where despite various policy commitments made beginning with its Constitution (1978) which includes the right to equality as one of the fundamental rights and establishment of institutional structures like the Women's Bureau of Sri Lanka in 1978, the country's progress regarding gender equality in the field of education is not similarly reflected in many other areas as it is expected to be, especially in the areas of labour force participation. Despite the high literacy rates and significantly good access to education, the labour force participation of women is very low compared to men and as well as to women in many other countries in the region. For instance, the female to male (F/M Age 15+) labour force participation for the year 2023 was 32/72 (International Labour Organization, 2024).

Focusing on the nature of gender equality within the state sector of Sri Lanka, the Asian Development Bank (2016) highlights that according to a 2012 study the ratio of men to women in the labour force had been 2:1 with 67% of men and just 33% of women and the men to women ratio in the top tiers of the public sector had been 6:1 in the top tier and 5:1 in the second highest tier.



Diplomacy, a key tool in maintaining peaceful relations between nations, has traditionally and formally been a sphere reserved for men (Aggestam & Towns, 2018). According to Aggestam and Towns (2018), it was only in the beginning of the 1920s that states and international organizations had allowed women to partake in formal diplomatic activities. Since then, various efforts have been taken internationally and locally to include more women in the field of diplomacy which has been considerably fruitful. Despite the positive developments achieved in the recent years to end formal and informal barriers and achieve gender equality in diplomacy, the field remains inclined towards masculinized norms and gendered divisions of labour where women are still poorly represented in diplomatic careers (Stanzel, 2018; Tavares, 2018).

Thus, this research explores the evolution of gender equality in Sri Lanka's diplomacy sector since Independence till 2023, focusing particularly on women diplomats in the Sri Lanka Foreign Service (SLFS) to examine whether the same trend conspicuous in the overall and public sector labour force participation rates in Sri Lanka is reflected similarly in the patterns of representation among men and women in the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka and whether a trend similar to the case of gender equality in world diplomacy is visible within the Sri Lankan diplomatic arena.

### Research Objectives

The research seeks to accomplish the following objectives:

1. To investigate the emergence and evolution of gender equality in diplomacy in Sri Lanka with a special focus rendered on the status and contribution of Sri Lankan women diplomats.
2. To discover whether there are and had been any challenges for women diplomats of Sri Lanka as a result of their gender and thereby comprehend the root causes of those challenges if there are any.

### METHODOLOGY

The research, as its methodology, followed a qualitative approach. Despite being qualitative, it utilized secondary quantitative data as supplements to the primary and secondary qualitative data collected, which aided in making the findings of the research credible.

The secondary quantitative data required to analyze the evolution of gender equality in the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka since Independence was obtained from secondary sources such as the databases of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Sri Lanka through a written Right To Information (RTI) request and through the official website of the MFA, Sri Lanka while the required secondary qualitative data was obtained from newspaper articles published on the internet, autobiographies and through historical government documents such as the *Overseas Service Minute of 1948*, *Ceylon Sessional Papers 1949* and the *Sri Lanka Foreign Service Minute of 2001*.

The qualitative data required about the evolution of gender equality in the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka and the challenges faced by Sri Lankan women diplomats, respectively, was obtained as primary data through 8 semi-structured one-hour interviews conducted online and physically. The resource persons for the interviews were chosen with an intention of gaining an all-encompassing perspective on the evolution of gender equality in the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka and the challenges faced by Sri Lankan women diplomats. Thus, the eight resource persons included two retired female ambassadors, two female non-career diplomats, two mid-level female career diplomats and two male diplomats.

Furthermore, the research when analyzing and interpreting its data involved theory triangulation where its analysis was based on the two theories - liberal feminism and gender structure theory by Barbara J. Risman. In addition, it also utilized the concept of 'gender essentialism' for the analysis.

Liberal feminism was chosen as one theory to analyze the findings of the research mainly because it is a branch of feminist theory that focuses on gender equality which aids in offering the readers an International Relations (IR) perspective on the research topic. Furthermore, liberal feminism was particularly chosen since it is one of the major and relatively popular branches of feminism that has not out-dated. The focus of liberal feminism on workplace gender equality and its inclusive nature further made it relevant to the research since the research has its focus on the evolution of gender equality in the Sri Lankan state sector and its branch diplomacy.



