Chapter - II

POLITICS AND WOMEN IN SOUTH ASIA
South Asia

South Asia is a vast geographic region covering an area of 1.5 million square miles having a population of about 1 billion comprising the countries of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Srilanka, besides Bhutan and Maldives.

Some basic Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area ('000Km²)</th>
<th>Bangladesh</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>Pakistan</th>
<th>Srilanka</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population 1990 (m)</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>853</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projected for year 2000(m)</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>1042</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage cultivated</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>3288</td>
<td>802</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percapita income</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source - Peter Lyon - South Asia and the Geostrategics of the 1990s, Contemporary South Asia, Vol No-1 1992 U.K., Pg.25-39.

Some indicators of development performance in four of selected countries of South Asia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Life Expectancy at birth (yrs)</th>
<th>Adult literacy rate/ Infant mortality per 1000 live births</th>
<th>Population Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Srilanka</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>88.4 71 25</td>
<td>1.8 1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>48.2 165 90</td>
<td>2.3 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>34.8 163 101</td>
<td>3.1 3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>35.3 156 111</td>
<td>2.6 2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


South Asia as a region possesses geographical contiguity, if we include Afghanistan and Burma and geographical compactness if we leave them out. Leaving Afghanistan, which never came under direct British rule, the entire region was brought under the unified control of British imperialism. This impact
led to the development of common political, legal and administrative institutions. There are other spheres also in which it becomes difficult to distinguish these countries from one another. They have common religions like Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism and Christianity.¹

Apart from these, the region has many unhappy distinctions — mass poverty with its attendant evils of ignorance, ill health and technological backwardness, territorial disputes among the major states of India and Pakistan, internal polarizations that threaten peace and integrity in almost each state and the lack of mutual trust among its constituents.²

A striking feature of the underdeveloped countries of Asia is that they are hierarchical societies in which the patterns of social stratification are characterized by social and economic inequalities which are no longer legitimized by the officially accepted system of values. However after independence the traditional societies of South Asia are publicly committed to the creation of egalitarian societies³. The geographical compactness and contiguity added to the common legacy of British rule and common religions and languages make the core countries of South Asia indistinguishable from each other. But this has not necessarily brought about any sentiment of unity in the region. The British rule acted both as a unifying and a divisive factor. While it brought the countries of South Asia together under a common imperial umbrella it also laid the seeds of differences between India and Pakistan over the two nation theory, between India and Srilanka over the nationality of Tamil plantation workers and between India and Burma over the rights of the Indian settlers. In fact the existence of different religious, racial and linguistic groups has led to various difficulties in the intra-regional relationships⁴.
South Asian countries have large populations but very few decision makers at the top level of policy making. The number of women in that few decision makers is still further negligible but a surprising feature of South Asia is that there is a concentration of female governmental heads in this region though the region conforms to the worldwide pattern of low women's participation in politics. The phenomenon is rare in the sense that of the seven countries of South Asia four of them had or are having female governmental heads and have the rare distinctions of having the first woman Prime Minister of a Muslim country, mother and daughter as the Prime Minister and the President of a country and women as both Prime Minister and opposition leader of a country.

South Asia is an extremely diverse region and as such difficult to outline in general terms. One factor contributing to this diversity is the area's wide range of religious faiths including Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism and the first three being numerically the most important. Religion has been characterised as embodying the most sublime of human aspirations as being a bulwark of morality, a source of public order and inner individual peace as ennobling and civilizing in its effect upon mankind.5

Population (in percentage) of South Asia by Religion (mid 1980).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Hindu</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Buddhist</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>85.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Around two thirds of the South Asian population depend directly on agriculture for survival and GNP per capita in 1985 was only 380 US dollars in Srilanka and Pakistan, 270 in India and as low as 150 in Bangladesh. The sex ratio in South Asia is highly masculine ranging from 1040 males per 1000 females in Srilanka, 1067 in Bangladesh, 1073 in India and 1078 in Pakistan. The masculinization of the sex ratio is usually attributed to the comparatively poor nutrition of young girls and the fact that they are for less likely to receive medical treatment than their brothers.6 As in other areas of the third world the kinship system exerts an extremely important influence on women's lives. The typical South Asian family is patriarchal and extended. South Asian women in general are subject to considerable pressure to conform to the domestic roles of wife and mother and are subject to religious ideology which places heavy emphasis on female inferiority7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Nature of Society</th>
<th>Main Occupation of the people</th>
<th>Literacy Rate</th>
<th>Dominant Religion</th>
<th>Nature of Regime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Patriarchal</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>Patriarchal</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Mostly military regime followed by democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Patriarchal</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Mostly military regime followed by democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Srilanka</td>
<td>Patriarchal</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>88.4</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bangladesh**

A small compact country of 55126 sq. miles, Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated, poorest and least developed countries in the world. It was carved out of the eastern districts of the Indian state of Bengal in 1947 as a part of Islamic Republic of Pakistan from which it became independent.
in 1971 following a short but bloody civil war. Compared to most less developed countries Bangladesh is religiously, ethnically, linguistically and socially extremely homogeneous. Of its total population in 1991 85% was Muslim and 98% speak Bengali.

Historically the region has had a very low level of urbanization. Even today Bangladesh remains basically a peasant society. Some 90% of the population live in the rural areas and 80% still depend on agriculture. Industry contributes only 10% of the gross domestic product and employs a bare 1.8% of the labour force. In addition only 20% of the population are literate.

The two most important influences responsible for shaping national identity in Bangladesh have been religion and ethnicity. Although the Muslims of East Pakistan were deeply religious and shared the same core doctrines of Islam as West Pakistanis, centuries of evolution had given East Pakistani Islam a distinctive character. This led to friction and contributed to the breakup of Pakistan and the emergence of Bangladesh. Islam exists in Bangladesh in modern, orthodox and popular variants and this very diversity softened some of the rigidities of orthodox Pakistani Islamic fundamentalism. The strong sense of religious identity in Bangladesh has been accompanied by an equally strong feeling of cultural and ethnic identity. The ethnic and linguistic question was much more complex than sectarian differences. Only 3% of the population of Pakistan spoke Urdu and the vast majority of them lived in West Pakistan. Despite this difference, Mohammad Ali Jinnah and the leadership of the Muslim League insisted on Urdu as the sole official language of Pakistan. The emerging Bengali Muslim middle class saw the decision as an insult to their language and culture and refused to accept it. The attempts to impose Urdu on the Muslims
of Bengal planted the seeds of the civil war and the breakup of Pakistan a quarter of a century later.9

The politics in Bangladesh is marked by inherent tension between civil and military leaders which was basically transmitted from Pakistan. Since politics has centred round the rivalries of politicians and soldiers one violent coup led to one assassination to many.

