CONCLUSION
The South Asian region has a distinctive identity of its own when compared with other regions of the Asian continent. There are observable similarities as well as differences. This provides scope for fruitful comparative study. In India multiple pluralities rule out social, religious or linguistic homogeneity. Pakistan faces trouble with its various nationalities though they are mostly Muslims. In Sri Lanka the violent conflict between the Sinhalese and Tamils has literally split the island into two parts. Because of the diversity and complexities of different cultures, local history and popular religious cults, each region and country experiences different social, political and economic developments. India since the time of independence has a parliamentary form of government which means, the President is the titular head and the real power is exercised by the council of ministers headed by the Prime Minister. Rest of the three countries namely Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh experimented with both the Presidential and Parliamentary forms of government making the Prime Minister or the President more powerful at different times.

But one thing that is common for all the four countries is their patriarchal societies. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh depict a common picture - the second class status of women. Though the constitutions in all these four countries embody the fundamental rights of women and forbid any discrimination on the basis of sex. Laws and amendments in these countries have sought to enhance the status of women but in practice there exists great inequalities in the status of men and women. The status of women in any society could be assessed on the basis of the degree of access and control the women have over material resources (like food, income, land and other forms of wealth) and social resources (including knowledge, power and prestige) within the family, the community and in society.
The following list of life options related to six major types of human activity are performed in every known society.

(a) **Political Expression** — Do women have rights (to join in community decisions, to vote, hold property, or public office) that are now enjoyed by men? Do important segments of the female population show clear signs of dissatisfaction or a sense of injustice compared with men?

(b) **Work and Mobility** — Are women active in the labour force? Do the jobs they hold enjoy equal rank with those held by men? Is their pay roughly equivalent and do they enjoy the same amount of leisure?

(c) **Education** — Do females have the same access to educational opportunities as boys? Do they reach the same levels of educational attainment?

(d) **Health and Sexual Control** — Are females subject to higher mortality or more serious physical or mental illness than males? Are they prevented from limiting conceptions and birth?

(e) **Family Formation, Duration and Size** — Are women subject to greater control and limitations in their choice of a marriage partner than men? Do they have the same right to divorce? What are the consequences if they are single or widowed?

(j) **Cultural Expression** — Do women make identifiable contributions to religious culture, practical artefacts and inventions?

In case of political participation' data from various countries have shown that while the rate of voting for women is almost equal to that of men, few
women contest for public office at the local, state and national levels. At the higher levels of public office women's participation is nominal, both in the developed industrialized countries and in the less developed countries of the Third World. Now the question is why is women's participation so important? In the first place there can be no true democracy, no true people's participation in governance and development without the equal participation of women and men in all spheres of life and levels of decision making. Second, the goals of development cannot be attained without women's full participation not only in the development process but also in shaping its goals. And third, women's participation is changing the world in which we live by bringing new priorities and perspectives to the political process and the organization of society.

Women's political participation takes many forms: it includes not only voting and holding public office, but also collective action in associations and organisations. In the sphere of electoral politics, women have made great strides forward in obtaining vote and the right to be elected to political office in nearly every country, yet today their number is negligible in different parliaments of the world and hold only a fraction of other leadership positions nationally and internationally.

In this background the main thrust of the study is on the early socialization, recruitment process and political performance of six illustrious women of South Asia — Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Sirimavo Bandarnaike, Chandrika Kumaratunga, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina in the background of the political landscape of their respective country with a comparative touch. Though it is very difficult to compare these six women as Prime Minister/President. Of them — Chandrika and Hasina are only being President and Prime Minister and it
is too early to make an assessment but there are both similarities and differences in their background, emergence and functioning. Their background and emergence naturally point out two important questions — why they are chosen as political heir of their fathers/husbands? and why it is difficult for women to gain entry into political leadership without the support of family connections? To answer the last question the focus is on the societal and cultural constraints that limit women's participation in politics in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. The obstacles women generally face in participating and advancing to higher political and decision making levels are many. To succeed in electoral politics one needs money, time, skill, experience, patronage and contacts. However woman are at a disadvantage with regard to all the above mentioned factors.

The United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) has identified a number of obstacles to women's participation in politics which prevent them from reaching parliamentary and ministerial positions.

(a) the relatively short historical tradition of women's political participation and lack of experience in campaigning, public debate, exposure to media.

(b) prevailing negative attitudes towards women's participation in public life, lack of confidence and support for female candidates and politicians on the part of the electorate including women.

(c) the difficulty women experience in combining a political career with the traditional woman role in the family and often in society.

(d) economic dependency or lack of financial means.

(e) insufficient education in general and political education in particular.
women's reluctance or diffidence to participate in politics particularly at a high level.