The gender structure theory was mainly chosen to explain the findings of this research since it is a theory which explains gender equality holistically. Simply, the theory becomes relevant due to its dynamism signifying the reflexive relations between the three dimensions of gender which depict that gender equality or inequality is a result of many interrelated social processes within different dimensions. Furthermore, it would improve the credibility of the research by providing a non-IR perspective. The theory also becomes relevant since it complements with liberal feminism, such that both explain gender inequality particularly in the workplace and views gender as socially constructed. Adding to the link with feminism, Risman (2018b) identifies herself as a second wave feminist based in sociology who therefore developed the theory with a feminist perspective as well. Furthermore, the theory would help in making the findings, particularly those regarding the experiences and opinions collected about the nature of recruitment, appointment, promotions and challenges faced by Sri Lankan women diplomats clearer through a theoretical explanation to them.

Gender essentialism essentially becomes relevant to this research since it is a concept on gender which through an in-depth study provides an understanding about certain causes like stereotypes which negatively impact gender equality in societies. The concept becomes also relevant to liberal feminism and gender structure theory since those theories also discuss the impact of essentialist thinking and stereotypes on gender equality. Furthermore, the utilization of the concept would support in testing whether gender essentialism plays a significant role within the Sri Lankan societies, particularly within its working environment. It would further support in making more sense of the findings of the experiences and opinions regarding the recruitment, promotion, appointment and challenges faced by Sri Lankan women diplomats.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the primary and secondary data collected regarding the evolution of gender equality in the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka since Independence as a whole, provides an all-encompassing perspective on what progress or issues had taken place related to gender equality within the field over time while depicting the special focus of the research on Sri Lankan women diplomats.

- **Milestones and contributions of Sri Lankan Women Diplomats**

The first milestone of achieving gender equality in the field of diplomacy was reached with the appointment of Ms. Manel Abeysekera as the country's first female career diplomat in 1958 while also creating history as the first woman to face the SLFS interview and the youngest and the first woman Chargé d'Affaires of COS (Abeysekera, 2010). Having had to go through the most difficult challenges of breaking the glass ceiling to ensure the opportunity of Sri Lankan women to join the SLFS, Ms. Abeysekera contributed immensely to the SLFS by: authoring the Protocol Manual of MFA; playing a major role in organizing the Non-Aligned Summit in 1976; attending as the Sri Lankan delegate at the UN First World Conference on Women; serving as a Consultant for diplomat training and gender equality advocate after retirement, apart from her service as the Sri Lankan Ambassador to Germany and Thailand.

The contribution of the female non-career diplomats of Sri Lanka should not be forgotten since the first female ambassadorial appointments of the country were non-career women diplomats beginning with the appointment of Ms. Loraine Senaratne as the High Commissioner to Ghana in 1963 and the first female non-career diplomat. Her legacy was continued by other female non-career diplomats who contributed immensely to promote Sri Lanka's image internationally and improve relations between their country of appointment and Sri Lanka.

Furthermore, the contribution of Sri Lankan women diplomats in international and regional organizations is noteworthy. According to Bandara (2014), Ms. Sarala Fernando in 2003 served as the country's first female PRUN along with other women diplomats such as Ms. Geetha de Silva, Ms. Tamara Kunanayakam and Ms. Kshenuka Seneviratne continuing her legacy. Furthermore, he mentions the contribution of Ms. Grace Asiriwatham who joined the OPCW as the Deputy Director General while serving at the Sri Lankan Embassy in The Hague and joined the IAEA as its director, IONP. Furthermore, Bandara (2012, 2014), cites the



contribution of Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy as the Under-Secretary-General of the UN, Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and that of Ms. Damayanthi Rajapaksa as the Director General of SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu.

- **Early Developments in Gender Equality**

In terms of what information about the status of gender equality during the early years of SLFS is provided through the data gathered, the counts on the number of male and female diplomats recruited in the early years of SLFS presented in Table 01 along with the secondary data provided about the all-male first batch of COS; the early recruitment procedure based on the British Minute which resulted in having only men joining the service as mentioned in ‘The Overseas Service of Ceylon’ section in the *Report of the Public Service Commission within the Ceylon Sessional Papers 1949*, the Overseas Service Minute (1948) and by Abeysekera (2010) and the parallel primary data provided by the interviewees highlighting the fact that the field had been a “men’s domain” (Interviewee 3, personal communication, May 26, 2023), conveys the message that gender equality has not prevailed within the SLFS during its early years of functioning:

