

## LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN: A STUDY

# Women into Leadership



### Abstract:-

Over the last many decades, the core questions by individual women, civil society organisations, researchers and scholars, but rarely by decision makers, had to do with women's long journey to acquire and exercise their human rights. Simply put, the questions were, "Which country has combined the components of women's advancement in one national space?" and, "Does such a space exist?" At the end of 2004, there were about 192 member states of the United Nations whose contributions helped construct a statistical database on different aspects of women's lives. Information to fill the many gaps are still being compiled. 1 Many of the disaggregated data on women and men are accessible and may be used for examining trends on women's work, life and political participation. Is it possible to select a country where women have achieved the capacity to transform patriarchal structures and institution in their favour? Is there a woman's country?

### Keywords:

Leadership of Women , civil society organisations , human rights.

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## Human Rights



## INTRODUCTION

Until the beginning of the 20th century, democracy was never defined from women's perspectives nor has it always included minorities. Women, a majority of the population, were always among those excluded from participation in democratic institutions and procedures. Through that harrowing century, individuals, sustain and exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The right to vote is the essence of democracy and institutions of democracy can only be constructed with the full participation of all citizens. Women were considered minors in the legislation of many countries, denied the right to vote, and denied the right to own or control land and other assets in their own right. In some countries; for example Canada, women did not become legal persons until 1929. New Zealand and Finland took the lead in the struggle for the vote and preceded the United Kingdom and several other countries on legalising a range of equality of rights between women and men. The Napoleonic code was applicable to several European countries for over a century that barred the way to legal equality between men and women until parliaments altered or modified their existing legislation. During decolonization in the 1950, the newly independent and soon to be independent nations of Asia and Africa made equality of rights between women and men an integral part of their constitutions and later national laws. As late as the 1970s, fundamental right to vote to women beginning with the Cantons of Geneva and Vaud and late extended to the rest of the cantons in Switzerland.

Women were not new to top political leadership in the 21st century, but their participation before that had mainly been confined to monarchy, an institution that often discriminated against crowning women as queens, but due to lack of male heir introduced special laws or regulations to change the tradition. So, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom have crowned queens who have exercised real power. This power to rule or govern became more and more limited as time went on and the enlightenment of ideas of the twentieth century accommodated the institutions of monarchy into constitutional heads of state. In history, there are various examples of women queens and heads of government. There have been instances where led armies and fought battles as in India such as Razia Sultana who ruled as a queen in the 12th century. Women took over the reigns of power also when no male descendent in the royal line was available and became rulers. There is currently a controversy in Japan on this issue as they have not yet enacted any legislation to crown a queen .. in 2006, there were Several countries in Europe where queens Queens acted as heads of state, including the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

The Human Development Report 2001.2 analysed women's political participation in five categories for research and compiling data. 2

The year women received the right to vote and to stand for election;  
the year the first woman was elected or appointed to parliament;  
women in government managerial level as percentage of total; and

The number of seats held in Parliament by women as percentage of total in the lower house or the upper house.

In Canada, women acquired the right to vote in 1917 and the right to stand for election in 1920. In 1950 immigrants and indigenous women acquired the right to vote. Their right to stand for election was legislated in 1960. As recently as 1999, a quarter of the members of the cabinet were women. In Parliament at that time, women held 20 and 32 per cent of the seats in the Commons and Senate respectively. In the middle human development category, in Mexico, women acquired the right to vote in 1947 and to stand for election in 1953. The first woman elected or appointed to the national legislature in that country was in 1952. In 1999, 11 per cent of those serving at the ministerial level in the government in Mexico were women. In the lower and upper houses of parliament, women held 16 and 15 per cent seats of the total. In Pakistan, a low human development country, the right to vote and to stand for election came with independence in 1947, simultaneously with the birth of the country. It was in 1973 for the first time that women were elected to Parliament in that country, after the national parliament had elected to a women Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto.

The analysis in the paragraphs that focuses that on women who were elected as Presidents and Prime Ministers. In 1962, when the first woman Prime Ministe, Srimavo Bhandarnaika of Sri Lanka, was elected, it was a historical breakthrough on gender equality at the political level. Thereafter, over 50 countries have elected women as Presidents or Prime Ministers. Golda Mier was elected Prime Minister of Israel in 1963, barely a year after Bhadarnaika. The distribution of woman as heads of state by region (Annex 3) showed that in rich, developed countries fewer women had the opportunity of arriving at the to political levels. In those countries, women were rarely nominated as candidates by political parties or financially supported to fight elections or keep their parliamentary seats, Canada earlier and France currently are examples of changing rules at political levels. For the about half a century, women's movements worldwide struggled to acquire more political power to help women get elected and climb to the top positions. At the beginning, the succeeded mainly at the lower levels of representation in local, municipal, or district levels but slowly more particularly in the late 1970s and 1980s, women fought political battles to reach the top level

of the government. In some countries, the process began by their holding Ministerial posts such as education and health. Women rarely acquired portfolios of finance or economy. The breakthrough came when women were appointed foreign ministers and became heads of political parties. It became commonplace after 2000 that women could hold senior government or judicial positions or any high level positions. Similarly, leadership positions in trade unions for women was slow in becoming a reality. Similarly management positions in the corporate sector or multinationals have just started selecting women to break the glass ceiling.