The first phase of Bangladeshi politics (1971-75) marked by Mujibar Rahman's rule. In 1975, Bangladesh went through a number of coup d'etats - the coup of the junior officers of the Army on Aug 15 in which Mujib was assassinated and Khondkar Ahmed was brought to power. K.M. Ahmed reigned from 15 August 1975 to 2nd November 1975, the coup of Khaled Musharraf on 3 Nov. in which Mushtaq was toppled from power, and finally the army mutiny on November 7 in which Musharraf was killed and general Zia Ur Rahman was installed as the defacto leader of the military regime. After the assassination of Ziaur Rahman, Abdus Sattar ruled from 31st May 1981 to 24 March 1982. Lt General Hossain Mohammad Ershad was in power from 24th March 1982 to 4th Dec 1990 and Begum Zia from 1991 to 1996, Begum Hasina from 1996 till now. The chief characteristic of all these governments except Mujib, Sattar, Begum Zia and Begum Hasina is that they had come to power through unconstitutional and illegitimate means.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leader</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mujibar Rahman</td>
<td>1971-1975</td>
<td>Assassinated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaled Musharraf</td>
<td>3rd Nov. 1975 - 7th Nov, 1975</td>
<td>Assassinated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziaur Rahman</td>
<td>1975-1981</td>
<td>Assassinated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdus Sattar</td>
<td>31st May 1981-24th March 1982</td>
<td>Topped from power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H.M. Ershad</td>
<td>1982-1990</td>
<td>Topped from power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begum Khaleeda Zia</td>
<td>1991-1996</td>
<td>Lost Election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begum Hasina Wazed</td>
<td>1996 --</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be said that Bangladesh has experienced short spells of governance by popularly elected political parties followed by rather longer periods of military backed rule. The Bangladesh army has inherited a legacy from the Pakistan's army which includes interference in civilian rule often under the pretext that the latter is corrupt and weak or unable to maintain law and order.

The history of Bangladesh includes the political assassination of successive heads of state in order to bring down governments. Such measures were taken to overthrow first Mujib Ur Rahman and later Khaled Musharraf and Ziaur Rahman. The assassination appeared to establish a pattern which was broken only when Ershad who succeeded Zia as President was compelled to relinquish power without much blood letting. In 26 years since Bangladesh came into being between 1971 and 1997 there were 7 parliamentary elections, 3 presidential elections and two referendum to ratify martial law administrators. But these exercises were largely cosmetic, they did not allow people to exercise their rights to choose governments.

Bangladesh is a quintessential "third world" nation state. The legacy of British colonialism and 'internal colonialism' by Pakistan, its external economic dependency, its helpless 'peripherality' geo-political situation and external penetration meagre resources, over population, unsuccessful development strategies all contribute to making its third world status almost proverbial. As a result state building and nation - building have remained elusive.

Despite its linguistic, religious and ethnic homogeneity, Bangladesh has had a very difficult time creating and sustaining a legitimate, stable and effective political order.
In countries where political parties are not yet well developed or well organised, where the vast majority of the population is either illiterate or barely literate, where public opinion is not fully articulate, the quality of leadership becomes very important. The democratic institutions in these countries are fragile and the executive leaders rule by mass appeal and through broad political powers.

The politics in Bangladesh revolves around personalities. The nation's political events since 1991 have been largely shaped by the clash of personalities of the two women leaders who presently occupy the centre-stage of politics in Bangladesh the two Begums - Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wajed\textsuperscript{13}.

Bangladesh is a unitary republic. The first constitution came into force on 16 Dec 1972 and provided for a parliamentary democracy. The head of the state is the president elected by Parliament every 5 years. He/She appoints a Vice President. There is a Council of Ministers to assist and advise the President. Parliament has 30% seats reserved for women. A referendum in Sept 1991 was in favour of abandoning the presidential system and opted for a parliamentary system. At present the essentially titular president is elected for a once renewable five year term by the National Parliament (Jatiyo Sangsad) from which the P.M. and all but 4 other ministers must be drawn. The unicameral legislature which has a five-year mandate contains 330 seats, 300 of which are filled by direct election from single territorial constituencies with 30 reserved for women.

**Srilanka**

Srilanka is a small country compared to other Asian countries, like India, Pakistan and China. It is spread over 25,000 sq miles in area, 270 miles from South to North and 140 miles from East to West.
Srilankan society is said to be 'intricate'. Different perspectives illuminate different aspects of it. Wriggins pointed out that Ceylon is a 'plural society' distinguishable simultaneously on ethnic, caste, linguistic and religious grounds. Ceylon is predominantly a rural society. Economic classes still shed different light on political phenomena.\textsuperscript{14}

The majority of Ceylonese people nearly 70\% are Sinhalese. Their language is 'Sinhala' spoken by about seven million people. The Sinhalese are largely Buddhist. The British transferred power to Srilanka in 1948. The new rulers were Ceylonese but they were aristocratic, economically well off, of high caste and family background and English educated. This aristocracy belonging to the United National Party continued in power up to 1956. The year 1956 marked the beginning of a change in Srilankan politics. The UNP was dislodged from power by the Srilankan Freedom Party. The SLFP decided to Ceylonize foreign owned establishments which in reality amount to 'Sinhalization'. The new government also declared its policy that Sinhala would be the 'only' and national language and Buddhism would be Srilanka's religion. The leadership of SLFP were also aristocratic like that of the UNP. They belonged to high caste and uppermost families of Srilanka. The wave of SLFP radicalism continued from 1956-65. In 1965 itself the UNP comeback to power. Srilanka has experienced almost alternately both liberal (UNP) and radical (SLFP) leadership.\textsuperscript{15}

Srilanka is perhaps the only country in South Asia under study other than India, where the democratic process has continued uninterrupted despite internal dilemmas and external challenges. The continuity of the democratic process in Srilanka owes much to the electoral exercise, conducted at regular intervals, since the country's independence from the British rule in 1948. The only
exception was in 1982, when through a referendum the life of the sitting Parliament was extended beyond its normal terms\textsuperscript{16}.

According to the Constitution, the Republic of Srilanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights granted by section 18 (1)(d).