**Table 01**

*Gender Segregated Data on Each SLFS Batch Recruited Since Independence*

| Year of Recruitment | Total SLFS Officers | Male | Female |
|---------------------|---------------------|------|--------|
| 1949                | 6                   | 6    | 0      |
| 1958                | 8                   | 7    | 1      |
| 1965                | 5                   | 5    | 0      |
| 1967                | 2                   | 2    | 0      |
| 1970                | 9                   | 9    | 0      |
| 1971                | 2                   | 2    | 0      |
| 1973                | 2                   | 2    | 0      |
| 1975                | 9                   | 8    | 1      |
| 1981                | 10                  | 7    | 3      |
| 1985                | 9                   | 8    | 1      |
| 1988                | 11                  | 9    | 2      |
| 1991                | 2                   | 2    | 0      |
| 1992                | 11                  | 11   | 0      |
| 1994                | 15                  | 12   | 3      |
| 1995                | 4                   | 3    | 1      |
| 1996                | 13                  | 6    | 7      |
| 1998                | 24                  | 11   | 13     |
| 1999                | 15                  | 15   | 0      |
| 2000                | 14                  | 8    | 6      |
| 2001                | 5                   | 5    | 0      |
| 2003                | 23                  | 12   | 11     |
| 2007                | 10                  | 6    | 4      |
| 2009                | 11                  | 7    | 4      |
| 2012                | 14                  | 3    | 11     |
| 2013                | 24                  | 7    | 17     |
| 2015                | 24                  | 8    | 16     |
| 2018                | 18                  | 4    | 14     |

*Note.* Adapted from the image Ceylon Overseas Service, the First Batch- 1949 (2007); Abeysekera (2010) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Sri Lanka (2023, May 04). RTI Application No. MFA/RTI/012/2023 dated 12. 04. 2023, for information sought under RTI Act No. 12 of 2016. By Navodya. L. M. S.; 2023.



The descriptions by Abeysekera (2010) about the recruitments made based on the British Minute and the requirement for married women to obtain special permission from the PSC if they wished to apply for the COS displayed in the Gazette Notice published in Ceylon Daily News which is supported by the mentioning by Interviewee 1 (personal communication, May 19, 2023) that very few married women joined the service during the early years even after women started to enter the service and the conditions given in section (1) of the chapter VII ‘Marriage and Divorce’ of *Overseas Service Minute of 1948*, thus depicts discriminatory laws and policies which the classical liberal feminists describe as the main causes of gender inequality.

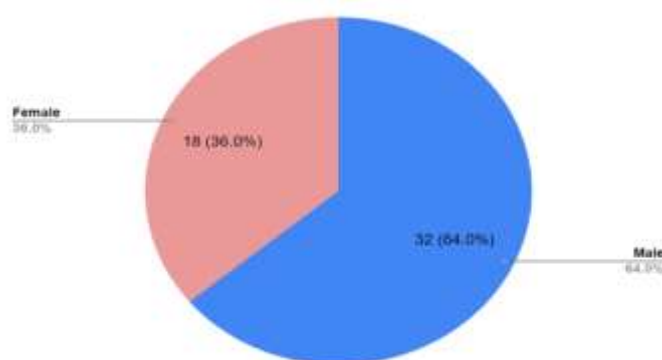
Furthermore, Abeysekera’s description about her experience of being questioned about leaving the service after marriage depicts the underestimations and doubts that had existed about the ability of women to manage work and family life due to the social and biological roles associated with their gender. Such assumptions thus depict instances of ‘sexism’ that liberal feminists explain as ideas and social practices based on gender roles that lead to underestimate women and their capacities while also depicting examples to discriminatory socio-cultural barriers described by welfare liberal feminists.

- **Progressive Shifts in Gender Equality**

The progress achieved over time regarding gender equality within the field is highlighted through the removal of legal barriers affecting individual career choices like the conduct of Open Competitive Exams for recruitment; the increase in the number of female diplomats recruited under each SLFS batch over time as depicted in Table 01; the contributions of Sri Lankan women diplomats; the significant number of female diplomats heading Sri Lanka’s foreign missions as depicted in Figure 01; the considerable progressive change in attitudes taken place and the establishment of gender-sensitive initiatives like the ‘National Committees on Gender Empowerment and Workplace Harassment’ in government ministries and the Transfer Boards in the MFA (Interviewee 3, personal communication, May 26, 2023; Interviewee 5, personal communication, June 01, 2023).

