



**University of Jaffna**

**Lady Leelawathy Ramanathan  
Memorial Lecture- 2021**



**“Women in Academia:  
Special Reference to  
Sri Lankan State Universities”**

*by*

**Professor Vasanthi Arasaratnam,**  
Senior Professor of Biochemistry and  
Member of University Grants Commission,  
Department of Biochemistry,  
Faculty of Medicine.  
University of Jaffna.

*on*

**Monday 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2021 at 3.00 p.m**

*at*

**Kailasapathy Auditorium  
University of Jaffna**





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01.03.2021



சீமாட்டி லீலாவதி இராமநாதன்  
**Lady Leelawathy Ramanathan**



## Message from the Vice Chancellor

“She is the force of Nature

She blossomed regardless of the soil”- Alex Myles

A young lady who was born and brought up in Australia, who was a deeply pious woman attracted by the theosophical movement in Australia moved to Sri Lanka to quench her spiritual thirst. Finally she found (her Guru) Sir, Thiru Ponnambalam Ramanathan, a high Hindu intellectual personality. She was a living example to all the women, who harnessed her husband Sir. Pon Ramanathan's great vision of knowledge and spirituality as her own. She was a devoted wife, who respected all the cultures and traditions of her second home land as her own motherland. She is none other than our Lady Leelavathy Ramanathan.

Sir Ramanathan and Leelavathy Ramanathan moved to India and spent their beautiful last days over there. Soon after the demise of Sir Ramanathan in 1924. Lady Leelavathy Ramanathan followed the Hindu tradition, of wearing white and build Kurinji Anadavar temple in loving memory of her husband.

She contributed a lot to the Tamil speaking world in so many ways. Her untiring efforts on publishing Sir Ramanathan's lectures and several books including Ramayana in English version were marvelous.

Speaker of Leelavathy Ramanathan Memorial lecture 2021 is an eminent lady and famous scientist of Sri Lanka. Prof. (Ms) Vasanthy Arasaratnam, Senior Professor in Biochemistry, University of Jaffna who joined the University of Jaffna in 1984

and has been serving in the University for more than 36 years under various capacities, Professor and Head of the Department of Biochemistry and, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Vice Chancellor. Ultimately she drove the University to greater height by serving as the Vice Chancellor for a maximum allowed period of six years from 2011. Prof. Arasaratnam is a most accomplished Biochemist of Sri Lanka, she has published more than 100 research papers, acquired research grants worth of several millions dollars from Sida / SARFC- Sweedan, IFS- Sweden, TWAS, etc,. She is a gifted teacher and respected by all students. Her concern for the community is highly appreciated as an academia of high caliber. She devoted her research in the areas relevant to the region and people. In this respect she supervised many postgraduate students leading to the award of MPhil and PhD. While she was holding the noble post of Vice Chancellor, Prof. Arasaratnam brought accelerated growth to the university in both infrastructure and academic developments. Her period of tenure as Vice Chancellor of the University of Jaffna is proved to be a golden period in the annals of University of Jaffna. Actually, Ms. Arasaratnam devoted her entire professional life for fostering and enriching her beloved mother University of Jaffna in many spheres.

All glories to God.

**Prof. S. Srisatkunarajah,**

B.Sc.(Hons)Jaffna, PGDE(Merit)OUSL,

Ph.D (Heriot-Walt),

Professor in Mathematics,

**Vice Chancellor,**

**University of Jaffna.**



## Lady Leelawathy Ramanathan Memorial Lecture

# Women in Academia: Special Reference to Sri Lankan State Universities

**Prof. Vasanthi Arasaratnam**

**Senior Professor of Biochemistry**

*Department of Biochemistry, Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna.*

Respected Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Rector, Deans of the Faculties, Registrar, Acting Librarian, Head of the Departments, Professors, my academic colleagues, well-wishers and my dear Students; I have been honored for the responsibility entrusted on me to deliver this prestigious Lady Leelawathy Memorial Lecture, 2021. My sincere thanks are due to the Vice Chancellor who has the faith on me to take upon this mission.

C. Coomaraswamy, High Commissioner for Ceylon in India has stated that “We shall be failing in our duty, if we do not pay our tribute to the noble lady who was Sir Pon Ramanathan’s partner in his later life, who shared all his joys and sorrows. She was born in a country thousands of miles away; nevertheless, she has dedicated her life to the service of a society quite different from the one in the land of her birth”.

Miss R.L. Harrison had later become Lady Ramanathan. Father of Miss Harrison was an Englishman, immigrated to Australia. Miss Harrison had the passion on comparative study of religion

and the search for spiritual truths during her early life. The quest brought her to Sir Pon Ramanathan who, at this time, combined with his official duties worked on a comparative study of religion and the pursuit of Truth. Sir Pon Ramanathan expounded to her the mysteries of religion and guided her in the path of spiritual enlightenment. Under the guidance of Sir Pon Ramanathan, Miss Harrison took an enthusiastic study of the Hindu classics and became in her own right an authority on Hindu religion and Philosophy. Sir Pon Ramanathan found in her a true friend, an intelligent companion, an able collaborator in his many-sided intellectual and spiritual activity and an unfailing source of inspiration and refreshment to him.

