

Gender Inequality in Family Makes Weak Society: Problems and Challenges Against Millennium Goals and Seek Solutions Through Buddhist Teaching

Prof. Yasanjali Devika Jayatilleke (*)

INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles as well as biologically through chromosomes, brain structure, and hormonal differences. Gender systems are often dichotomous and hierarchical; gender binary systems may reflect the inequalities that manifest in numerous dimensions of daily life. Gender inequality stems from distinctions, whether empirically grounded or socially constructed.

There are natural differences between the sexes based on biological and anatomical factors and most notably differing reproductive roles. Biological differences include chromosomes, brain structure, and hormonal imbalances. There is a natural difference also in the relative physical strengths (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_inequality).

However man and woman are both equal and both plays a vital role in the creation and development of their family in a particular and the society in general. Gender inequalities refer to the obvious or hidden disparities

(*) University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka; Yasanjali25@gmail.com

among individuals based on the performance of gender. This problem in simple term is known as 'Gender Bias' which in simple terms means the gender stratification or making difference between a male and a female([http://www.articlebase.com/womens-issues-articles/gender inequality](http://www.articlebase.com/womens-issues-articles/gender-inequality))

Indeed, the struggle for legal equality has been one of the major concerns of the women's movement all over the world. Therefore principle of gender equality is enshrined in the constitutions of the most countries in the world. The empowerment of women has been recognized as the central issue in determining the status of women. The constitution of Sri Lanka (1978) not only grants equality to woman, but also empowers the state to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favor of women. Sri Lanka has also ratified various international conventions on 'Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women' (CEDAW) in 1993.

Although Sri Lankan women had enjoyed freedom and quality life in the past, present situation is far different than past. Socially and culturally not accepted or approved the inequalities and violence against women but the inequalities and violence are prevailing in the existing society. There are a plenty of incidents such as family disputes, excessive work load against women, bettering, threatening, torture, sexual violence etc., reports daily from Sri Lankan families.

Marasinghe (2012:43) quotes statistics of the Department of Police and says that only 17 cases were reported of domestic violence in 2006 and it was increased to 187 in 2008. The Social Services Ministry of Western Province was recently announced that the rate of divorce cases were 52% out of all court cases which are annually listed in the country. As earlier mentioned, this study also reveals that a woman bears many burdens than man in day to day life in a Sri Lankan family.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This is a study which is carried out on gender inequality among Sri Lankan families and how it makes weak society and fades the millennium goals. Main objective of the study is to seek solution for gender inequality through Buddha's teaching.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

In spite of the government has been taken many steps and also promulgated laws to minimize gender inequality and gender based violence in the country, why such inequality and violence further prevails among the people of the society?

METHODOLOGY

The questionnaires, interview method, focus group discussions and case studies were used as tools of primary data collection. Two hundred (200) questionnaires, five (5) interviews and case studies were employed. Simple random sample method was used for data collection. For representing urban, semi urban and rural areas, data were gathered from nine areas of the country. The sample was consisted of respondents' i. e. employee housewives and female children. Accordingly, police statistical data also were used. Computer software was used for the data analysis.

INEQUALITY VS EQUALITY: STATUS OF THE WOMEN IN THE PAST

The ancient history of Sri Lanka does show a number of examples of women who made their own contribution to the political and religious events, social and economic affairs of their times.

According to the great chronicle Mahavansa, Sri Lanka had a provincial women leader namely Kuveni even in the very ancient history i. e. sixth century B. C. After arrival of Buddhism, during the reign of King Devanampiyatissa, thoughts, beliefs, philosophy, and world view of the people had more nourished and shaped by the philosophy of Buddha's.

When we go this recorded history of the country, the first queen (Her name was Anula) in Asia had been produced in the first century B. C. (B. C. 48-44) by the people of Sri Lanka (Munasinghe, 1998:141-149). From then onwards there were four queens had ruled the country at several times who led the armies of their kingdom into battle. One of the interesting information on them was that all of them were widowed wives of Sinhala kings. Thereby we could realize that the past Sri Lankans

were not considering 'womanhood' or 'widowhood' as a miserable or inauspicious event of one's life.

Also historical evidence clearly shows that the respect of women and marital relationship between husbands and wives were fairly good in the past. For the sake of pay respect to demised wives, number of kings had built pagoda, monasteries and cities and named on behalf of them (Munasinghe, 1998:124-125). Ancient literature reveals that husband of past Sri Lankan society had anticipated particular qualities from their wife such as protection of chastity, maintaining an intelligence and pleasantness etc. And wives also had equal rights and equal honors within the family and in the society. She had spent sociable life with sufficient freedom. Some inscriptions say that women were generously offered their properties, forests, lands, and lakes etc., to the Buddhist monasteries (Munasinghe, 1998:52-53). Thereby we could understand how much economic and social freedom she had enjoyed in their lives.