When the 1972 Constitution was superseded in 1978 by a new one, this same principle of a special status of Buddhism was embodied in the new Constitution. The secularity of the post independence Srilankan state was being undermined even if it had not become a Buddhist state which Buddhist pressure groups wished it to be. With the creation in 1989 of a ministry of Buddha Sasana placed under the President, the special status conferred on Buddhism has been raised a notch higher and the secularity of the Srilankan state has been reduced to a vestigial remnant of the principle that had been so prominently embodied in the transfer of power settlement, and the Soulbury Constitution\textsuperscript{17}.

In Srilanka as in many other countries, the participation of women in politics is numerically small. Since people are social by nature and societies need to be governed by legitimate bodies of persons, politics requires the active participation of all segments of society. But the paucity of women participants is a noticeable feature and a drawback\textsuperscript{18}. Compared to some of the Asian countries the female in Srilanka has a high literacy rate although it is lower than that of the males. With the granting of universal franchise in 1931 and free education in 1944 and the later introduction of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, formal education received a tremendous fillip in which women were equal beneficiaries with men.
In Srilankan society the male is considered the head of a household although a number of women headed households do exist. Stigmas attached to childlessness, divorce, spinsterhood, still remain, though with less intensity. The influence of Hinduism is seen in religious rituals and taboos relating to women though Buddhism made no marked distinctions based on sex. The 'dowry' which existed as a gift by her parents to a daughter at her marriage is at times dispensed with especially when the partner is of her choice but is a must in the case of an arranged marriage. There may be cases where the woman is murdered by her husband or by the in-laws for the sake of dowry and made to appear as if she had committed suicide. Despite different legislations being added to statute books one has to admit that these legislations would be meaningful only if society received them in the proper spirit. The large majority of women are neither aware of their rights nor are they in a position to enforce them.

With equal access to opportunities being available more women became interested in affairs outside the home. Participation in different outside activities helped them to become interested in political office as the best means of getting things done legislation passed or funds obtained for some public project. Active participation in politics makes exacting demands on the participants. Women sometimes find these demands over powering or discouraging. In the Srilankan context the names of lady Molamure, Vivienne Goonewardene, Kusuma Gunawardena, Ayesha Rauf, Doreen Wickremasinghe, Kusuma Rajaratne, Tamara Kumari Ilangaratne, Wimala Wijewardene, Wimala Kannangara and Sirimavo Bandarnaike cannot be overlooked.
**Change of rule in Sri Lanka**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PMs</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don Stephen Senanayake</td>
<td>Aug 1947 to March 1952</td>
<td>Died</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dudley Senanayake</td>
<td>March 1952 to Oct 1953</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sir John Kotelawala</td>
<td>Oct 1953 to April 1956</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike</td>
<td>April 1956 to Sept 1959</td>
<td>Assassinated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wijayananda Dahanayake</td>
<td>Sept 1959 to March 1960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirimavo Bandaranaike</td>
<td>July 1960 to March 1965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dudley Senanayake</td>
<td>March 1965 to May 1970</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirimavo Bandaranaike</td>
<td>May 1970 to July 1977</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.R. Jayewardene</td>
<td>July 1977 to Feb 1978</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranasinghe Premdasara</td>
<td>1978 to 1988</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.B. Wijetunge</td>
<td>1989 to 1993</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranil Wickremasinghe</td>
<td>1993 to 1994</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandrika</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirimavo</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ceylon became an independent common wealth state on 4 Feb, 1948 and became a republic in 1972 as Sri Lanka. The new constitution for the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka was promulgated in Sept 1978. The executive President is directly elected for a 6 year term renewable once. Parliament is composed of 225 members.

**Pakistan**

Pakistan is an independent Islamic sovereign state in South Asia which was brought into being in August 1947 to fulfil the religious or cultural aspirations of the Muslims. Pakistan is basically an underdeveloped country. People are largely illiterate nearly 65% of the population and 37 millions live below the absolute poverty line.
The history of Pakistan is a story of continuous power struggles involving competing elites. There was a succession of Prime Ministers coming one after another for short periods making the administrative structure of the state completely rotten. Since the early 1950s the Pakistani army's political influence and role in internal and external affairs has grown. Unfortunately it fought unsuccessfully two wars with India in 1965 and 1971, the latter war resulting in secession of East Pakistan from Pakistan and the formation of an independent separate Bangladesh.

**Change of regimes in Pakistan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ruler</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khwaja Nazimuddin</td>
<td>Oct 1951-April 1953</td>
<td>Sacked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohammad Ali Bogra</td>
<td>April 1953-Aug 1955</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ch. Mohammad Ali</td>
<td>Aug 1955-Sep 1957</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sohrawordy</td>
<td>Sept. 1956-Oct 1957</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chundrigan</td>
<td>Oct-Dec 1957</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firoz Khan Noon</td>
<td>Dec 1957-Oct 1958</td>
<td>Army Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iskandar Mirza</td>
<td>Oct 1958</td>
<td>Army Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayub Khan</td>
<td>Oct 1958-March 1969</td>
<td>Army Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahya Khan</td>
<td>March 1969-Dec 1971</td>
<td>Army Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z.A. Bhutto</td>
<td>Dec 1971-July 1977</td>
<td>Army Coup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zia ul Haq</td>
<td>July 1977-Aug 1988</td>
<td>Killed in air crash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benazir Bhutto</td>
<td>Dec 1988-Aug 1990</td>
<td>Sacked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junejo</td>
<td>Aug 1990-Nov 1990</td>
<td>Sacked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nawaz Sharif</td>
<td>Nov 1990-April 1993</td>
<td>Sacked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.S. Mazari</td>
<td>April 1993-May 1993</td>
<td>Dismissed by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supreme court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nawaz Sharif</td>
<td>May 1993-Oct 1993</td>
<td>Election held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benezir Bhutto</td>
<td>Oct 1993-Nov 1996</td>
<td>Sacked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miraj Khalid</td>
<td>Nov 1996-Feb 1997</td>
<td>Caretaker P.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nawaz Sharif</td>
<td>Feb 1997</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In his book Pakistan in Crisis (Routledge, London), Ashoke Kapur pointed out different determinants of political actions in Pakistan. These determinants are deeply embedded in Pakistani political history, its constitutional history, its military - civil relations, its political culture, its elite structure, its external relations and its internal social relations. The continuous strains in Pakistani politics since 1947 reflect the presence and interplay of these determinants. According to Kapur some of the driving elements in Pakistan are as follows:

1. Leaders are ambitious - Generals, politicians and civil servants who have participated in Pakistan's political affairs have been motivated by personal ambition. They lost because of weakness in their character and their power base. They gained power through fortunate circumstances and intrigue. None of them have a long term strategy to reform Pakistan's political system along democratic lines.