When Sir Pon Ramanathan proceeded to America on his lecture tour, Miss Harrison accompanied him as his Private-Secretary and was responsible for his success. In 1906 when Sir Pon Ramanathan visited England, on his return from America, Sir Pon Ramanathan Being then a widower, felt that the selfless and devoted labours of Miss Harrison who had stood by him and registered their marriage. Subsequent success of Sir Pon Ramanathan was due to Lady Ramanathan.

Lady Leelawathy, though heir to an alien culture and an alien upbringing, in every way exemplified the noblest traditions of Hindu womanhood by unquestioning obedience to her husband's will.

Whenever Sir Pon Ramanathan made a train journey, the noble lady would be the first to enter the compartment, dust and clean



his seat, personally to provide every detail of his comfort on the journey and, when the husband was comfortably seated and the train steamed out, returned home. She played host to his numerous friends who came to him from far and near, supervised his large retinue of servants, managed his extensive estates and farms and did a host of other things in a supreme endeavour to free him from the many anxieties and worries which are generally the portion of men in high places. She was a vegetarian ever since she came under his influence and remained so to the end of life. She died in 1953 full of years and honour, mourned by the people whom she loved so well, whom she served for half a century with surprising loyalty and devotion.

Lady Ramanathan's wide scholarship and her untiring labours in the cause of women's education received recognition when the University of Ceylon conferred on her the Doctorate of Laws, honoris causa.

### **Lady Leelawathy Ramanathan**

C. Coomaraswamy, High Commissioner for Ceylon in India has stated that "We shall be failing in our duty, if we do not pay our tribute to the noble lady who was Ramanathan's partner in his later life, who shared all his joys and sorrows. She was born in a country thousands of miles away; nevertheless, she has dedicated her life to the service of a society quite different from the one in the land of her birth".

## 1.OVERVIEW

The initial objective was to consider the South Asian Women in Academia. South Asian Countries account for about 25% of the world population [1]. The South Asian Countries include eight countries, namely Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Unfortunately, statistical data on women in academia of most of the South Asian countries available were limited, except those of India (for limited period) and Sri Lanka. [2]. Further the data in most of the countries had not been classified on gender basis. Further the previous information on Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and the Maldivian academia were not in English. The recent information on gender based classification of academia is available in English [3, 4]. Majority of the gender based data are included related to students, rather than to academia[5].In general there was a lack of substantive information on scholarship and research of women in academia and academic leadership in higher education of the region, except few research publications. Hence the **‘Women in Academia- Special Reference to Sri Lankan State Universities’** was chosen for today’s talk.

Cambridge Dictionary defines Academia as ‘The part of society, especially universities that is connected with **studying and thinking or the activity or job of study.**’While the Oxford Dictionary defines Academia as learning, research, etc. at colleges and universities, the people involved in it.

Thus here let us consider **the activity or the job of study in the university.**



## 2. FEMALE ACADEMICS IN SOUTH ASIAN COUNTRIES EXCLUDING SRI LANKA

Among the 8 South Asian Countries information on female academics from Afghanistan and Bangladesh between 2004 and 2012 were available (Table 1) [6, 7] without distribution by employment category.

**Table 1:** Total and Percentage of female Academics from 2004 to 2012 in Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

Country	Total Female Academics % (No.)								
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>Afghanistan</b>	14.5 (273)	15.3 (302)	15.1 (316)	15.5 (373)	15.2 (391)	14.7 (419)	15.1 (456)	15.2 (479)	14.5 (510)
<b>Bangladesh</b>	15.1 (6,462)	15.7 (6,921)	18.2 (7,905)	18.0 (8,068)	-	18.1 (9,163)	18.1 (9,241)	35.7 (9,669)	19.4 (10,623)

In absolute numbers female academics over this 8 year period has almost doubled. However, in Afghanistan there had been a change in the absolute number of representation of women in higher educational sector with insignificant changes in the percentage of women representation [8].

Reports on the Bangladesh Academic [7,9] show that the female academic population increased from 15.1 to 19.5% in the public institutions. Further the Health and Information system had higher percentage of female academics increasing from 22 to 24.8% in two years (Table 2) [7].

**Table 2:** Number and percentage of female academics in Bangladesh during 2010 and 2012 [7].

		2010	2012
<b>Total Academics (% , No.)</b>		18.1 (1677)	19.5 (2068)
<b>Field of Study (% , No.)</b>	Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary	12 (106)	16.3 (180)
	Science, Technology and Engineering	13.7 (275)	14.5 (355)
	Health and Welfare	22 (77)	24.8 (108)

Information on Bhutanese academia were not available.

In India the women enrolment in higher education increased with years in different states [10]. The Women academic constituted 1.4% of the Professorate before 2011 [11]. The females composed of 25% women among the 666,971 academics [12]. In 2011, among the academics female Professors, Readers & Associate Professors and Lecturers/Assistant Professors were 5% (90,398), 31.1% (971,792) and 38.5% (47,828) respectively. Table 3 shows the women in different academic positions in India between 2015/2016 and 2018/2019 (Table 3). Thus an overall academic positions in Indian universities is occupied by about 40% females (Table 3) [3]. The latest data available is up to 2018/2019 and the Annual reports prior to 2015/2016 were not available in English.