As far as economic affairs concerned women had given enormous contribution to their husbands specially relate to cultivating paddy field. As an agricultural based society Sri Lankan family life was totally depend on the sharing and helping between husband and wife. According to Munasinghe (1998: 74-85) in the course of paddy cultivation harvesting crops, protecting paddy fields during the day time, food supplying to the paddy field, drying and ponding paddy were the works and duties which totally done by the women. Apart from paddy cultivation she involved in engaging vegetable and fruit cultivation, internal trade, cane and juggary industry, animal husbandry, pottery and linen work, washing clothes etc.

Thus the women in ancient society had enjoyed a position of importance and equal rights. In Sri Lanka have not had to suffer from many of the social evils that affected women in neighboring countries, such as *sati*, *purdha*, child marriage and the ban on widow marriage.

As far as recent past is considered, Sri Lanka attracted a great deal of attention in 1960 when Sirimavo Bandaranaike became the world's first woman prime minister; and this was widely interpreted, both in Sri Lanka and outside, as an indicator of role and position of women in Sri

Lankan society – a position of equality and independence (Jayawardena, 1986:109).

Even the women in modern Sri Lanka enjoyed better quality of life than in other countries of Asia – a literacy rate among women of 83%, a maternal mortality rate of 1.2 per 1000 live births, and a life expectancy of 67 years at today's levels, which has been achieved in spite of a relatively low Gross National Product. However, a closer look at the position of women in Sri Lankan society, both ancient and modern, reveals that, in spite of conditions that appear favorable to them, women have existed and continue to exist in a situation of subordination.

However Sri Lankan society has gradually changed over last century. Colonialism had made a massive contribution for it. Instead of self sufficient economy, market economy had been introduced by colonial rulers. Local education system had been replaced by modern education system. Mid of the last century the country was gained political freedom from British rulers. After independence free education had introduced by local leaders and university education also widen up. This new situation was benefited to women than men. As a result of it, women were more involved in formal education and they employed in various sectors in the country.

EQUALITY VS INEQUALITY: STATUS OF THE WOMEN IN THE PRESENT

Gender Based Violence

As already mentioned gender inequality doesn't socially or culturally approve in Sri Lanka. After independence all the governments which had come to power had been introduced many legal enactments, social projects, and schemes etc., for minimizing gender inequality. Just after thirty years of long civil war, the present government has been making an attempt to solve various issues which prevail against women in the country and thereby seek an effort to reach millennium development goals. For fulfilling one of those objectives, 2005 No. 34 Domestic violence Act has been introduced. And also women desk had commenced almost all

over the police stations of the country. For restraining sexual violence against women, section 363 (Rape) of Penal Code was twice amended (1995 No. 22 and 1998 No. 29). By the amendment of 1995 No. 22 the incest marriage had become illegal.

But presently there is an alarming increase of crimes against women and children in Sri Lanka. These crimes begin from the family and it spreads to the society. Edirisinghe (2008:139) had conducted a research on ‘Sexual Violence against Women’ and it revealed 44% girls and women were raped in their homes by closed relatives. This situation has created insecure, inequality and injustice against women not only in the society but also inside the families itself.

Table 1

Status of Rape and Incest in Sri Lanka

Year	No.
2005	516
2006	487
2007	424
2008	425
2009	396
2010	408

Source: Statistics of Police Department quoted by Marasinghe, 2012: 75

Table 2

Grave Offences Committed against Women for the Year 2011: Cases Reported

Offence	Total No.
Homicide	148
Attempted homicide	27
Rape/Incest	408
Grievous hurt	310
Hurt by knife	208

Grievous sexual abuse	36
Abduction	90
Trafficking	20
Total	1247

Source: Statistics of Police Department, Official Web Site of Sri Lanka Police.

Table 3

Minor Offences Committed against Women for the Year 2011: Cases Reported

Offence	Total No.
Sexual abuse	1714
Publishing the facts relating to certain offences	2
Causing death by negligence	1
Unlawful abortion	34
Cohabitation caused by a man deceitfully inducing a belief of lawful marriage	7
Bigaming	100
Simple assault	3459
Wrongful restraint/Wrongful confinement	20
Criminal force otherwise than on grave and sudden provocation	100
Criminal intimidation	175
Intentional insult	18
Attempted to sexual harassment	89
Domestic violence	181
Others	293
Total	6193

Source: Statistics of Police Department, Official Web Site of Sri Lanka Police.

