

## **“Inappropriate” Subjects: The Portrayal of Women in Sri Lanka’s Parliamentary Discourse**

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This paper explores the portrayal of women in Sri Lanka’s parliamentary speeches, focusing in particular on the role of the former Minister of Child Development and Women’s Affairs, Mr Tissa Karaliyadda, in instantiating certain ways of talking about the subject ‘women’ and the issues concerning them. This exploration provides important, although not exhaustive, insights into how women are perceived and talked about in the country’s legislature. The corpus will consist of Hansards that report the former Minister’s interventions, dating from his appointment in 2010 and extending to 2014. The paper takes a discourse analysis approach from the position that parliamentary speech is not just communication in any self-evident sense, but reflects a specific ordering of language and signification within a social institution, and is underpinned by an institutional basis of power. The paper finds that former Minister Karaliyadda’s parliamentary speeches inscribe the category of woman within the state’s dominant ideology of national development, as set out in *Mahinda Chinthanaya*. Women are hailed as gendered subjects deserving intervention in so far as their subjectivity can be integrated with the models of womanhood congruent with that specific vision of culturally appropriate development. Development which is not anchored to this manifesto is cast as “inappropriate”, attributed to foreign influences and associated negatively with tropes of disease and the destruction of traditional ways of life. The gendered implications of issues such as violence and sexual abuse are also rationalized by the same logic, chiefly that they must arise from undesirable socio-political change which sees women facing the consequences of embracing “inappropriate” [*nogalapena*] choices. The paper concludes that, in the parliamentary speech examined, women are assigned a circumscribed footing as beneficiaries of welfare and services, as a subordinate and victimized group whom a benevolent paternal state should do well by in its development initiatives, and suggests ways in which parliamentary discourses contain within them the resources to eschew patronizing and stereotyping women, and to recognize them as political subjects in their own right.

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