**Table 3:** Different academic positions occupied by females in India from 2015/2016 to 2018/2019.

<b>Position</b>	<b>2015/2016</b>	<b>2016/2017</b>	<b>2017/2018</b>	<b>2018/2019</b>
<b>Professor</b>	25.1	25.4	27.8	26.5
<b>Associate Professor / Reader</b>	34.7	35.3	36.6	36.8
<b>Senior Lecturer</b>	40.3	39.0	43.4	43.5
<b>Lecturer /Assistant Professor</b>	40.7	42.1	63.0	62.9
<b>Tutor/ Demonstrator</b>	55.8	60.3	50.6	49.8
<b>Total</b>	39.0	40.2	42.1	42.2

UGC Annual Reports of India[3]

About seven universities have a more equal representation (including Kerala, Mghalaya and Chandigarh) where female representation is higher than 50%[8]. However the female occupancy in higher positions are under - represented. There is a slight increase in the percentage of female academic representation in India (Table 3).

Nepal; has 12 universities, 97 constituent and 1,268 affiliated colleges, leading a total of 1,365 academics[13]. The UGC Annual report of Nepal (2010/2011) provides a list of members of governing committees but does not provide a gender analysis. There port for 2007/2008 is not in English, and there port for 2009 does not give gender differentiation[13].

In Pakistan female academic strength during 2015/2016 private and public universities were 35.3 and 36.64% respectively. However, there has been no data classifying the gender[14, 15].

Data on women distribution on the Maldivian Higher Educational system is unavailable in English. Qualifications of the Maldivians academics are very low. Young access of women to a local university is higher than young men. Women seem to be having more workload than men[16].

### 3. FEMALE ACADEMICS IN SRILANKA

There are 16 Universities in Sri Lanka including a recently established Gampaha Wickramarachi University of Indigenous Medicine under the Act No. 16 of 1978 (Table4). There are several Universities which do not come under the said act. Growth of private higher education has been much slower in Sri Lanka than in its neighboring South Asian countries, due to the sistance, including strikes by the academics in the public sector [17].

**Table 4:** The 16 State Universities and the years of establishment.

University	Commencement Date
Colombo	1978 (1921, University of Ceylon)
Peradeniya	1978
Sri Jayewardenepura	1978 (1959, Vidyodaya University)
Keleniya	1978 (1959, Vidyalankara University)
Jaffna	1979 (1974, Jaffna Campus)
Moratuwa	1979 (Katubedda, 1972)
Open University	1979
Ruhuna	1984
Eastern	1986
Sabragamuwa	1995
Rajarata	1996
South Eastern	1996



Wayamba	1999
Uva-Wlleasa	2005
Visual and Performing Arts	2005 (School of Arts1893)
Gampaha Wikramarachi University of Indigenous Medicine	2020

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The enrolment rate to the 15 State Universities is about 16%[18]. Girls and women fare relatively well in the education system. More females than males are enrolled at the undergraduate level (Table 5; 56 to 64% from 2009 to 2019). Sri Lanka has ensured the gender equity in higher education through a non-discriminating educational policy [18].

**Table 5:** Percentage of the female student enrolment to the fifteen State Universities from 2009 to 2019[19-29].

Year	Female (%)
2009	56
2010	58
2011	59
2012	60
2013	60
2014	60
2015	60
2016	62
2017	63
2018	63
2019	64

### 3.1 UNIVERSITIES AND ACADEMIC CADRE

In Sri Lankan Universities the number of academia increased from 2015 to 2019 (Table 6). There has been an increase in the academic carder from 10.6 to 56.1% (Peradeniya to Uwa Wellasa). This increase was due to the personal visit of the Department of Management Services and the University Grants Commission Officials to the different Universities (Table 6). Majority of the peripheral Universities had the carder increase between 21.4 and 56.1% while the Colombo based Universities had the carder increase from 13.1 to 28.3% and the University of Peradeniya had only 10.6% increase.

Sri Lanka has progressed towards more equal education for men and women prior to independence [18]. From 1945 an educational policy was developed for non-discrimination towards either sex to provide free primary, secondary and higher education. There has been a steady increase in the female student enrolment from 1942 to 1965 (from 10.1 to 42.7%)[18].



**Table 6:** Increase in the academic cadres in different univer sites calculated based on the permanent academics carders available at 2015.

University	Increase in carder up to 2019 (%)
Colombo	28.3
Peradeniya	10.6
Sri Jayawardenapura	18.9
Keleniya	17.0
Moratuwa	13.1
Jaffna	30.8
Ruhuna	21.4
Eastern	28.1
South Eastern	45.2
Rajarata	30.0
Sabragamuwa	28.8
Wayamba	34.4
Uwa-Wllasa	56.1
Visual And Performing Arts	26.9
Open University	16.3

(Sri Lanka University Statics 2019)

### 3.2 FEMALE ACADEMIA IN DIFFERENT UNIVERSITIES

Female academic population has started to increase since 2009 (from 39.6%) and was 48.2% (2019). Both the number as well as percentage have increased from 1,508 (2009) to 2,883 (2019). Among the universities, highest percentage of female academics are in open University (57.8%) followed with Colombo (57.3%) and Uwa Wllasa (56.9%) and the least percentage is in University of Visual and Performing Arts (27.0%). Less percentage of female academia was also observed in South Eastern University of Sri Lanka (31.7%; Table 7) and University of Peradeniya (31.1%). The changes in the percentage of female academic was not significant from