The above mentioned statistics reveal the current situation of the offences against Sri Lankan women. As usual in all over the world, unreported cases are much higher than reported cases in the country. Rape and incest were

the highest rated offences according to the above statistics.

Rape is the most ruthless offence which can be done only against women and girl children by men. In 2011, among the grave crimes committed against children, rape and incest were the highest amounts out of all kind of offences. That was 1463 out of 3258 committed all crimes. Due to migration and employment of mothers girl children are more vulnerable inside their homes. Several cases had reported that the daughters were raped by their own fathers or brothers. This situation even leads to the incest marriages. Cyber crimes are also spreading in alarming rate.

Recently the Family Health Bureau and UNFPA had carried out a joined research on 'The Impact of Mobile Phones and Internet on Sexual Offences,' revealed that their use was the main reason for the increase in rapes and other sexual abuses on girls (The Island, 6th Oct. 2012:4). Above information make us understanding how much inequality and masculinity activate against femininity in the society.

Domestic Violence against Women

Domestic violence simply described, is an act of physical harm, or fear of physical harm, mental, emotional, sexual or economic violence committed within the confines of the domestic sphere by persons living in that domestic sphere. Domestic violence is massively spreading out in all over the world.

When we consider official website of police, daily reports in the electronic media, television, radio and the printed media as well as the many incidents that are brought to our attention it is obvious to see that wives and children are being subjected to many difficulties and remain vulnerable in Sri Lanka. Moreover, many people consider domestic violence a personal grievance and they say it is a dispute between husband and wife within the family. Then they do not consider it as a crime. And many of those who have experienced domestic violence do not want to expose their experiences in public. The reasons for not taking action against an abusive are many: economic, cultural and most importantly, insufficient protection for victims.

Table 4
Domestic Violence Year 2011

Nature of Complaints Recorded	No. of Complaints Reported	No. of True Complaints	No. of Complaints Investigated	Settled in Police	No. of Complaints Settled in Mediation Board	No. of Complaints Withdrawn	Pending Inquiries
Family Disputes	109201	109201	108086	88446	1232	15753	2655
Harassment or Neglect Cause by Husband	28491	28491	28180	22889	232	4274	785
Family Disputes Due to Term of Intimacy	10303	10303	10169	8514	99	1246	310

Source: Statistics of Police Department, Official Web Site of Sri Lanka Police.

Even in the official statistics of police website in Sri Lanka, domestic violence has been categorized under petty complaints. Therefore no sufficient information's are available on domestic violence. The table has prepared the information and figures which had given by the said website as follows.

According to above mentioned statistics, domestic violence is a serious problem in the country. An article by the United Nations' (UN) Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) quotes a representative of the UN Population Fund as saying that "the prevalence of gender based violence is reported to be high and widespread, cutting across class, race, ethnicity and religion" (<http://www.refworld.org/docid/4f4f33322.html>).

Culturally Sri Lanka is a male oriented society. Traditionally family matters would never be dealt with in public and women are expected to protect the family reputation under any circumstances and it is considered a great failure and humiliation if they do not manage to do so. And also women continue to tolerate harassment and abuse from their husbands because they are the main breadwinner of the family and protecting the stability of the family is seen as more important than anything else.

On the other hand most of the women those who subject to domestic violence use to tolerate due to affection of the children. As fatherless children are humiliated by the society these women are reluctant to enter to the legal procedure. Another huge challenge is the lack of victim protection. As almost all women have no their own house or land victims do not take any legal action against violence. These are the causes which aggravates domestic violence in the Sri Lankan context.

Gender Inequality in the Family

As a mother, wife and housewife Sri Lankan woman plays vital role in the family. Since she is the main contributor of the all kind of household works some sociologists say that although Sri Lanka is a patriarchal society, matriarchal features also can be seen there. Despite the increase in women in the labor force since in the middle of the 20th century, traditional gender roles still prevalent in Sri Lankan society. Most of the time she works extensively in the family, without sufficient

help from other members. According to present study in spite of making contribution to the family income cooking, washing, cleaning, marketing, going for doctor, attending matters of schools are the household duties and responsibilities which bears by her.

Table 5

Cooking

Who is Responsible	Total No.
Wife	129
Mother of Wife or Husband	22
Servant	8
Both Wife and Husband	12
Wife/Daughter or Son	6
Wife/ Mother of Wife or Husband/ Daughter or Son/ Sister	18
Other	5
Total	200

Source: By the field study.