2. Pakistani subnationalism i.e. its ethnic, regional and religious forces are competitive. Five nationalities i.e. Punjabis, Sindhis, Baluchis, Pathans and Mohajirs (Indian Muslims) exist in Pakistan. Their interests and images of the future are competitive. The Sunnis and Shias in Pakistan are also divided.

3. The Pakistani Army is dominant in Pakistan and it is dominated by the US. It is too big for Pakistan's political development and it is too small to manage hostile neighbours. It has internal and external functions but the former are more important than the latter. It generally fails to win wars. It is the biggest and most organized political player in Pakistan, but it is not truly independent. Its military capability, political ideas and political interests depend on the U.S. government's
ideas, interests and aid. The Pakistani army is the client, the U.S.A is the patron.

(4) Political parties and public opinion are divided and disorganised. Ideology is fractured. There is ideological polarization confusion and passion in Pakistan. This reveals an array of fascist, socialist and democratic tendencies in Pakistani thinking, there is no meeting ground between them. The Pakistani Left and political parties have been marginalized in Pakistan's internal affairs but they continue to exist as social tendencies.23

One interesting point to be noted in Pakistani politics is that every regime that has come to power in Pakistan since independence has sooner or later invoked the name of religion to justify its existence. Yet whenever the people of Pakistan get a chance to exercise their franchise they refrain overwhelmingly from voting for the Islamic political parties determined to convert the country into a theocratic state. Islamic parties as pressure groups also have their uses for the propertied classes of Pakistan. By keeping the issue of "Islamization" in the forefront of the national debate and keeping the pot of sectarian strife boiling these parties serve to divert attention from issues of social justice, mute class struggle and thereby provide a secure environment for the rich to accumulate wealth and property by fair or foul means24.

Islamization has focused attention on the status and role of women in Pakistan. The status of Pakistani woman if one is asked to describe it in one word it would be 'dependence'. She is not in command of her own life. From birth to death decisions affecting her are taken by others25.
In Pakistan women find three causes for continued concern - the creation of separate women's universities, the introduction of quazi courts and the revision of the laws of Evidence Act. Women universities are viewed as acquiescing to religious pressures for separation of the sexes. Women fear that this will lend credibility to the long run, spread to other educational institutions. Many women find reason for their concern that Islamic education, will be equated with separation of the sexes. In addition degrees from new women's universities could make their credentials less competitive with those of males from established universities. The current status of Female Education in Pakistan is not very encouraging. According to Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey Report 1990/1991 only 6.9% of the total female population are exposed to secondary or higher education, 5.2% to middle school, 19.2% to primary school, 67.6% to no education.26

The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan provides for a federal parliamentary system of government with President as the head of the state and the popularly elected P.M. as head of government and country's Chief Executor. Parliament is bicameral a National Assembly of 217 members (2 women) are directly elected with 10 religious minority representation. During the period of martial law (1977-85) the constitution was in abeyance but not abrogated. In 1985 it was amended to extend the powers of the President.

INDIA

India occupies a strategic position in Asia covering an area of 3287263 sq. km. India shares its political borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan on the west and Bangladesh and Burma on the east. The northern boundary is made
up of the provinces of China, Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan. After almost two hundred years of colonial rule India became independent in 1947.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prime Ministers (upto 1984)</th>
<th>Tenure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gulzarilal Nanda (acting)</td>
<td>May-June 1964.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nehru was a dominant leader of the Congress Party when India gained independence, who became the first Prime Minister of independent India. Under Mahatma Gandhi's inspiration, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress movement formulated a set of principles which had served as country's guidelines — these are democracy, socialism and secularism so far as internal affairs are concerned and non-alignment in external relations. In the economic field Nehru had his own vision. There was an impressive record of diversifying the industrial capacity and raising industrial output. The Indian peasants quickly responded to the new strategy, with the state providing irrigation, improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. In the field of foreign policy India declined to join either bloc but decided to remain non-aligned. In conformity with this objective India sought friendship with every nation.

After Nehru's death Lal Bahadur Shastri became the Prime Minister. His slogan 'Jai Jawan Jai Kisan' showed his capacity to emerge as a leader by
broadening the base. He continued with the successful policy of Nehru by giving boost to heavy industry. The year 1965 saw war with Pakistan.

Following Shastri's death at Tashkent Nehru's daughter Indira was made the Prime Minister of India. She took risks and became more successful so far as the implementation of the socio-economic programme was concerned. Nationalisation of 14 banks, and General Insurance Companies and mines, and abolition of privy purses and special privileges to ICS officers go to her credit. She played an important role in 1971 Indo-Pak war which resulted in Bangladesh's independence. But the year 1977 saw the ouster from power of this famous daughter of Nehru as the infamous mother of Sanjoy. The internal chaos of the Janata Government brought her back to power in 1980 election.

The Constitution of India describes India as a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic. While Pakistan remained a British Dominion until 1956, India ceased to be a Dominion and declared herself a 'Republic' since the making of the Constitution in 1949. It means a government by the people and for the people. The people of India are to exercise their sovereignty through a Parliament at the centre and a legislature in each state, which is to be elected on adult franchise and to which the real Executive, namely, the Council of Ministers, shall be responsible. Guaranteeing of certain rights to each individual would be meaningless unless all inequality is banished from the social structure and each individual is assured of equality of status and opportunity for the development of the best in him. This object is secured in the body of the Constitution, by making illegal all discriminations by the state between citizen and citizen, simply on the ground of religion, racem caste, sex or place of birth.
Of the seven countries of South Asia four of them had or are having women governmental heads but considering that women constitute roughly half the regions population they are still hardly seen in positions of power and decision making process. The considerable prominence of a very few women in politics has undoubtedly conveyed a distorted impression of the active role of women in politics in general in these societies. In order to understand significance of the emergence and functioning of Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandarnaike, Benazir Bhutto, Begum Khaleda Zia, Sheikh Hasina, Chandrika Kumaratunga it is important to analyse the status and political participation of women in general in India, Bangladesh, Srilanka and Pakistan. In societies where the agrarian mode of production dominates as in these four countries in South Asia women are subject to heavy demands for child bearing, their movements are restricted, significant role choices are limited to family related activity and overt political activity and movements are rare. Politics involves the competition for and the exercise of power and women have been effectively blocked from access to power in any arena, domestic or public and have been assigned a status inferior to man. In most of the civilizations; man has taken every advantage of his usually superior strength and of his biological good fortune in the matter of child bearing. When he hunted across the plains, his woman stayed behind tending children, preparing food, gathering wood. When he became a pastoralist she nursed cattle. At last when he took to agriculture she shared his labour in the fields and breast fed their child in the intervals of digging, sowing and reaping. Women were not allowed to mix nor allowed to express any opinion on such things as politics. Discrimination against women can be traced way back into the Athenian states where democracy first developed where women were not recognised as citizens and both their political and civic rights were strictly limited. In their work the social contract theorists Hobbes, Locke, and
Rousseau were also antipathetic regarding the status of women and their participation in politics. Throughout recorded history in all parts of the globe, women have been subject to domination by males. Although John Locke held that "all men are by nature equal", he never recommended that women be allowed to vote and considered it more or less as self-evident that in family matters the husband must have the final say. J.J. Rousseau who is sometimes interpreted as radically democratic and egalitarian announced to women that "the lot of your sex will always be to govern ours" — but only as wives and mothers not as citizens. Such tradition is continuing even today. The patriarchal structure of the society also makes it difficult to improve the situation of the women folk. In developing countries like those of South Asia where traditional beliefs rule everyday life the situation of women although improving recently there still exists great inequalities in the status of men and women\(^8\).