**Table 7: Percentage of female academia among the total Permanent Academics in different State Universities.**

Universities	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Colombo	45.9	47.0	44.4	51.5	53.5	51.4	55.2	54.0	54.7	55.9	57.3
Peradeniya	32.8	33.9	35.0	35.4	37.9	39.4	41.2	40.8	42.8	43.8	31.1
SJP	45.8	48.5	49.0	51.3	47.2	50.5	50.3	50.3	51.3	51.6	51.8
Kelaniya	40.0	42.1	44.4	44.3	47.1	48.8	48.7	47.5	49.4	49.8	51.7
Moratuwa	27.5	32.1	31.0	32.1	37.0	36.2	36.2	37.0	38.1	38.7	38.8
Jaffna	40.7	41.3	41.3	43.7	46.0	41.7	42.2	41.1	44.7	47.4	46.8
Ruhuna	34.4	38.4	36.7	39.0	43.3	44.5	43.7	44.4	45.1	46.0	47.1
Eastern	33.8	34.2	35.8	37.6	36.6	38.0	37.5	40.4	40.4	41.8	43.1
South Eastern	22.2	23.5	23.8	23.1	25.0	24.2	24.6	24.6	27.2	27.3	31.7
Rajarata	28.7	28.7	31.7	31.1	30.9	35.2	31.5	33.5	38.3	35.4	37.9
Sabragamuwa	31.6	32.9	38.7	38.8	39.1	38.1	39.4	39.9	43.6	45.6	46.3
Wayamba	46.5	46.0	46.0	48.4	55.3	51.3	53.6	53.8	55.6	55.6	55.7
UwaWillasa	27.4	48.4	46.8	54.8	55.9	63.2	58.2	55.6	59.0	58.0	56.9
VAPA	37.4	26.7	26.9	28.4	26.5	25.2	46.3	23.9	23.6	26.8	27.0
Open University	51.0	50.2	52.0	52.5	52.2	50.3	52.4	52.8	53.3	56.9	57.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>39.6</b>	<b>39.9</b>	<b>40.4</b>	<b>42.1</b>	<b>44.3</b>	<b>43.9</b>	<b>44.0</b>	<b>45.0</b>	<b>46.4</b>	<b>47.2</b>	<b>48.2</b>
<b>Academics</b>											

VAPA- Visual and Performing Arts



2015 to 2019 while the actual number increased (i.e 728; from 2,155 nos. to 2,883 nos.). Universities which are situated in the extreme South and the North of the country respectively have 47.1% (Ruhuna University of Sri Lanka) and 46.8% (University of Jaffna) of female academia. Hence the female academia percentage cannot be correlated to the year of establishment of the Universities or the geographical areas of the Universities where they are situated.

Overall women academia in Sri Lankan Universities has increased from 39.6% to 48.2% during the last ten years. The changes in the percentage of female academia classified based on the academic positions in Sri Lankan Public Universities are given in Table 8. There has been an increase in the female academia at Professorial, Senior Lecturer and Lecturer levels. The annual statistics for the majority of the universities within these 10 years reflects fluctuations in the levels of female representation (Table 7). The actual numbers of the Associate Professors in the Sri Lankan Universities are very small, as this position is considered as the stepping stone to become a Professor. Hence the number of Associate Professor has always been fluctuating. The level of Lecturer is the only employment category where female representation is slightly higher than the males where there is the gender distribution changing from 45.9% in 2009 to 59.3% in 2019; i.e. the increase is by 13.4%. However, this more equal representation is far from being realised in the next level of academic seniority. Thus at Senior Lecturer level (from 35.7 to 45.5%; i.e. 9.8%), significant gender disparities remain, with the female representation at only 23.2% of the total

Professors 2009, this being an insignificant increase to 33.0% in 2019(i.e. 9.8%). Nonetheless, the numbers of female academic simplicated at this level is marginal with in the overall distribution of academic positions.

It has also been reported that during 2001, only 20% Professors, 22.7% Associate Professors, 27.7% Senior Lecturer Grade I, 34.2% Senior Lecturer Grade II and 39.1% Lectures were females [18].

**Table 8:** Different Academic Positions Occupied by female in Sri Lankan State Universities.

Year	Professor (%)	Associate Professors (%)	Senior Lecturers (%)	Lecturers (%)
2009	23.2	34.7	35.7	45.9
2010	24.1	29.5	37.1	49.2
2011	24.2	32.9	37.9	49.6
2012	26.3	41.2	34.4	52.1
2013	26.6	37.9	40.2	54.2
2014	27.8	39.3	41.1	55.0
2015	29.5	36.2	41.6	54.3
2016	29.9	54.0	41.6	56.0
2017	30.6	33.3	43.3	58.1
2018	32.0	31.8	44.5	58.2
2019	33.0	35.0	45.5	59.3

### 3.3 FEMALE ACADEMICS BASED ON DISCIPLINES

The female academics were progressively increasing in all the disciplines (Table 9). Here the Professor and Associate Professor carders were combined together for easy reference as most of the



Associate Professors are promoted to Senior Professors within few years. This suggests that there is no clear trend in the proportion of female to male academics in the different fields. Although there have been some small increases in the percentages of female academics in different fields, these have not been steady or significant across all areas. For example, while the proportions of females in Engineering, Agriculture and Science increased, they fluctuated (Table 9).