**Figure 01**

*The percentage and number of male and female diplomats serving as Heads of Missions in diplomatic missions of Sri Lanka as of 31<sup>st</sup> May 2023*



*Note.* The chart in Figure 01 was prepared in accordance with the author’s calculation of the data collected from Ministry of Foreign Affairs- Sri Lanka. (n.d.). *Sri Lanka Missions*. <https://mfa.gov.lk/sri-lanka-missions/>. By Navodya. L. M. S.; 2023.

The noted progress thus depicts the reduction of socio-cultural and legal barriers identified by liberal feminists as causes of gender inequality in workplaces to achieve what liberal feminists advocated for: equal opportunities and treatment for all genders.



Furthermore, the data provided on the notable contribution of Sri Lankan female diplomats (both career and non-career) and data on the significant number of women diplomats currently leading foreign missions prove liberal feminist Harriet Taylor's assumption described by Mohajan (2022) that women can be equal partners of men in productive industries.

The progressive status of gender equality in the field of diplomacy of the country in legal terms is conspicuous with all eight Interviewees suggesting that except for a few discriminatory laws and policies identified during the early years of the service, no gender discriminatory national or institutional laws or policies existed or exists with regard to individual career choices, recruitment, promotion or appointment to foreign missions. Furthermore, the safeguarding of gender equality in terms of promotions in SLFS is guaranteed by section (3) in chapter II of the *Overseas Service Minute of 1948*: "Promotions from one class or grade to another in the Overseas Service will depend entirely on merit and suitability, and will be conditional on officers passing the prescribed departmental examinations" ("*Overseas Service Minute*," 1948, p. 2) and confirmed by the determinants of promotion listed under point 7 in Part I: Section (1) of the *Sri Lanka Foreign Service Minute of 2001* (Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 2001).

- **Persisting Gender Inequities**

However, the data collected through the secondary sources and the interviews furthermore portray that despite the progress achieved over time, the service has not eliminated gender inequalities within its arena. For instance, the counts depicted in Table 01 related to the years 1996, 1998, 2012 to 2018 depicting the trend of female representation in SLFS batches surpassing that of male; the fact provided by Interviewee 3 and 7 (personal communication, May 26, 2023; personal communication, June 02, 2023) that 65% of SLFS cadre is female diplomats and most importantly all interviewees suggesting that gender inequality persists in the SLFS in terms of representation, not only conveys such existence but also the liberal feminist idea that gender equality is about all genders.

Furthermore, the considerable number of examples provided by the interviewees about the socio-cultural factors like gender stereotypes and roles that cause challenges and discriminations against the female diplomats in relation to individual career choices, promotions and appointments, confirms the statement of Interviewee 5 (personal communication, June 01, 2023) that many undiscussed "intense social problems" still remain within the service.

For instance, the examples depicting the tendency of young women having to rethink their choices of a SLFS career; female diplomats having to quit their jobs or having to avoid career advancement; having to put an extra effort to prove their potential and facing the tendency of not being appointed to missions involving sensitive topics like counterterrorism or to militarily proactive states or to set up new missions, clearly depict how gender roles attached to females like the expectation of being the primary caregiver and stereotypes that women are weak, emotional and passive, create unfair consequences for female diplomats within the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka.

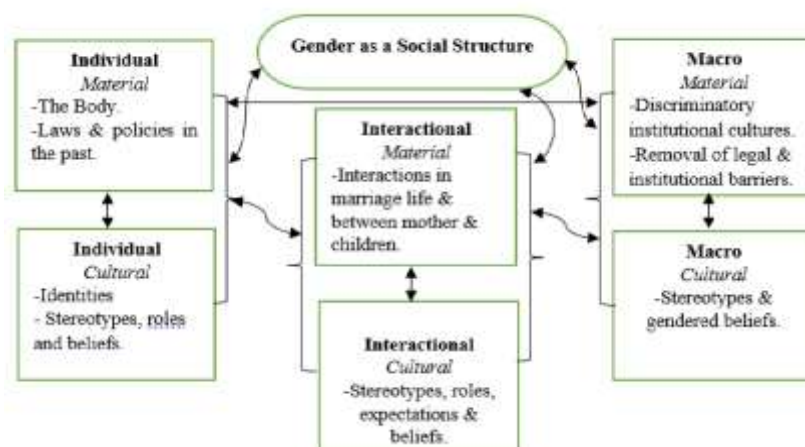
While providing examples for discriminatory socio-cultural factors explained by welfare liberal feminists, the given instances furthermore depict the functioning of gender essentialism where inequalities are generated through differences promoted through stereotypes and where essentialist beliefs about unique characteristics of each gender ultimately negatively affect individual choices and the treatment of others (Vinney, 2021).