Though women participate in politics in lesser number but several studies of women in politics show that women's experiences particularly as mothers and in their traditional roles in the home and family make them more acutely aware than the men of the needs of other people and thus more able and likely to take into account in their work the needs and right of women, children, the elderly, the disabled' minorities and the disadvantaged. Women are also more likely to advocate measures in the areas of health and reproduction, child care, education, welfare and environment and are generally less militant and more supportive of non violence and peace.

Though from the above analysis it is apparent that women leaders are likely to be transformational leaders. But the six women leaders under study are more transactional leaders than transformational leaders because they are operative on the basis of reciprocity and like transformational leaders hardly usher in any major social change in their respective countries.

Regarding the classification of leaders under three broad heads (i) those who are born leaders by their superior skill or ability (ii) those who acquire leadership by consent of their followers or by the use of force (iii) those who have leadership thrust upon them, Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Chandrika Kumaratunga, Sheikh Hasina belong to the second category that is they acquire leadership by consent of their followers. Khaleda Zia and Sirimavo Bandarnaike belong more to the third category of leaders who have leadership thrust upon them without any prior political experience.
Regarding the styles of leadership the six female leaders differ. We can identify Indira Gandhi as a leader who is willing to fight her corner. Sirimavo Bandarnaike, Sheikh Hasina, Chandrika Kumaratunga are leaders who emphasise cohesion and maintenance of the statusquo representing and responding to diverse interests. Benazir Bhutto and Begum Khaleda Zia fall into the category of those leaders who sometimes appear weak and lose support at other times they may be able to construct wide ranging coalition of support. But all the female political leaders fall into the category of those leaders who are terribly afraid of losing their own positions; try to keep themselves in the limelight and thus avoid creating other leaders. Another common factor for all the six women leaders under study is that they belong to the political first families of their respective countries whether they gained power immediately after the death of a parent or spouse is a highly debateable point. Indira Gandhi and Sirimavo Bandarnaike initially gained power without contesting election. But Indira joined politics when her father Nehru was alive. Sirimavo gained power immediately after the death of her husband but for Benazir, Khaleda, Hasina, Chandrika the gap ranges between 9 years to 35 years.

Thus it shows that though these leaders gained initial favour from their family background it is to be remembered that they had to succeed in nurturing the sympathies of the electorate after the unnatural death of their father / spouse if they had to encash any political gain from their personal tragedies. We can safely exclude Indira Gandhi from the list because her father Nehru had a natural death. Here one thing has to be noted that public memory is very short, it will be highly illogical to ascertain that people will sympathise and support Hasina or Chandrika after 21 or 35 years their father's death. But it cannot be denied that when these leaders willingly or underpressure assumed office
they got ready recognition as daughter or wife of the country's ex-Prime Minister or President. For example we take the case of Khaleda and Hasina. Both come from important political families of Bangladesh, one lost her husband in a coup and other her father also in a coup. If we go by the statement that the women political leaders became Prime Minister or President in South Asia only because of public sympathy for unnatural death in the family we will be focusing one side of the story, derogating the personal capabilities of these leaders. In Bangladesh after the ouster of H.M. Ershad when the country was prepared for parliamentary elections in 1991, the main contenders for power were two Begums, a widow holding the mantle of BNP, another orphan holding the mantle of Awami League. The field was open for both of them. But the election results showed BNP on its way to form the government. Now the point which arises from here is that some personal qualities of Begum Zia as party manager, as key campaigner must have paved the way for BNP's electoral victory. Thus it has to be admitted that these female leaders gained prominence not only for their connection with politically active father or spouse but also because of their own personal qualities which are often underestimated. The women political leaders of South Asia under study took the charge of the political parties when the latter were in bad shape or in disorganised form. Organising a disorganised party and leading the party to victory is no mean achievement. Each of the six women leaders did the same thing which should speak of their ability as leaders on their own right. All of these women are remarkable not only for them achievement in becoming Prime Minister/President but also for their tenacity in remaining in power.

Discussing the importance of political involvement of family members as a contributing factor in one's leadership position, C.Wright Mills observed that
"It is never a disadvantage for a man bent on entering politics to have a father who is the governor of the state. Even an uncle or a father-in-law in such position can be very helpful." In another context Mills observed about U.S. political leaders that there have been statesmen of high personal ability, there have also been men who arrived politically only because of the abilities of their relatives. But Indira, Benazir, Chandrika, Sirimavo, Khaleda or Hasina were not that much politically ambitious to acquire power by hook or cook. But once they got the opportunity they grabbed that.