In Sri Lanka there has been an increase in the female academics in the Arts stream from 2015 to 2019 where the increase in the Lecturer position was about 8.4%. Management discipline has the female dominance at the Lecturer level (63% in 2019) and the percentage of female academics increased by 5.9%, at the Senior Lecturer level (from 2015 to 2019).

In the field of Engineering the percentage of female academics had been fluctuating and observed to be more male dominant. Initially the Technology stream had male dominance and has started to become female dominant discipline and this could be due to the recruitment of female Agriculture graduates to the Bio System Technology discipline of the Technology Stream.

The percentage of female academics was the highest in the Allied Health Sciences Discipline followed with Medicine and Agriculture. The reason for the highest percentage of academics in Allied Health Sciences could be due to the establishment of new Faculties at different universities, namely Ruhuna, Sri

Jayewardenepura and Jaffna, and the nursing discipline has more female academics [25-29].

Even though the female academics were highest in the Siddha Medicine, it cannot be considered as significant percentages because the number of staff in this discipline is very small and fluctuated even with an increase where one male Lecturer / Senior Lecturer is appointed. There are only two Units of Siddha Medicine each attached to University of Jaffna and the Trincomalee Campus of the Eastern University of Sri Lanka.

Here the percentage of female academics in Dental, Veterinary Science and Architecture were not considered for discussion as only one faculty for each of the disciplines are available. However Architecture has slowly started to increase but fluctuate in the percentage of female academics.

There has been a steady increase in the female academics in Medicine and has the highest percentage of Professors (52.9%).

The Science stream also has started to be dominated by the female academics, where the Senior Lecturer and Lecturer positions are occupied by 44.6 and 56.6% females (2019) respectively. This discipline has second highest percentage of Professors (41.5%) followed with Agriculture (38.5%) and Management (35.2%) (2019).



Table 9: Percentage of female academics based on disciplines in different State Universities of Sri Lanka.

Faculty	Professor and Associate Professor (%)										Senior Lecturer (%)										Lecturer (%)																																																																																																																																																															
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019																																																																																																																																																											
Arts	22.1	18.6	19.9	23.6	27.0	37.1	39.7	44.9	46.7	45.3	47.6	48.5	50.0	52.9	56.0	28.6	17.1	27.3	26.0	35.2	43.0	45.4	44.2	48.6	48.9	61.1	60.4	63.6	49.9	64.0	11.3	12.3	8.8	7.5	9.0	27.7	20.0	23.4	34.5	28.4	41.6	43.3	64.3	39.6	40.3	0.0	0.0	25.0	25.0	42.9	46.3	47.6	48.9	52.0	47.9	61.3	66.7	70.4	70.4	60.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	43.6	40.3	39.7	32.4	65.1	53.2	47.9	59.0	56.5	59.4.	44.2	41.5	40.4	43.3	52.5	51.2	40.6	50.7	52.4	52.8	62.0	60.4	61.8	64.2	62.9	50.0	47.1	47.6	16.7	39.1	46.7	43.5	50.0	50.0	68.8	71.4	75.0	61.5	70.4	81.3	80.0	33.3	20.0	16.7	16.7	44.4	42.3	42.9	23.3	53.3	75.0	50.0	66.7	62.5	50.0	18.9	30.3	32.4	34.6	38.5	43.0	44.1	47.0	49.3	48.9	55.9	65.8	65.3	67.5	64.0	0.0	0.0	0	50.0	50.0	66.7	60.9	65.0	65.0	67.2	84.2	84.6	85.1	87.7	84.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	80.0	80.0	80.0	69.2	75.0	57.1	62.5	66.7	84.6	81.8	37.1	41.1	40.1	41.5	42.7	43.1	50.7	44.4	46.7	44.6	56.7	53.8	58.7	56.7	56.6

The Law, Education and Visual and Performing Arts have been considered along with Arts and Humanities.

In Allied Health Sciences, there have been two Professors and one is a female, and when the percentage is presented it has been shown as 50%.

#### 4. WOMEN IN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

Table 10 gives the information on women leaders in 2006[8].

**Table 10:** Women leaders in some of the South Asian Countries during 2006 [8].

	Bangladesh	India	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
<b>Executive Heads</b>	0 (0)	9.3 (10)	5 (1)	7.7 (1)
<b>Deans</b>	5.6 (4)	19.7 (94)	8.5 (4)	8.9 (4)
<b>Professors</b>	12.3 (218)	18.5 (1190)	19.7 (116)	24.5 (46)
<b>Heads and Directors</b>	10.8 (35)	23.4 (585)	20.9 (61)	33.2 (86)

As far as the leadership positions are considered, in Afghanistan only 0.04% of the Vice Chancellors were females[8]. During 2013 only 0.1% of Vice-Chancellors are women of the 37 public universities in Bangladesh only 2 female Vice Chancellors were appointed in 2014 [7].