**Status of women**

Status in pure sociological terms denotes only the position vis-a-vis others in terms of rights and obligations. In discussion on women's status in any society, the general convention has been to assess their role in relation to men. Two other dimensions have been introduced in the recent times to facilitate such assessment, particularly in a period of process of change:

(a) The extent of actual control enjoyed by women over their own lives.

(b) The extent to which they have access to decision-making processes and are effective in positions of power and authority.

The Human Development Report 1995 has convincingly demonstrated that all over the world gender justice remains a far cry and like the "apartheid of
races" which has now been legally abolished in its homeland there exists an 'apartheid of gender' in all societies developed and developing, western and eastern and irrespective of religious faith and economic system.\textsuperscript{29}

Although it is impossible to trace the historical origins of male domination one highly plausible explanation is to be found in physical differences. Men are on average heavier, taller and physically stronger than women and thus more capable than women of enforcing their will through physical violence and the threat of violence. Moreover women's role in bearing and nursing children increases their vulnerability. Once established, the subjection of women was further enforced by custom, tradition, practice and belief.\textsuperscript{30}

The preamble to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (adopted on Dec, 1979) states that .... the Charter of the U.N reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity ... in the equal rights of men and women. Despite these declarations extensive discrimination against women continues to exist. A report in 1975 by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) caught world attention by pointing out that while 'women and girls constitute one-half of the world's population and one-third of the official labour force' and 'perform nearly two thirds of work hours', they 'receive only one tenth of the world's income and less than one hundredth of the world's property'. Nearly twenty years later a report by the United Nations Human Development report found that despite advances in labour force participation, education and health women still constitute about two thirds of the world's illiterates, hold fewer than half of the jobs on the market and are paid half as much as men for work of equal value.\textsuperscript{31}
Although exploitation of and discrimination against women are global phenomena their consequences are particularly tragic in the third world. Poverty, ignorance and deprivation of the basic necessities of life symbolise the existence of women in the third world countries as a continuous battle for survival. The major source of all the problems of women in this part of the world can be summarised in a very few words. Complete social and economic dependence on men and a stress on their reproductive role that is inimical to their own interest. Women contribute more to the economic well being of human society and yet receive lesser from society than men, both in terms of remuneration and investment in their education and health. Legislation alone cannot itself change the society. Limited educational opportunities are barriers to political participation, where civil and political rights are attached to literacy as well as to employment opportunities. Of the world's 840 million illiterates, two thirds are female and inequality in access to employment reaches deeper and deeper into their lives. Thus women are the most deprived group in terms of education as well as employment.

In context of women's social discrimination the social conditioning of male superiority over female is ingrained in many young girls. In countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh the preference for male children over females is reflected at different levels. There is a great disparity between males and females in access to nutrition, healthcare and medical service.

The position of Hindu women has been a subject of controversy. Manu said "The father takes care of her in childhood, the husband in youth, the son during old age. A woman does not deserve freedom". But it was the same law giver who also said that "the gods reside where women are honoured". The
son was considered to be more important than the daughter because he not only performed the funeral rights necessary for the salvation of father but at the same time retained the family tree.

The ideology of purdah among Muslim women which is very common in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh is related closely to kinship, economic and political structures. The value given to purdah actually gives sanction for women's segregation and strict gender based divisions of labour, thus accentuating women's dependency on male relatives. The word talaq is usually rendered as 'repudiation' it comes from a root tolloqa which means to release (an animal) from a tether whence to repudiate the wife or free her from the bondage of marriage. So the expression talaq signifies an absolute power which the husband possesses of divorcing his wife at all times. Intrahousehold dynamics show that women's authority on decision making process is totally absent or minimal. A woman's personal freedom is negligible and it is almost suppressed in the years of her sexuality. Development cycle in her life is well guarded by rituals, beliefs and rules that would bar her from associating with people other than her husband and immediate family members. Despite all these, women's work involvement and drudgery in household chores is very high. And the total lack of awareness or indifference towards women's invaluable contribution by the family and society is a result of patriarchal structure and a basic gender bias that women are meant to serve their husbands, produce valiant sons and spent the rest of their lives in peace and piety.

The general condition of women in South Asia is quite similar but still they have some specificities. Women in Pakistan have to arouse themselves to fight against Islamic chauvinist military regime. Atrocities against women have
taken the heinous form of flogging, beating and stoning to death by the Islamic state and the religious chauvinism in Pakistan. While in India they take the form of dowry murders, mass rape during caste and communal riots, female foeticide etc. In Srilanka state-sponsored ethnic riots between Sinhalese and Tamilians have generated orgy of violence against Tamil women. Bangladesh has still not overcome the shocking experience of rehabilitating 30,000 rape Muslim (Bangladeshi) women by the Pakistani army during 1970-71.