What transformed this frozen system that had excluded women from top government posts? Some of the factors were the rapid increases in the volume and pattern of world trade, changes in international investments, and the introduction of national development models, specially the global elements of the dominant neo-liberal project have transformed the international economy and the division of labour among regions and countries. Under the vast and expansive system of globalization, the position of women as wage-earners has fundamentally changed their presence in the labour market. Earlier in 1990s and beginning of 2000, women exercised bargaining power at the economic level until they crowded into the low-paying and precarious jobs in the service sector and the informal sector.

#### **GENDER AND THE CORPORATE SECTOR**

From 1960 to 1980, women were slowly recognized in a range of economic activities, achieving economic status step by step and moving up the scale in the commercial and corporate sector and senior trade union position like the ILO. Many countries were under a legal obligation to transform existing to make the marketplace more receptive to the entry of women in different occupation. <sup>3</sup> But their work performance was not adequately rewarded in most countries, as statistics available at the end of 2000. <sup>4</sup> testified. Women's entry transformed and influenced economic structures and institutions slowly. The labour market and the workplace continued to discriminate against them from recruitment to retirement. In between they had to struggle for promotion, responsibility and entitlement to retirement benefits. Despite a slow trend towards reduction of discrimination in some occupations, international and national standards on gender equality were not honoured by employers or trade unions or the private sector. Just as the overall labour market remained sharply segregated by sex, women executives were concentrated into mostly staff and administrative support jobs that offered little opportunity for climbing the ladder. Looking back at the period, it is interesting to reflect on a 1986 Wall Street Journal survey which found that "[t]he highest ranking women in most industries are in non-operating areas such as personnel public relations, or, occasionally, finance specialties that seldom lead to the most powerful top-management posts." One of the reasons women were locked out of jobs in the business of companies, was that they did not belong to the 'old boys clubs'. But even when women did get a job which placed her in the position of higher promotions, it was less likely to be in a crucial part of the business or the type or job that can mark them as leaders. In the public sector enterprises, there was relatively less discrimination except at top levels where political appointments were involved.

Rules and regulations of public service employment were applied on the basis of gender equality except in cases where discretionary power was used by the management in job evaluation and job grading. When women began to use their bargaining power for the first time in industrial relations, it led to an enhancement of their political status. The impact of these changes was a rapid increase in the number of women seeking political power and participation in power sharing to improve their economic and social status. This pace was particularly rapid in countries where the political process was open to receiving women candidates, but in others there were obstacles making it harder to break the glass ceiling. <sup>5</sup>

The collective will of women was reflected in their combined strength at election time when women's voting power could not be ignored by the political parties and power structures. The political slogan that Women are everywhere reflected an emerging reality even in countries where social relations between women and men were traditional, women were invisible and public institutions were unaccustomed to women in power using a different management style. This new economic landscape changed government positions between 1960 and 2005. The number of women elected as heads of state as Presidents and Prime Ministers in that period rapidly rose to over 65, with 30 in Europe, 16 in Asia, 15 in the America and 6 in Africa.

#### **WOMEN AS DECISION-MAKERS**

Political participation in decision-making had been a recurring item on national and international agendas since the first UN Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975 – the year that became International Year of Women. During the UN Decade for Women that followed (1986 to 1995), the political scene was occupied by prominent women like Indira Gandhi (India), Margaret Thatcher (United Kingdom), Isabel Peron (Argentina), Elizabeth Domitien (Central African Republic), Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo (Portugal), Gro Harlem Brundtland (Norway). All over the world, women were nominated as candidates by political parties and contested elections, but with limited success- in the United States and some European countries, political parties failed to provide women the social and financial backing that male candidates received. Their numbers remained low in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate. This limited success in the

lead-up ranks to the top job showed that affirmative action was needed to discriminate in favour of women in public policy or legislation. In Canada, the situation was slightly different as women's organisations lobbied very hard during several elections. Political parties were made to recognize that without nominating women no political party could gain their votes. In the mid-1980s, in one election all political parties tried to woo women's vote. But when Kim Campbell took over in 1993 as Prime Minister following the resignation of Brian Mulroney, she served for only four months.