In India 35% of the academics are women and even fewer are represented in leadership positions. Increase in the number of women student numbers not been matched by growth in the



number of women in Senior leadership involves universities [6, 30]. In India 6.67% Indian Institutes (54/810), Central Universities 9.8% (5/51), State Universities 8.6% (28/325) and Deemed Universities 7.1% (19/126) have female leaders [31].

In Indian 17% of the Vice Chancellor, Pro Vice Chancellor and Director Positions across university are held by women [32]. India lags behind the developed countries. Central Universities are headed by higher females (9.8%, 5/15) than state universities (8.6%, 28/325), Deemed Universities (7.14%, 9/126) and Indian Institutes (6.67%) [31]. During 2016-2017, only 17% of VC, pro VC and director positions in India are held by women [32]. As leaders, women disseminated great passion for and commitment to their craft, were self-aware of their position in relation to being women, and demonstrated the self-confidence to stand at in a male dominance society [30].

In Nepal there are no female Vice Chancellors [7, 33] and in Pakistan 0.04% Women Vice Chancellors [8].

In the Maldives, leadership positions in Higher Educational sector are male dominant and gender imbalance [34]. The real number or the percentage of academics in the administrative position are not available [34].

## **5.ACADEMIC LEADERS IN SRILANKA**

### **5.1 LEADERSHIP AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL**

#### **5.1.1 Female Vice Chancellors**

There are 16 State Universities and among them the University of Colombo had the first Vice Chancellor and consequently it had two more and a Competent Authority and set an example for women leaders. The details are given in Table 11. Following which Open University of Sri Lanka and University of Jaffna had female Vice Chancellors. The female Vice Chancellor of the Open University of Sri Lanka also functioned as the Competent Authority at Eastern University of Sri Lanka and South Eastern University of Sri Lanka. Currently there are two permanent and one female Acting Vice Chancellors in the University system. The newly established University has the Acting Vice Chancellor. During 2002, 9.7% Vice Chancellors were females [18].

The governing body of the University is the Council (Table 12). The female representation in the council does not exceed 17.2% (Ruhuna) while there is no female representation in Peradeniya, Sri Jayewardenepura and Rajarata. Among the UGC appointed Council Members Moratuwa (27.3%), has the highest female members followed with Colombo (21.4%) UvavWellasa (12.5%) and the newly established GampahaWickramarachi University of Indigenous Medicine (12.5%). These observations show that there are no significant female representation in the governing body of the Universities in Sri Lanka.



**Table 11:** Female Vice Chancellors in the State Universities of Sri Lanka.

University	Name	Period
Colombo	Prof. Savithiri WE Gunsekera	1999-2002
Open University	Prof. Uma Kumarswamy	2000-2006
Colombo	Prof. Kshanika Hiriburegama	2007-2013
Jaffna	Prof. Vasanthy Arasaratnam	2011-2017
Colombo	Prof. Chandrika W. Wijeyaratne	2019- to date
Keleniya	Prof. Nilanthi de Silva	2020- to date
Gampaha Wikramarachi University of Indigenous Medicine*	Prof. Janitha A. Liyanagae	2021- to date

\*Acting Vice Chancellor

### 5.1.2 Female Deans

Female Deans are highest in Open University of Sri Lanka (33.3%) followed with University of Jaffna (33.3%). Moratuwa, South Eastern, Rajarata and Uva-Wellasa do not have female Deans. It is also noteworthy that Uva-Wellasa University has the third highest percentage of female academics (56.9%) but does not have a single Dean (Table 13). During 2002, 14.3% Deans were females [18].

The Faculties of Allied Health Sciences and Technology have 50% females as Deans (Table 14). Medical, Science and Agriculture Faculties respectively have 27.3, 18.8 and 16.7% female Deans. The Faculties of Engineering in the country do not have female Deans. Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences have only 7.1% female Deans. The newly established Faculties i.e. Allied Health Sciences and Technology have more percentage of Deans than those traditional Faculties.

### 5.1.3 Female Heads of the Departments

Percentage of the Female Heads was highest in the Open University (56.7%) followed with Uva Wellasa (45.5%), Ruhuna (43.6%) and Sri Jayewardenepura (43.5%) (Table 13). When the Heads are considered discipline wise, Allied Health Sciences has the highest percentage of female Heads (64.0%) followed with Medicine (42.9%), Agriculture (39.6%) and Science (38.8%) (Table 14).

**Table 12:** Percentage of female representation in the Councils as well as the UGC appointed Council members of the Universities during 2020/2021..

University	Total Members (%)	UGC Appointed Members (%)
Colombo	13.8*	21.4
Peradeniya	0.0	0.0
Sri Jayewardenepura	18.1	0.0
Keleniya	4.3*	0.0
Moratuwa	14.3	27.3
Jaffna	15.2	5.9
Ruhuna	17.2	20.0
Eastern	8.0	7.7
Sabragamuwa	13.0	8.3
Rajarata	0.0	0.0
South Eastern	5.3	10.0
Wayamba	15.8	20.0
Uva-Wellasa	6.7	12.5
Visual and Performing Arts	4.0	8.3
Open University	13.0	8.3
Wickramarachi University of Indigenous Medicine	Not Yet in Place	12.5

\*Including the Vice Chancellor



During 2002, 9.7% Vice Chancellors, 14.3% Deans and 24.6% Heads of the Departments are females [18]. University of Colombo and Open University have shed some light on possible scenarios.