Women in Pakistan

Like in other South Asian countries Pakistani society is divided into the domestic sphere of the household and the outer world of finance, markets, politics and power. Women are secluded in the former while men dominate the outside. As a result, men negotiate all interaction between the outside world and the inner world of women. Women have little access to and no control over the outside, whereas even within the household men hold a pre-eminent position. This demarcation is accompanied by rigid gender based role ascriptions. Defined by her reproductive powers, a woman's role is considered to be motherhood and by extension the nurturing and servicing of the family unit. A man's principal role is to provide for the family's economic needs and to protect its name and members. Formal rights have largely eluded the majority of Pakistani womanhood which belongs to the silent and unmentioned peasantry in the rural areas and the working class in the industrial centres. This poor and virtually illiterate majority bears the triple burden of reproduction, domestic labour and work outside the home. The statistics shows that the official labour force participation rate of Pakistani women and the female literacy rate (16% and 4.8% respectively) are amongst the lowest in the world. The legislation in Pakistan which emphasises that the evidence of two women is equivalent
to that of one man and that the compensation paid to the relatives of a murdered woman should be half that of a man, is both a direct and symbolic violation of the equal dignity and consequently of the rights of women41. Though constitutional provisions guarantee women equal status and non-discrimination the laws have always discriminated against women. The infamous Hudood Ordinances, the Quanoone Shahadat and the Qisas and Diyat Ordinance to name a few remain on the statutes seriously undermining women's rights. Most rape victims drop rape charges under the threat of adultery charges under the Hudood Ordinance. In Hudood cases female or non-Muslim witnesses are not accepted. If a man rapes a woman in front of several women, he cannot be convicted under the Hudood Ordinance. Similarly if a Muslim man rapes a Christian woman in the presence of several Christian women and men their testimony will not be accepted42. The Qisas and Diyat Ordinance which permits forms of cruel, inhuman punishment including judicial amputation was periodically repromulgated with minor changes. The patriarchal, patrilineal nature of social system determines the shape of the life of women in Pakistan. They are forced to depend on men. The rate of literacy is poor among women and in Pakistan labour force rate of participation of female is 6.80%. The degree of access and control of Pakistani women over material and social resources is less than men.

**Women in Srilanka**

Srilankan tradition prior to being influenced by foreign invasions both Asian and European abounds with documented evidence of women being treated with honour, as participants in social and religious function and permitted liberty and independence and accepted in society as responsible persons and leaders. The seclusion and protection of women and their relegation to an inferior
dependent status in society evolved partly due to changes in the economic structures such as the introduction of cash crops and money and the imbibing of foreign social ethics by an imitative elite in Srilankan society. In case of education compared to some of the other South Asian countries Srilanka has a high literacy rate though the females are less literate than the males. The tradition of women's participation in 'economic affairs' continued with changes in the nature and status of their work. Female labour in plantations was subject to wage differentials and confined to unskilled, monotonous work. Economic pressures which cause girls to limit their education to the secondary level, the lack of technical training and social prejudices result in most women being ill-equipped to face competition from men. Varied ethnic groups with differing cultures and social practices form Srilankan society where the male is considered the head of a household although a number of women-headed households do exist. Stigmas attached to childlessness, divorce, spinsterhood still remain, though with less intensity. Myths and superstitions particular to women though fast dying out among the more educated classes still retain a firm hold in the villages. The Srilankan women in particular those of the upper and middleclasses 'lost' their status by overresponding to the social ethos brought in from outside. It is from these restraints that they have to be emancipated. The unique and distinctive role a woman plays in the production and nurturing of children is to be valued, and a blending of those ancient traditions with participation in modern development should determine the future of the Srilankan woman.

Though women had equal access to education, sex-based diversification in curriculum in schools and traditional cultural attitudes influenced girls against joining 'masculine' areas such as technical studies. An overwhelming proportion of them opted for the arts, law, commerce and the social science options —
subjects which unfortunately offered poorer employment prospects in the longer run. Similarly though highly educated, due to persisting sex role stereotypes, 46% of women continued to be engaged exclusively in house work as against less than 2% of the men. The slow rate of economic growth and the high rate of unemployment characteristic of Srilanka after the mid fifties had a particularly pernicious impact of women. The unemployment rate rose steeply for women to become double that of men: from 9.5% for men and 12.4% for women in 1959-60, it increased to 11.4% for men and 21.2% for women in 1969-70 and continued to grow to over a quarter of the labour force into the late seventies. The material situation of Srilankan women was reinforced by traditional patriarchal ideology. Women were viewed as secondary earners due to their poorly paid subordinate status and society continued to place the responsibility and burden of maintaining a smooth and stable family life primarily on women. Religion and traditional concepts determine the status of women in Srilanka. Dominated by men the plight of Srilankan women is no different than other women in the region.

**Women in Bangladesh**

As in most other countries around the world, so in Bangladesh too women have an inferior socio-economic status compared to men. In the rural areas the birth of a girl is rarely celebrated by parents and relatives, unless she happens to be the first daughter after four of five sons. From her childhood, a girl is trained to fit into the only socially acceptable role that of wife and mother. In rural areas girls discontinue schooling at an early age for two main reasons. First, by the time a girl is in the sixth or seventh grade, she has completed basic training in reading, writing and arithmetic and any further education is regarded as unnecessary if not harmful for a happy married life. Second, after
she reaches the age of 12 or 13 a girl has to drop out of school for purdah considerations. In rural areas it is customary for girls to go into purdah when they reach puberty. Thus purdah is an important factor restricting access to education particularly where marriages take place at a young age. Although a legal minimum broached by many traditional communities because daughters are deemed to be an expense on the family because of their low economic return. It is also broached to relieve the family of the burden of protecting a girl's virginity value and to advance the time of her bride price. It is not unknown for a girl to be given away to pay her father's debts.

The overwhelming majority of Bangladeshi women are Muslims, and their legal status is largely determined by Sharia (Islamic) laws. Three note worthy legal rights are given to Muslim women by Sharia: rights regarding marriage, divorce and inheritance. In Islam marriage is a contract, and the consent of both partners in front of witnesses is required. Both the husband and wife can start divorce proceedings, though it is far easier for a husband to divorce his wife. A woman's marriage is arranged by her father or other male guardians and she usually consents to such arrangements. In cases of divorce men usually take the initiative. In practice prevailing social norms still permit men greater freedom to practice polygamy and initiate divorce. In a social system where a woman always needs a male guardian she can never fully exploits her legal rights. These are exercised on her behalf by her male guardians. Another much publicized legal right of Muslim women is their right to inherit property. After a man's death, his widow inherits one eighth of his property and if he dies childless, she inherits one fourth, daughters inherit one half of the son's shares. Thus the women live in a social system where they need to be protected by males as a result they can hardly exploit their legal right.

In Bangladesh women...
have always been the most deprived section of the society. Socio-cultural attitudes and prejudices, religious influence, 'purdah' exclusion of women from productive work and inaccurate evaluation of the significance of the role played by women gave birth to disparity that is prevalent in the legal, social, economic and political status of women\textsuperscript{49}.