It was mainly the Third UN Conference on women in 1985 (Nairobi) that ushered in a new political era for women. More and more women became the heads of parties or were sought as candidates to increase the parties' support among the electorate. During the decade on the Nairobi- Forwarding Looking Strategies (NFLS) 6. it became clear that political issues, international tensions, cross-border conflicts, and religious and ethnic problems are all women's concerns as equal members of their society. There was an intense debate on women as decision-makers. This document at the time was seen as a bill of rights of women, a symbol of a new concept that "political issues".

Later, the Vienna Declaration and Program of Action<sup>7</sup> emerging from the World Conference on Human Rights 1993 had clearly stated that political power is a precondition to acquiring, demanding and exercising women's human rights. The origin of how the term women's human rights became an accepted terminology has been discussed earlier. For several decades, UN statistics, studies and surveys had clearly shown that global inequalities between women and men began in households and moved upwards to social and ethnic groups within a nation and then beyond to international inequalities. At the Vienna Conference, women's organisations and NGOs succeeded in pointing out that women's human rights should be distinguished from the ensemble of human rights in general. Their rationale was to prevent the confusion as to whether the terms man or human included women. The new definitions of women's human rights confirmed the right to vote in almost all countries (including in 2006 in Kuwait) and be elected at the highest level of political decision-making (as being discussed in 2006 in the US).

In the 1990s, the presence of a woman as a head of state both nationally and internationally emerged as a political and legal norm. The obstacles in many countries began to crumble. The presence of women in conference, political summits and the UN General Assembly was no longer newsworthy was Eleanor Roosevelt in 1950 and the second was Vijaylaxmi Pandit of India in 1951. Subsequently, it became, an accepted procedure by the United Nations to elect other women presidents. The 60th session of the General Assembly in September, 2006 elected a woman President from Bahrain. To increase the number of women in UN conferences, several agencies and organizations inserted and affirmative action phrase in their letters of invitation to governments. It became an unwritten rule that women be included in official delegations and that at UN conferences the number of women should be visible.

#### **POLITICAL PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN**

The UN Conferences of the 1990 brought to the international scene political perspectives of women on subjects such as a sustainable environment (Norway), disarmament (Sweden) and human rights (Libya). The international community and women's organisations got accustomed to the names of women prime ministers and presidents such as Khaleda Zia (Bangladesh), Corazon Aquino (Philippines), Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan), Edith Cresson (France), Kim Campbell (Canada), Tansu Ciller (Turkey), Agatha Uwilingiyimana (Rwanda) and Janet Jagen (Guyana).

Looking at this remarkable historical breakthrough at the political level, a few observations on women's impact on governance need to be underlined. First, the process of electing a woman to the highest government position signified overcoming the gender and class bias in an economy and society. Interestingly, this political phenomenon originated in South Asia a region of the world where many women have not been even to a primary school and where millions of women are the poorest of the poor. The second observation relates to countries that have promote women at the highest level. In those countries, religion and state are clearly constitutionally separate.

Furthermore, countries that have elected women prime ministers and presidents have elected women prime ministers and presidents have different have dominate religions – it seems not to matter whether the population is largely Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist or Hindu. Thirdly, such women were elected in countries with different and democratic institutions, forms of government and constitutional provisions. Some of these women decisively changed the economic and social maps of their countries. Margaret Thatcher, for example, in the U. K. In the early 1980 reduced the power of trade unions and introduced neo-liberal fiscal policies that affected women's employment. The policy and legislation introduced in Norway had an irreversible impact on gender equality and parliamentary procedures in that country.

The rise of women heads of state and government from various regions and diverse cultures provides a rich field for research. What form of political structure was conducive to the election of women head of state historical? After coming to power, did women introduce any policy, legislation or change governmental institutions to enhance the economic and social status of women? Did women in power introduce new economic and employment policies to encourage economic activity of women and increase the rates of participation of women in the labour market? On coming to power did women introduce anti-discrimination legislation linked to international legal norms like the UN Convention on the Elimination of

all Forms of Discrimination against Women? And finally, if women heads of state used their political power in changing values in favour of women, how did they do it? Was their style of management or administration different from their male counterparts?

In the same year as the Millennium Summit, in 2000 the Inter- Parliamentary Union<sup>8</sup> attempted to give partial answers and pointed out that

“The political world, which is intrinsically conflictual, is still broadly unwelcoming to women. They have to fight hard for every inch of ground and their encounter with power politics, the constraints of party discipline and disparaging media coverage is often a bitter experience. They are also engaged in a permanent balancing act seeking to do political work without sacrificing their family life and incurring several criticisms for putting their political ambitions before the welfare of their children.”

Women political in their interviews in 2004-2005 suggested that while gender equality is generally embodied in the law, the obstacles and difficulties faced by them are clear evidence that the principles of parity are not generally accepted. The clash between politics and sexual stereotyping is not yet a thing of the past, as the UN Assistant Secretary General argued, “Anything less than equality for women in this area is a deficit for democracy.”<sup>8</sup>

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