**Table 13:** Percentage of female Deans and Heads in different Universities during 2021.

University	Deans	Heads
Colombo	11.1	39.3
Peradeniya	0.0	36.3
Sri Jayewardenepura	25.0	43.5
Keleniya	14.3	40.0
Moratuwa	0.0	25.0
Jaffna	33.3	33.3
Ruhuna	20.0	43.6
Eastern	16.7	22.2
South Eastern	0.0	17.4
Rajarata	0.0	27.0
Sabragamuwa	25.0	29.2
Wayamba	20.0	31.6
Uva-Wellasa	0.0	45.5
Visual and Performing Arts	NA	NA
Open University	33.3	56.7
Wickramarachi University of Indigenous Medicine	Not Yet in Place	Not Yet in Place

**Table 14:** Deans and Heads based on discipline during 2021.

Discipline	Heads	Deans
Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences	35.4	7.1
Management	32.3	6.3
Engineering	25.6	0.0
Medicine	42.9	27.3
Allied Health Sciences	64.0	50.0
Agriculture	39.6	16.7
Science	38.8	18.8
Technology	23.7	50.0

## 5.2 LEADERSHIP AT UGC LEVEL

### 5.2.1 Chairperson and Vice Chairpersons of UGC

Since the inception of the University Grants Commission from 1978, one female was appointed as the Chairperson (2013-2015) after the resignation of the Chairman at that period and functional for two years, (Table 15). Further one Vice Chairperson (1993 - 1994) was appointed on 26.03.1993 due to the resignation of the Vice Chairman at that time. It is also important to note that these two females have not occupied the office for the full-term of five years.

In 2019 a new Vice Chairperson has been appointed to the UGC.

**Table 15:** Female Chairperson/ Vice Chairperson UGC.

Period	Name	Position
1978-1983	Nil	-
1983-1989	Nil	-
1989-1993	Nil	-
1993-1994	Prof. N. B. Ratnasiri*	Vice Chairperson
1994-1999	Nil	-
1999-2001	Nil	-
2001-2006	Nil	-
2006-2011	Nil	-
2011-2013	Nil	-
2013-2015	Prof. Kshanika Hiriburegama**	Chairperson
2015-2019	Nil	-
2019- to date	Prof. Janitha A. Liyanagae	Vice Chairperson

\*26.10.1993; \*\*From 23.01.2013



### 5.2.2 Female Commission members

The female representation in the Commission as Member is very much limited. To date apart from the said Chairperson and a Vice Chairperson during the past, only three female members have been appointed to the Commission; during 1999-2001, 2006-2011 and 2013-2015 in addition to the current female member.

**Table 16:** Female members of the UGC

Period	Female Members (%)
1978-1983	0.0
1983-1989	0.0
1989-1993	0.0
1993-1994	14.3*
1994-1999	0.0
1999-2001	14.3
2001-2006	0.0
2006-2011	14.3
2011-2013	14.3**
2013-2015	28.6@
2015-2019	14.3@
2019- to date	28.6@

\*Vice Chairperson; \*\*Chairperson; @ Treasury Representative; @@ Vice Chairperson and an appointed member

### 5.2.3 Female representation in Standing Committees

There are 22 Standing Committees at the UGC level to enhance the study programs and other activities in the Universities. To the Standing committees, which are mainly based on the Study Faculties, the Deans of the respective Faculties are invited as the Ex-Officio. Among the 22 Standing Committees, 10 mainly

align with the different Faculties. This practice enables the Deans and other administrators to meet and discuss the problems, new developments and future planning as well as to eliminate most of the issues and problems faced by the Universities. Even though the Agriculture, Medicine and Science have substantial number of female academics, the respective standing committees respectively have 21.5, 26.7 and 15% female members. The areas like Engineering and Technology have 10% and 11.8% female representation.

**Table 17:** Total and percentage of female Members of the standing committees during 2020/2021.

	Total Members	Female Member (%)
Humanities and Social Sciences	25	12.0
Legal Studies	11	45.5
Fine Arts	17	23.5
Education	12	33.3
Management Studies	18	5.6
Engineering and Architecture	20	10.0
Medical and Dental Sciences	15	26.7
Medical and Dental	17	17.7
Allied Health Science	11	54.5
Agriculture, Veterinary medicine and Animal Science	20	15.0
Indigenous Medicine	13	38.5
Development on the information technology infrastructure and online education	10	27.8
Libraries and Information Science	18	55.6
Computing	26	7.7
Teaching English as the Second Language	21	33.3



Postgraduate studies and research	21	33.3
External Degrees	25	16.0
Carrier Guidance	19	31.6
Quality Assurance Council	17	25.5
University Business Linkage	26	30.8
Gender Equity and Equality	17	18.5
	28	71.4

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## 6. DISCUSSIONS

### 6.1 ACADEMIA

The establishment of Higher Educational Institutions and Universities are increasing in the South Asian Countries and similar changes are taking place in relation to the female academia [35].

Male academics reached more senior levels than their female counter parts[41]. Academic values accounts the output, namely published research in high ranking journals, having a strong network of mutual support from academics both within the University and across different institutions [36]. These are often observed in male academia. Instead female academics take on the load of non-permanent tasks, often described as house-keeping roles, organising social events to support teams, attending departmental meetings, sitting in various committees, engaging in external activities like organising events, arranging conferences, etc. All which demonstrates great collegiality but do not build the necessary credits when candidates are in front of promotion committees [36].

