

**DRESSING THE FEMALE BODY:
[DE]CONSTRUCTING WOMEN'S SAREE
FROM A GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

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Gender-specific clothing expectations in professional settings are a common phenomenon in Sri Lanka which came into the discussion with the changes in the attire of female judges, attorneys at law, and female officers in public service. Compared with these occupations, the suggestion of changing the dress code for female teachers in government schools was confronted with numerous debates. The study's objectives were to understand social expectations of women's professional attire, the impact of wearing sarees on the gender identity of women in professional settings, and society's reaction to the teachers who resisted wearing sarees. This study highlights the importance of understanding the gendered culture of a workplace and the challenges that women face regarding their clothing choices by investigating the complex interplay between the saree, gender, and identity, with a focus on how the saree's construction and interpretation contribute to the [de]construction of gender roles and representations in the workplace. For this, qualitative study data collecting techniques were used, such as semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, visual and textual data sources, secondary data, and social media analysis. The study population was female state school teachers, and the sample size of 15 was determined through the purposive sampling method, where the participants would be selected based on their gender, occupation, and ethnicity. In addition, snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which participants were selected from other participants' social media networks. The data was analyzed through content analysis. The findings revealed the disadvantages of wearing a saree, such as the cost of the attire, material weight, wearer comfort, the tendency for accidents to occur while using transportation, and the physical and psychological comfort related to employee performance and productivity. Cultural expectations of gendered attire significantly influence the embodiment and body image of female teachers supported by the traditional dress code. In conclusion, Women in Sri Lanka face objectification and sexualization based on their physical appearance in workplaces like schools, and it interplays between culture, gender, attire, and the self in Sri Lankan society affected through forms of "symbolic violence" wherein there is an element of complicity on the part of the embodied subject.

Keywords: Gender, identity, performativity, culture