Table 6

Washing

Who is Responsible	Total No.
Wife	146
Mother of Wife or Husband	9
Servant	7
Both Wife and Husband	17
Wife/Daughter or Son	5
Wife/ Mother of Wife or Husband/ Husband/ Sisters of Wife	11
Other	5
Total	200

Source: By the field study.

Table 7

Cleaning

Who is Responsible	Total No.
Wife	127
Mother of Wife or Husband	13
Servant	8
Both Wife and Husband	17
Wife/Daughter or Son	12
Wife/Husband/Mother of Wife or Husband/ Sisters of Wife	13
Other	10
Total	200

*Source: By the field study.***Table 8**

Marketing

Who is Responsible	Total No.
Wife	62
Mother of Wife or Husband	6
Servant	3
Husband	68
Both Wife and Husband	45
Wife/Daughter or Son	7
Other	9
Total	200

*Source: By the field study.***Table 9**

Going for Doctor

Who is Responsible	Total No.
Wife	66
Husband	25
Both Wife and Husband	101
Other	8
Total	200

Source: By the field study.

Table 10

Attending Matters of Schools

Who is Responsible	Total No.
Wife	82
Husband	18
Other	43
*Not Applicable	57
Total	200

**Children are over 17 year old*

Source: By the field study.

Present study reveals that how much work has been done by a Sri Lankan woman in a home. UNO once announced that the three fourth of work in the world have been covered by women's labour. As household duties such as cooking, washing, cleaning, marketing, rearing children etc., are voluntarily carried out by housewives, they are not considered as human labour to be accounted. Sometimes women are usually expected to put their educational and career goals on hold in order to raise children, while their husbands work. However, there are women who choose to work as well as fulfill their gender role of cleaning the house and taking care of the children. Despite the fact that different households may divide chores more evenly, there is evidence that supports that women have retained the primary caregiver role within familial life despite end up contributions economically.

In this study 40% respondents begin their day between 4-5 a.m. and 24% before 4 a.m. and the day ends up 49% between 10-11 p.m. and 24% between 11-12 p.m. Accordingly the women who work inside the home spend consecutive 8 to 10 hours a day doing household or childcare related chores in addition to their economic contribution. Although 39% respondents' states that their husbands help them for household work 15.5% stated they don't have any help from the any members of the family. And also 30% were not satisfied with the help receiving from the members of the family and 22% respondents seek more help from them. Further 45.5% respondents say they bring home, works relate to the office and 6% of respondents' state husbands and children make oppose against it. It seems the gender roles still divided along traditional gender lines in Sri Lanka. Therefore most of the women (44%) are busy even in the weekends. Thirteen point five (13.5%) percent respondents say that they don't have leisure time at all. Although women intensively have been involving in the household work, it revealed that 34% out of 200 respondents were not appreciated by their members of the family at all.

Accordingly this study shows that how much gender disparity prevails among the Sri Lankans and how much they stereotype the work base on gender line. This situation makes gender inequality in family and it leads to weak society fading with millennium goals.

BUDDHA'S TEACHING ON GENDER EQUALITY

The days Buddha was lived, gender inequality and domestic violence had been culturally and institutionally sanctioned and legitimized within the Indian culture. Buddha was the religious prophet who criticized all sorts of inequalities and violence against women in India. He practically showed his stance by giving opportunity to enter women to his religious action and taught them the way to achieved emancipation. Buddha had given an important status to one's mind. Therefore it is individual responsibility to refrain all kinds of violence. For making peaceful society he preached about five abuses i.e., killing any living beings, harming, battering, beating; stealing, robbing, cheating, wrong living; raping,

sexual harassment, sexual misconduct; Telling lies, using harsh words, using malicious words and talking uselessly; consuming drugs, drinking alcohol, other addictions. If everybody refrains by those abuses, violence and evil would have been eliminated from the society. Then all kind of violence and discrimination expel from one's mind and love, affectionate, kind, and compassion would be replaced.

According to ancient Indian thought the 'womanhood' was a result of evil effect of the previous birth. If anyone practices sexual misconduct her/his next birth would be a feminine. But Buddha was completely denied this idea by his preaching of *Sanyoga Visanyoga Dhamma Pariyaya Suthra* in *Anguththara Nikaya*, *Saththaka Nipatha* and also *Agganga Suthra* in *Deega Nikaya* reveals how the gender differentiation first began in the world (Ven. K. Ariyawimala, 2009:377-379).