In India females are frequently treated as subordinate to males and receive fewer education opportunities than their male counterparts [37]. In northern India, the female academia comprised only 18.6% of 400 faculty members during 2000, with no female Vice Chancellors [38].

## **6.2 LEADERSHIP**

The absence of female representation in higher education leadership in developing countries is obvious [6]. There are handful female leaders in higher education in South Asia. In general highly under representing senior management positions [12]. Administrative leadership, both within and outside educational context remains a male – centred field [33, 40]. Female leaders are often evaluated based on male leadership characteristics in Indian sector[8]. Women at universities and higher education commission across the region have received position of prominence[6, 30].

Many academics in the South Asian Region are reluctant to aim for senior leadership and perceive it as an unattractive career option. There are complex multi-dimensional barriers to women taking up leadership roles. This is due to the range from social, cultural and economic barriers in each country, the organisational culture in universities, discrimination in recreational and selection and unequal power relations [33]. There are also cultural beliefs among some that women should not have seniority or authority over men.



Gender imbalanced working environment where men tend to be jealous of successful women and do not want them undertake leadership [39]. Many women in South Asia had to prove their worth to unsympathetic and often –hostile critics. The vulnerability of leaders to allegations of bribery and corruptions were also mentioned. The negative visibility was thought to deter many women from setting high-profile roles[8].

Despite the potential of the women to be effective and transformative leaders, their administrative talent and leadership capabilities remains underutilised. In administrative leadership compositions women may have to demonstrate considerable drive, ability and tenacity if they are to challenge barriers, develop the professional skills and achieve success [30].

There are evidences that when women do aspire for leadership but frequently they are rejected from the most senior positions. Further many women academics are reluctant to aim for senior leadership and perceive it as an unattractive career option. Women are less likely to occupy leadership positions when open selection rather than nomination is the recruitment procedure (47.4% men,26.2%women)[38]. Chanana (2012) high lighted the lower number of female in higher education management [42].

Like in other sectors of employment, women working in academic sector face more challenging environment in comparison to men in terms of carrier progression and in attending and maintaining leadership. Women are not included in decision making process as they are under-represented in

committees as few held positions in such bodies. Female academics are also likely to be kept out of information loops in universities [39]. Even though the women are numerically more, the participation in decision making is less visible. The organizational culture in universities is such that women are not adequately represented in elected posts (e.g. Dean) or appointed posts (Heads of Departments, Directors of Centres or Institutes) or on Boards and Councils. Even when equal opportunities are available for women, due to various reasons, females do not seem to avail themselves of these opportunities [43]. Women tend to remain quite in most of the cases to avoid acrimony with the male colleagues [39].

### **6.3 GENDER BASED PROBLEMS**

Several barriers hinder the academic progress, including cultural barriers, work-family responsibilities, and distance from home and travel to work place, lack of facilities at work place and lack of leadership opportunities [34, 39]. Maldivian Women academics in Higher Educational system often face major constrains of culture, tradition and other more subtle barriers to their work [36].

Males hold higher positions than the females and reason has been considered as due to the maternal and domestic duties. Later it has been shown that child care could not explain the personal reason and that the real barriers emerge from institutional and individual biases, attitudes of line managers, as well as the self-limiting believes of women [41]. Women as higher education administrators have issues with negotiating personal and



professional; lives. [41]. Mainly to balance between the work and life, women are expected to deviate from domestic responsibilities as well as at work place [44]. Some women also dealt with challenges through sheer determination and multi-tasking at workplace and at home [15]. Most of the women joined their profession before the marriages due to the support of their parents or siblings, despite resistance from their extended families[44]. The female academics had career interruptions when they get married due to the career demands of their husbands[38].

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The challenges women face likely will persist until society becomes more receptive towards gender equality, affords women equal opportunities and models success for girls and young women to follow [30].

From the data presented it can be observed that the female student enrolment to the Sri Lankan State Universities is increasing and the female academic recruitment to the different disciplines are also increasing, except in Engineering discipline. The Scheme of recruitment and promotional Schemes for the Sri Lankan State Universities are similar and transparent. The female academia does not reach the top of the academic ladder similar to the male academics due to problems in balancing between the academic responsibilities and house-hold activities. Male dominance in the administrative activities is obvious in Sri Lanka. The female academics those who have taken over the leadership positions in have faced tremendous harassments. Developing research

activities, research collaboration and research output and self-confidence of the female academics can lead to furthering their carrier improvement and reaching academic leadership. This has to be considered and taken serious by the female academia than being dependent.

Educate your women first and leave them to themselves, they will tell you what reforms are necessary' - Swamy Vivekananda.

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She has been involved with several research projects and has brought more than 150 million Sri Lankan Rupees to the department. She was the Project Leader of International Program in Chemical Sciences, Sweden since 1997 to 2002 and was the Project Leader of the Sida / SAREC, Sweden since 2000 to 2010. She also has obtained several thousands of Dollars from IFS, Sweden and TWAS as research funds. Further she has been the recipient of several NRC and NSF grants.

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