Thus the backing of politically active families may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the rise of the female political heads in the South Asian scenario. The backing of politically active families is not always seen as a blessing. For example in case of Benazir, the execution of Bhutto is a watershed in Pakistan's history. In the eyes of his supporters he was a nationalist but in the eyes of his opponents he stood for nothing except evil, thereby had to be removed. The cleavage between Bhutto lovers and haters persisted. Thus lineage is not always very advantageous for the women leaders who had to prove their own worth. As a leader they need to have their power of analysis, decision making, far sightedness which all of them have in varying degree because they rule on their own without becoming mere ciphers, they tried to assert themselves which at times may usher in their downfall but they did not (always or at all) get any advice from then father/spouse who were earlier Prime Minister or President. All their goodness or mistakes are of their own.

A very important point revolves round the marital status of women in South Asia. In South Asia when a woman is married she generally looses all her independence, she leads a life according to the likings of her husband and
in-laws. A woman is seen as a cook, a bed partner and a child producing machine. Thus under such circumstances the rise of six female leaders is quite amazing though their socio-economic structure differed from millions of women population in this part of the world but they did not alienate themselves from the general role of a woman as a house maker and a mother. Here we can cite the example of Benazir Bhutto who is perhaps the only Prime Minister in the world who gave birth to a child while holding the office of Prime Minister of a country.

Politics is an unusual profession where less women are involved and is regarded as a game which does not have any fixed rules so a participant has to be on guard all the time but with an enlightened and understanding home front these difficulties are not insurmountable. But Sirimavo, Khaleda and Chandrika did not always get help from their partners and when Sirimavo, Khaleda, Indira became Prime Minister they were widows so active help from their spouse did not arise and support from their parents also always did not arise. In case of Chandrika, she got support from her husband in politics but she became the President of Srilanka after ten years of his assassination and to some extent Sirimavo supported her ascent but strong opposition came from her brother Anura. For Benazir she got a supportive husband who also ushered in her downfall from power on the charges of nepotism and corruption. She got little support from her mother who like most South Asian mother believed that only male child has the right to carry on the legacy of the family. In that way Sheikh Hasina is lucky enough to have a husband who keeps a low profile and not actively involved in politics. Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandarnaike, Chandrika Kumaratunga Khaleda Zia, Benazir Bhutto were married to persons who were themselves involved in politics.
After the death of their husbands Sirimavo and Khaleda were given the responsibility to organise the parties founded by their husbands to fill in the void. This shows that "widow succession" is not an unusual phenomenon of South Asian Politics. Their story is that of reluctant housewife to politician by marriage ending up as politician on their own right.

Thus among the major factors affecting women's political participation Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Khaleda Zia, Sirimavo Bandarnaike, Sheikh Hasina, Chandrika Kumaratunga have a number of favourable factors:

(a) Favourable household status
(b) Education
(c) Health
(d) Ability to control fertility
(e) Access to financial resources
(f) Socialization and self confidence
(g) Relief from double burden of work
(h) Aware of violence against women
(i) Sympathetic mass media

These factors led to the rise and smooth functioning of the six female political leaders.

The performances of the women leaders were not always very encouraging. At times they lacked tactfulness or insight as a leader. But failure is a common human problem which these leaders could not avoid altogether. Their performance cannot be judged in isolation. Keeping in mind the nature of societies within which Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandarnaike, Benazir Bhutto, Khaleda
Zia, Chandrika Kumaratunga and Sheikh Hasina operate the profile of political leadership projected by them is not altogether unexpected. One might find faults with the manner of their handling problems and at times becoming authoritarian or inefficient but the constraints which they had inherited or faced should not be ignored. The mass poverty, illiteracy, slow economic development, ethnic crisis and other problems of third World countries prevented the women political leaders to usher in any revolutionary change. It is often said that women leaders like Sirimavo and Khaleda were initiated into active politics more owing to political assassination of the husbands and much less on the basis of proven experience or capacity. Though initially their relative political inexperience was the criterion for their selection as political heirs, party bosses thought that these women without a well known political past would be easier to control and at the same time would be able to draw public sympathy and support. But all of them tried their best to learn the basics of politics once they were into it.

Earlier we have discussed that their exists a close relationship between the environment and the functioning of the political leaders. The environment within which Indira, Benazir, Sirimavo Khaleda, Chandrika and Hasina operated is not always the same. After gaining independence all the four countries Indira, Pakistan, Srilanka and Bangladesh had a democratic political process but in Pakistan and Bangladesh the democratic experiment did not last long because of imperfect relationship between the army and political leaders. But at a later stage the potential of popular urges try to bring back democratic rule in these two countries. As a result Benazir and Khaleda and Hasina became the democratically elected leaders of post military ruled Pakistan and Bangladesh and they had to face the difficulties arising out of the remnants of military rule.
The study shows that the societies of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are infested with too many challenges and there cannot be instant and immediate solution to all these challenges. There are always certain forces and pressures which restrict even the influential leaders from constantly pursuing popular objectives, situations and compulsions often tend to undo a leader's efforts and expectations. If Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Chandrika Kumaratunga, Benazir Bhutto, Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina at times failed to live up to the expectations of the people it may not always be their own inefficiency but may be because of societal or situational compulsions. Critics can ignore the contributions of the six female leaders under study and designate them as mere satellites of Nehru, Mujib or S.W.RD but by criticising them critics unknowingly prove the worth and importance of these six leaders.