It may be generally said that the issue of gender discrimination and gender exploitation in Bangladesh has been initiated through and have featured more in the development discourse rather than in mainstream politics. In a country where 100\% of the development budget is dependent on foreign aid, it is natural to expect perhaps that much of the discourse on women and development will be donor oriented. The first elected government of Bangladesh faced the mammoth task of reconstruction and rehabilitation of a war devastated economy. In the first five year plan female education was emphasised but justified in a traditional way, i.e. to enhance the role of women as mother and managers of the household\textsuperscript{50}.

Unlike the revolution in China and Vietnam and even to a limited extent the national independence movement in India which radically changed the status of women by giving them substantial participation in the liberation movement, the political movements in Bangladesh did not consciously attempt to include women.

One major factor that has affected and shaped the patterns of women's political participation in Bangladesh is purdah, the cultural norm that is also present in other Muslim countries. The dichotomy between the domestic and public spheres is present in most cultures and limiting women to the domestic
sphere had limited women's participation in politics in most societies. Purdah not only creates a separate space and place for women in politics it also restrict women's participation. In a purdah society, after puberty a woman's mobility outside her home is severely restricted. While in the western countries woman had been active as members of church and other community organizations women in Bangladesh have little tradition of organizational participation.

**Women in India**

The position of Indian women is not very different from their counterparts in other South Asian countries. From their childhood girls are made full aware of the fact that they are the liabilities of their families. As they grow up, girls perceive the preferential treatment given to the male members of the family, and they are told that getting less of everything and not complaining about it is the ideal behaviour of good women. In a situation of scarcity, whatever is available — food, clothing or opportunities for education and health care — is offered first to the men. If the family can afford good food, the father and sons have the first and major share. If the family has enough resources to send children to school, the boys get preference over girls, even if the girls are brighter. No one can deny that women have been deprived of power within the family and society in India by mainstream religious and social traditions. Indian men saw them as "womanly", weak, dependent and submissive and made them so. It was their lot to give "unpaid services on a non-leave, non-stop basis". Yet these services were considered their duty and were never classed as work at all. Family and marriage are the two basic concepts that determine the status of women in a society. In Indian tradition the girls learn of the dependence on the male members of the family from their childhood. The Hindu
law prohibits second marriage but there are hundreds of cases where Hindu males secretly keep more than one wife in different names or engage in extramarital sex. Indian society in many ways is rather a funny society. Its grand paradox is that the woman who has been portrayed as "the weak one" or abala in fiction, poetry and real life has also been seen and recognised as Durga, the Mahisasur Mardini (Killer of the evil demon). Women in India were adored, respected as mothers, liked as sisters, loved as a wife and praised as Goddesses. But they did not always get a rightful place in the society. The social scenario has undergone significant aberrations regarding the status of women. The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act 1956, the Sati Prevention Act (1987) the Dowry Prohibition Act, the Hindu Succession (Amendment Act) and Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986 are some of the new developments. But in the changed scenario women are facing a different set of challenges with the rise in dowry deaths, divorce cases, female foeticides, forced prostitution of girls, export and sale of girls to other countries in the guise of fake marriage etc.

Judging by the standards of many developing and even developed countries, the legal and political rights conferred on women in India would appear to be considerably high. When one compares them with the situation that prevailed at the beginning of the 20th century the progress may even appear fantastic. The Indian Constitution empowers the state by Article 15(3) to make any special provision for women and children even in violation of the fundamental obligation of non-discrimination among citizens. As equal citizen of India, women benefit from these rights equally with men. However since the constitution recognized the unequal social position of women, a special clause empowers the state to make special provisions for women. The Directive Principles of State Policy
defining the major goals of a Welfare State, also contain specific items affecting women the special attention given to the needs and problems of women as one of the "weaker sections" of Indian society and the recognition of political equality was undoubtedly a radical departure from the norms prevailing in traditional Indian thought of pre-independence days.

Basically being a traditional society, Indian women live in a stratified hierarchical structure at the domestic sphere. Their entry into public domain continues to have an impact on their decisions. They are not a homogenous group with common interests. While the politico-legal framework of a society indicates the scope of rights and obligations of its members, the advent of quantitative methods has made it possible to adopt certain statistical indicators e.g. literacy and education, employment and political participation, age of marriage and other demographic features that may help to locate the status of women vis-a-vis men both at a given point of time as well as to measure the extent of change over a period. But the application of these indicators to a society like India, poses several problems such a cultural variations, social hierarchy and economic inequality and secular law. Woman's roles, right and norms of behaviour are greatly influenced by cultural factors like the institution of family, kinship, groups, descent systems, religious and other cultural traditions, caste hierarchy etc. The process of social change, development and modernization, impact of alien and western culture, which are sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory and destructive of each other are also involved in making any worthwhile assessment. Appreciation of this complexity led the Committee on the Status of Women in India to admit that —
"The status of women in Indian context cannot be defined simply by general concepts like equality, role-differentiation, legal, social and political rights, depending or independence are not applicable to all sections of our population. How then do we assess the status of Indian women or measure the degree or direction of change in their position? Against the new dimensions in women's status and roles introduced by the constitution and process of social change, this large section of our society still continues to be under the influence of traditional standards. Traditional India has seen a woman only as a member of the family or a group as daughters, wives and mothers and not as an individual with an identity or rights of her own.\(^59\)

The conspicuous position of a few leading women does distinguish India from many other countries. Mrs. Indira Gandhi here plays a foremost role. There have been other Indian women of international repute as well.

But to what extent is the prominence of these women in public affairs under written by the absence of large number of women in politics? The answer here depends largely on the point of comparison. In relation to the number of men, there is no question that Indian women are severely underrepresented at all levels of political leadership. Indian men greatly outnumber women. This is the case in elected as well as appointed administrative positions. Between 1952-75 there were 13 women ministers in the Union government of whom one became P.M. and one attained Cabinet rank.\(^60\)

After the promulgation of the constitution serious efforts were made to ameliorate the position of Hindu women inspite of tough resistance from the
orthodox section of the community. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 adopted monogamy both for men and women and provided judicial separation as a matrimonial relief, in a later amendment, cruelty and desertion were added as grounds for divorce. The Hindu Succession Act of 1956 conferred uniform rights of inheritance and succession to Hindu women throughout India. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1978 raised the age of marriage for girls from 15 to 18, for boys from 18 to 21. Similarly the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act of 1956, the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act of 1956, the Prohibition of Dowry Act of 1961 and its subsequent amendment in 1986 tried to elevate the position of women.

