

Sri Lankan Soldiers with Disabilities and their Masculine Identity

M.G.L. Mahesh Premarathna

Department of Sociology, University of Colombo

The objective of this research paper is to analyse the ways in which Sri Lankan soldiers with disabilities construct and continue their masculine identity in patriarchal post-war Sri Lankan society. This paper argues that masculine identity construction and continuation of soldiers with disabilities depend on the ways in which the disabled body claims the dominant, socially accepted able body's male role, the space for role performance, and economic stability; hence this needs an active role performance as the masculine identity is a continuous process of identity-claiming. According to existing literature, disability is generally identified and labelled as dependent, childlike, helpless, deviant, and having thought patterns of self-blame. Further, negative labels such as self-shame and self-doubt, freaks of nature, abnormal, unproductive, unattractive, antisocial, and tainted by disease/ ill-health, non-human, burdens of charity, disease organisms, and ungodly are attached to the notion of disability. Masculinity is linked to qualities such as rational, logical, truth-seeking, strong, powerful, autonomous, naturally authoritative, violent, desirous, independent, competitive, and goal-orientated. Therefore, masculinity and disability are seen as contradictory and polarized characters which are unable to exist simultaneously in a person's life. However, this research paper argues that it is difficult to apply the existing knowledge to understand the masculine identity of soldiers with disabilities as they do not necessarily have to face the conflict of losing their masculine identity. This research is based on a qualitative study done in soldiers' villages and other villages in the Colombo District, from May to July, 2014 and from December 2014 to January 2015. Using the purposeful sampling method, 13 soldiers with disabilities and 04 civilians were selected. In-depth interviews and non-participation observation were used to collect primary data. According to findings of this study, the disabled body is not always in conflict with masculinity. Soldiers with disabilities can also claim a masculine identity according to the space for role performance, the ways in which the disabled body claims the dominant socially accepted able body's male role, and economic stability.

Keywords: Disability, Masculinity, Identity, Patriarchal society, Space for role performance