Indira could not become Pandit Nehru or for that matter Sheikh Hasina cannot become Bangabandhu but they all have their own contribution to politics in their own way.

The woman leaders had to face tough opponents unlike their father or spouse. Indira Gandhi had to face the tough opposition of Jay Prakash Narayan, Morarji Desai, Charan Singh but for Nehru it was somewhat smooth sailing. Benazir had to withstand the opposition of military dictator Zia ul Haque and as well as of Nawaj Sharif. For Hasina and Khaleda it was a tough task to face heavy stalwart in politics like Ershad whom they had to take into confidence for their electoral gain later on.

Thus leadership functions in a context of conflict and cooperation. The leader's perceptions, expectations, customs, styles and values provide the frame
work within which he functions. This framework may not be rigidly set. Even if a general theory of leadership is possible we cannot ignore the particularities of time and place in discussions of specific leaders. A national leader who has to respond to diverse groups and classes across his country may have to take account of several political cultures in addition to the one which may have influenced his own perceptions, style and values the most.8

The fall from power cannot be said to have resulted always and merely from inefficiency of the leaders. At times they become victims of circumstances resulting from conflicting demands within several political cultures. Except Chandrika and Hasina who are serving their first term in office, rest of the four leaders under study experienced electoral defeat, of them, Benazir Bhutto's government was twice dismissed by the President before the completion of the full term for which her husband had a major role to play. For Indira Gandhi, excesses done by her son Sanjay during emergency dug her grave during the 1977 elections. Thus it can be said that all the six women leaders achieved entry into politics through their family connections but at times their own near and dear ones usher in their downfall. It is quite clear that both for men and women one of the routes to leadership is to enter into a patron/client relationship with a successful politician. Therefore for women there is more of a compulsion to seek patrons within the family circle which would not tarnish her image. While Nehru, Mujib and Bhutto could seek patrons (Gandhi, Suhrawardy and Ayub) from outside the family, for Indira, Hasina, Benazir the choices were limited to their fathers and close political associates of fathers9. And at times their family connection made their credibility questionable. For example in his last days Bhutto was branded as a betrayer for which when Benazir entered politics she was not readily accepted to the people but rather known as betrayer's
daughter. Here she took to the second route to leadership that of courting imprisonment and accumulating political sacrifices.

In conclusion it can be said that the capabilities of the women leaders should not be underestimated. There are so many Prime Ministers and Presidents in each of these country who have wives and children. But among them so far only Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Benazir Bhutto, Khaleda Zia, Chandrika Kumaratunga and Sheikh Hasina made it to the top which we cannot term as mere luck. Hard work, tenacity, interest, talent all should combine to reach to the top. Md. Ali Jinnah's sister went into oblivion on her brother's death, Liaquat Ali's wife was made Ambassador, Sardar Patel's daughter was lost sight of on her father's demise, Ershad's wife was not acceptable to people, Gamini Disanayake's widow lost election. But still we cannot ignore the kinship factor in the emergence of the female leaders of South Asia. One thing is interesting to note that except for Dudley Senanayake who was nominated after his father D.S. Senanayake's death none of the parents of male Prime Minister (except for Rajiv Gandhi of India) or President of India, Srilanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh were Prime Minister or President of their country.

While the leadership qualities of the South Asian cases analysed here prove that given the opportunity, women leaders could govern as well as their male counter-parts, their leadership could be a deceptive indicator of the overall status of women in South Asia. The socio-economic locations of these leaders have enabled each of them to circumvent the constraints of the endemic gender disadvantage of these entrenched patriarchal societies. Yet, paradoxically, their political rule has made little difference of the general status of women or their improvement in their respective societies. The question is why these leaders
chose to ignore women's issues? The answer may be that they found it politically expedient not to raise an issue that would challenge deep-seated religious, cultural values which could backfire and undermine even their own political status. In Pakistan and Bangladesh, Benazir Bhutto, Khaleda Zia and Hasina Wajed are silent about resurgent Islamic fundamentalism on women's issue. These women leaders even at times lend a hand of friendship to the fundamentalists for their own political survival.

REFERENCES :