Neither according to preaching of Buddha masculinity is superior nor is femininity inferior. Superiority can be gained by the uplift of the mind and thoughts. When the individual suffer from *lobha* (stingy, desire or ambition), *dosa* (anger) and *moha* (anger), aggravates evilness and becomes deflated in he/her mind. Thus the Buddha deeply makes understand that every human can be reached to the supremacy by their own effort, attempt and realization.

BUDDHA'S PREACHING ON SUCCESSFUL FAMILY LIFE

Buddha's main teaching goal was to provide his followers happiness, peace and salvation. He instructed each family member who came to meet him to live harmoniously together. Buddha preached that the Children activities were influenced by the conduct of the parents. Therefore he said (See *Sabrahamma Suthray Duthiya Sanwasa Suthraya*, *Sutrantha-Anguttaranikāya*, part II, 1962:132) the parents were the pre teachers (*Purvacharyya*) of one's life. Therefore he emphasizes on duties of each others in the family. In *Singalaka Suthraya* (*Sutrantha-Pitaka Digha Nikaya*, part III, Re print 2004:289-311) roles and duties of both parents and children were intensively described by him. When each other fulfill their duties happiness of the family would be accomplished.

In *Duthiya Sanvasa Suthraya*, (*Sutrantha-Anguttaranikāya*, part II, 1962:114-116) and *Patama Sanvasa Suthraya* (*Sutrantha-Pitaka Anguttaranikāya*, part II, 1962:110-114) Buddha was categorized the relationship between husband and wife by qualities of them i. e., quality less husband lives with a quality less wife, quality less husband lives with a quality wife (like Goddess), quality husband (like God) lives with a quality less wife, quality husband (like God) lives with a quality wife (like Goddess) and he preached to be a final category to spend a happy and quality life. In *Kula Suthraya* (*Sutrantha-Anguttaranikāya*, part II, 1962:478-479) he describes how members of a family should be managed earnings in prudently. In *Nakulapitu Suthraya* (*Sutrantha-Anguttaranikāya*, part IV, 1962:28-32) Buddha was admired loving and affectionate marital relationship. In *Saththabariya Suthraya* (*Sutrantha-Anguttaranikāya*, part IV, 1962:414-418) he describes about seven sorts of wives i. e., tortured wife (*vadaka samaya*), thief wife (*chaura samaya*), lazy and tough wife (*arrya samaya*), motherly wife (*mathu samaya*), respectful wife (*bagini samaya*), friendly wife (*saki samaya*), servant wife (*daasi samaya*).

Further Buddha states in *Devadutha Suthraya* (*The Suttantapitaka Anguttaranikāya*, part I, 1960:254-271) people those who make evil by their mind, physical and verbal lead to hell after their death. In *Parabava Suthraya* (*The Sutta-Pitaka Khuddaka-nikāya*, *Suttanipato*, 1977:36-43) and *Vasala Suthraya* (*The Sutta-Pitaka Khuddaka-nikāya*, *Suttanipato*, 1977:44-47) Buddha taught about the doors of decline and features of undignified qualities of a human. In *Mangala Suthraya* (*The Sutta-Pitaka Khuddaka-nikāya*, *Suttanipato*, 1977:80-83) he shows the features of good, pleasant and auspicious in the world.

Thus Buddha's teaching was highly applicable and practicable for human those who would expect to spend righteous, trust worthy and faithful lives.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that how gender inequality and gender discrimination

prevail in the contemporary Sri Lankan society. Although it doesn't approve or admit by the mass culture it severely propagates among all the segment of the society. Even though the family is a tiny unit, it is one of the strongest units in the society. When the reciprocity and intimacy expel, ties of the family would be shaken and eventually it affects to the society. Then the society would be gradually weakened.

It is argued that the Millennium Development Goals fail to acknowledge gender inequality as a cross-cutting issue. In Sri Lankan context although gender disparity not prevails in education there are some disputes available among regarding wage of women in private sector. Still especially in labour work, women get less amount of wage compare to men although they perform similar sort of work in private sector. Since woman over works in a family, division of labour hasn't been operated in productively. This situation pop up problems and challenges against millennium goals and it restrains acceleration of development in the country.

Although almost 70% of the people follow Buddhism, unfortunately many people don't nourished their lives through Buddha's philosophy. As already mentioned that the Buddha's teachings were immensely rich of information on successful family life, but the followers haven't grasped those teaching appropriately. In fact, gender inequality and disparity are common among any people and it doesn't base on religion, region or ethnicity.

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