

The Impact of Socio-Economic Changes in Female Employment Patterns in Sri Lanka

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The introduction of free education system [1943] and the open economy [1977] in Sri Lanka have established a reversal of gender roles and increased the female representation in the local job market and the migrant sector worker category. The traditional domestic housewife role changed to an active worker who contributes immensely to the wellbeing of the self, family and the country. The scholars were interested in this phenomenon and they identified two types of '*sexual division of labour*' in feudal society based on gender; '*horizontal and vertical*'. Barret (1988) calls this '*industrial apartheid*' and Coulson et al (1975) too have discussed the role the housewife play in capitalist economy. Barron and Norris (1976) identify the sexual division of labour of the workers in the economic sphere as '*primary and secondary sector*'. The main objective in this research is to find out how the female employment patterns in Sri Lanka have changed from '*horizontal secondary sector*' to a '*vertical primary sector*' due to the influence of free education and open economy. The research design used was survey. A structured questionnaire was used as the method of data collection. Randomly selected sample of 500 females [250 urban and 250 rural] were given the questionnaire to be completed. The official statistics issued by different Departments, Ministries and the Central Bank of Sri Lanka were utilized in preliminary literature survey. In the study it was identified that the contribution made by the Sri Lankan females in all sectors of economy has been outstanding and the urban females enjoy more opportunities than rural females. In a social dimension there has been a recognizable move from '*horizontal secondary sector*' to a '*vertical primary sector*'.

Key words: *Sexual division of labour, Industrial apartheid, Primary and secondary sector, Horizontal and vertical division of labour*