In addition, the above discussed data on the evolution of gender equality in the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka can be briefly analyzed through the gender structure theory by Barbara J. Risman as given in Figure 01:



**Figure 01**

*Application of the case of the evolution of gender equality in the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka since Independence to the model of gender structure theory.*



*Note.* Figure 01 was prepared using the secondary and primary qualitative data about the evolution of gender equality in Sri Lankan diplomacy and challenges faced by Sri Lankan women diplomats. Adapted from *Where the millennials will take us: A new generation wrestles with the gender structure* (p. 132), by B. J. Risman, 2018b, Oxford University Press (<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199324385.003.0002>). Copyright 2018 by Oxford University Press. By Navodya, L. M. S.; 2023.

As depicted in Figure 01, the actions which had taken place at each level of the integrative theory have affected in reproducing gender inequality and equality within the field of diplomacy of the country, over time. For instance, the policy of recruitment of COS probationers as specified in section 19 (d) of the *Report of the Public Service Commission* and supported by the descriptions by Abeysekera (2010) and Bandara (2007) along with other policies highlighted by Abeysekera (2010) like married women having to obtain a special permission to join the service, signify material processes at the individual level which indirectly affected the career choices of women during the early years of the Ceylon Overseas Service (COS).

Furthermore, depicting the interlink between the three levels, the gender stereotypes, beliefs and expectations created as a result of the interactions within multicultural societies at the interactional level impact the cultural processes in the individual level by reproducing self-discrimination where women discriminate themselves by restricting their individual choices. This is apparent through suggested individual choices like women deciding to avoid a career in SLFS, female diplomats deciding to quit the job or avoid career advancements or reject mission appointments to war-torn countries and so on due to the influence of gendered identities created with the instillation of the gender expectations associated with women and the belief that they are weak, emotional and passive since childhood (Interviewee 2, personal communication, May 24, 2023; Interviewee 3, personal communication, May 26, 2023; Interviewee 6, personal communication, May 27, 2023).

In addition, the limitations to individual choices created, especially to women, suggested by Interviewee 4 and Interviewee 5 (personal communication, May 30, 2023; personal communication, June 01, 2023) when husbands of female diplomats driven by patriarchal stereotypes refuse to accompany them to foreign missions depicts the interrelation of processes within the same level while also depicting the interlink between each level since the interactions between family members happening as a material process in the interactional level affect choices made in the individual level.

Furthermore, the suggested instances of discriminations that women diplomats have to face in terms of appointments to foreign missions by doubting their potential signify discriminatory





institutional cultures at play as material processes within the macro level which are results of the cultural processes happening in the same level as the gendered beliefs like women are weak, passive and emotional. The origin of such cultural processes thus can be traced in the cultural processes in the interactional level.

In addition, the initiatives such as the establishment of the ‘National Committees on Gender Empowerment and Workplace Harassment’ suggested by the interviewees as progressive initiatives taken at the institutional level which improved the gender equality within the service while reducing the challenges for the women diplomats, portray how actions at each level could also produce gender equality by challenging the social structure of gender. This scenario is explained by Risman within the theory as the existence of a reflexive relationship between structure and individual actions happening in each dimension where just as the structure of gender influences individual action, individual action also influence structure by either reinforcing or challenging it (Risman, 2018a; Risman & Davis, 2013).

- **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were provided by the Interviewees to improve the gender equality within the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka:

1. To continue to ensure that the recruitment, promotion and appointment procedures are based on qualifications and competence instead of gender (Interviewee 1, personal communication, May 19, 2023; Interviewee 4, personal communication, May 30, 2023; Interviewee 5, personal communication, June 01, 2023).
2. To increase the establishment of bi-lateral agreements with states allowing the spouses of diplomats to work during foreign missions (Interviewee 2, personal communication, May 24, 2023; Interviewee 8, personal communication, June 01, 2023).
3. To establish a code of ethics to ensure equal treatment of all genders within the service (Interviewee 3, personal communication, May 26, 2023; Interviewee 7, personal communication, June 02, 2023).
4. To encourage higher women participation in all-male interview boards and committees like the High Post Committee reviewing and confirming diplomatic appointments; ensuring that gender sensitive facilities are provided beyond maternity leave and nursing hours guaranteed through the Establishment Code to allow female diplomats to perform essential biological roles like the provision of temporary concessions like the working from home facilities during the maternity leave period so that the efficiency of female diplomats would not be reduced and create a feminist foreign policy focusing on empowering both genders within the field (Interviewee 5, personal communication, June 01, 2023).

