

SGBV AND EXCLUSION OF WOMEN FROM GOVERNANCE: SRI LANKAN LAW'S RESPONSES

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ABSTRACT

While intersecting and cross-cutting grounds such as ethnicity, class, caste, language, and educational status impact women's participation in politics; sexual and gender-based violence is a significant factor that pushes women away from political decision-making. Based on the reality that prejudices and discriminations against women created by social and legal structures carve a sub-standard position for women - justifying and condoning violence against those who defy this position - this paper argues that public decision-making bodies will not be democratic unless the law specifically addresses Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) against women in politics.

1. INTRODUCTION

When Sri Lanka elected the first woman Prime Minister, the first in the world, in July 1960, the entire region expected positive changes. Addressing the 26th session of the United Nations in 1971, she called for international support for her proposal for the establishment of a Peace Zone in the Indian Ocean. Quite contrary to her expressed vision, violence took over many spheres of social life, including governance at national and local level in the years that followed. Amidst an extremely violent climate, Sri Lanka elected its first woman Executive President in 1994, giving her a clear mandate to change the political landscape of the country. Yet, the Sri Lankan political arena never became a truly democratic - a violence-free - space for women. Quite contrary to the country's international commitments and national plans of action, the democratic space in Sri Lanka has since been marred by violence, shrinking the democratic spaces for women.

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