Furthermore, the following messages were given by the Interviewees to the young girls who are desiring a career in the SLFS:

1. Join the service without letting the fact that having to put an extra effort to prove oneself and break the bias, a burden since those can be easily overcome with efficiency and commitment (Interviewee 1, personal communication, May 19, 2023; Interviewee 8, personal communication, June 01, 2023).
2. Be highly qualified in all aspects of International Relations preferably with a master’s degree from a reputed international university along with genuine commitment to the service (Interviewee 2, personal communication, May 24, 2023).
3. Join the service since it involves a lot of prestige as you represent your country within the service known to be the “first defense line of the country” and a lot of personal advancement since the experiences are invaluable (Interviewee 3, personal communication, May 26, 2023; Interviewee 7, personal communication, June 02, 2023).
4. Weigh the pros and cons of joining the service based on the understanding of opportunities opening in the field of International Relations (Interviewee 4, personal communication, May 30, 2023).
5. While pursuing career and knowledge advancement throughout their service, female



diplomats should embrace challenges and prove their potential without denying them based on the stereotypes attached to their gender (Interviewee 5, personal communication, June 01, 2023).

Focusing on the recommendations given by the interviewees to improve gender equality within the service like the recommendation number 1, 3 and 4 which suggest taking remedies to ensure gender equality for both male and female diplomats signify the liberal feminist approach of ensuring gender equality for all genders. Furthermore, the messages of encouragement given by the interviewees to young girls passionate about joining the SLFS, indirectly carry Harriet Taylors' argument that women can be equal partners of men in productive activities (Mohajan, 2022).

- **Summary of Key Findings**

Thus, the following findings were concluded after the analysis of the data collected on the evolution of gender equality in the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka since Independence:

1. Having historically been a men's domain, the SLFS has seen significant progress in terms of gender equality within the field of diplomacy over time.
2. Despite the progress achieved, inequalities lie regarding the gender representation in the SLFS cadre and the unpopular social challenges that negatively affect the Sri Lankan women diplomats.
3. The analysis and the confirmation provided by the non-career female diplomat and the Mid-level female diplomat depicts that all female diplomats of the country face similar issues, especially the social challenges (Interviewee 2, personal communication, May 24, 2023; Interviewee 3, personal communication, May 26, 2023).

## CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussion on the variations of the role of gender in aspects like representation, recruitment, promotion and assignments within the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka since independence, shedding a special focus on the women diplomats of the country (both career and non-career), provided an all-encompassing idea on how gender equality has evolved within the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka and what challenges the female diplomats of the country has had to face over time. The findings thus show that SLFS has seen a significant improvement in gender equality related to most areas especially in overcoming gender discriminatory laws and policies with a noteworthy transformation of a service which had historically been male dominated while also emphasizing that there is still room for improvement in relation to minimizing the continuous social challenges negatively affecting the Sri Lankan women diplomats.

Also, when comparing the results expected for the case study during the preliminary stages of the research with its final findings, although it was initially expected to see results depicting a male-dominated field of diplomacy, the overall findings depicted the existence of an empowering field of diplomacy within which women diplomats serve with equal potential as their male colleagues, within Sri Lanka.

In terms of the contribution of the research, the findings on the field of diplomacy of the country depict that gender equality in the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka portrays a better progress than diplomacy in other parts of the world which according to Aggestam and Towns (2018) are still gender biased. Furthermore, the research findings by offering an in-depth analysis of the evolution of gender equality in the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka since independence with a special focus on women diplomats, contribute in filling the noted gap in literature regarding the lack of works focusing on the evolution of the role of gender within the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka since independence with a special focus on the female diplomats of the country. Furthermore, the findings on the evolution of gender equality related to the field of diplomacy in Sri Lanka and the challenges faced by the Sri Lankan female diplomats encourage future research on the effectiveness of the progressive initiatives taken to improve gender equality within the field and on the challenges faced by the members of diplomatic families of Sri Lanka.



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