Though in practice it is very difficult to replace and shift the centuries old traditions, customs and attitudes which have religious sanction behind them, the enhanced legal status of Hindu women is an indicator that a larger section of the community wants to ameliorate their subservient and suppressed position. In case of Muslim women too it would not be possible to stop the tide of change, the only choice is to re-read or to reinterpret the Holy Scripture and to frame laws on a more rational basis, as to suit the new emerging consciousness among the younger generation.

The status of women is paradoxical in Indian society. Religion places women both at the pedestal as well as at the lowest rank in society. Indian society is inter-woven with cultural-cum-material patriarchy ruled by the ideology of the subordination of women by men — father, brother or son. In this back drop the rural women who constitute the majority of the population are worse off. Women suffer from high rate of fertility due to early marriage, malnutrition or undernutrition and face difficulty in getting employment. Social and economic disabilities suffered by Indian women prevent them from
exercising their human rights. Legislation passed meant to enhance the status of women instead succeeded in eluding them. Dowry though prohibited since 1961 is still in practice and there are numerous reports of torture and death related to dowry. It is simply an indication that overwhelming majority of Indian women are not enjoying the rights and opportunity granted to them by constitution.

**Women and Political Participation**

In the developing countries where women are accorded a low status vis-a-vis men the reasons for low political participation by women are easily understandable. Few women who do get involved in politics find it hard to move up the ranks of political offices. Here again as women they face two major problems that block their advancement. First in the kind of factional political situation that exists in most of the developing societies, any ambitious new entrant into politics needs a factional political leader as a patron. The younger politicians cannot succeed unless they are in patron-client relationships with a political leader. For a young woman politician it is difficult to enter into a patron-client relationship with a political leader who is a man for doing so might give the impression that the relationship extends beyond politics into a sexual relationship whereas a young male politician can publicize to his advantage his close relationship with the patron leader, for a young woman politician such publicity would ruin her political career. This dilemma makes it nearly impossible for women to work through grass root politics. The only women who tend to succeed in politics are related to powerful politicians and can use that connection without evoking any suspicion of having loose morals.

The position of women in politics was analysed a number of years ago in the well known U.N. study edited by Maurice Duverger. The small part played
by women in politics, he notes, merely reflects and results from the secondary place to which they are assigned by the customs and attitudes of the society and which their education and training tend to make them accept as the natural order of things\textsuperscript{64}.

The granting of votes to women involved a change in the male attitude to women since it implied that women were intelligent enough to choose between political alternatives but the shift was only a small one. Having the same political rights as men did not mean however that women automatically gained equal influence with men in political and economic life\textsuperscript{65}. A woman is generally seen in the wife/mother role. Her time is consumed in this dual task. Therefore, it is presumed that she cannot fit into a decision making role and lacks the time either for such training although one may be a graduate or a person with high educational qualification.

A question arises as to why there has been a low level of participation among the females. One of the reasons which restricts women from entering the political field is the old tradition that treats women as subservient to men. Another reason might be the failure of political parties to sponsor an adequate number of women candidates\textsuperscript{66}. The fundamental dichotomy of public and private is mapped in a genderic split (man-woman) and the political — apolitical dimension which implies two appealing equations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Man</th>
<th>= Public</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>= Political</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>= Private</td>
<td>Private= Apolitical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therefore Man</td>
<td>= Political</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.: Woman</td>
<td>= Apolitical</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This conceptualisation is not fully correct\textsuperscript{67}. But it has to be admitted that in relation to the total population and to the composition of the government
as a whole, women cannot be considered adequately represented or well integrated into politics. While women tend to participate in greater numbers in local level politics the average percentage of women in national legislature globally in 1987 was 10. This hides wide diversity. In 1987 the proportion of women legislators in sub-Saharan Africa was approximately 7.5%, Latin America 7%, South Asia 5% and South East Asia 12%. But the proportions had increased in all regions since 1975.

The reason for this increase may be that today in most societies marriage is not one-sided. Household tasks are shared including child rearing. The modern wife, too seeks employment and is exposed to the free flow of information. Gradually she gets absorbed into community activities. She becomes aware of the public issues and wishes to contribute to solve them. This leads her into politics. She gets interested and involved in specific problems such as health, schools and local government. She may join a political party. All these are consequences in the entry to politics.

But in certain other cases political parties have suddenly thrust women into the political arena. They may have had special skills or training which would be useful in legislation. They may be people who have a desire to influence public events, achieve goals and decide on policy. A study of past and present female politicians shows that they have been ready recruits to office with their background, experience and motivation. Most of these women have come forward to participate actively in politics with the approval of their husbands who have encouraged them and even assisted them in their campaigns or in the household tasks. Thus one could identify cooperative and participant husbands. But they are very few in number.
Very few women are found in the executives of governments whether they are authoritarian, elected, state socialist or revolutionary. Often a very small number of women are appointed to posts which reflect the role that women so often play in the private sphere e.g. women are often given responsibility for health, education, welfare and women's affairs. In 1987-8 an average of only 3.5% of the world's cabinet ministers were women and 93 countries comprising 31 from African, 24 from Latin America and Caribbean and 30 from Asia and Pacific had no women ministers at all. Women are largely excluded from key areas such as economic policy defence and political affairs. Women in developed capitalist countries like France (where women constitute 54% of the electorate), U.S.A and Japan (where women voters outnumber men voters) the women have suffered a steady decline in their political position.

There are several explanations for this pattern of participation of women in politics. Many women are constrained by their roles in the private sphere which prevent them from participating in the public sphere on the same terms as men and gaining the experience deemed necessary for a career in politics. Almost universally middle class women because of factors like economic resources and employment, levels of education and confidence find it easier to participate than poorer women in the upper echelons of conventional politics. However, it is not only the nature of many women's lives which prevents them from participating but also the structures of formal politics. This ranges from the timing of meetings, the combative style and more widespread discrimination against women, for example in selection procedures which prevents them from rising in political parties.

While women constitute about 50% of the total electorate, they have never been able to get adequate representation. In Britain where women were granted franchise in 1918 the first woman member took her seat in 1919. In the U.S.
where women got franchise as far back as Aug 1920 there were only 10 members (2.3%) in the House of Representatives which was composed of 435 members in the early 1970s. In Canada where women had the right to vote in 1920, only 18 were elected to the House of Commons.

There are two broad set of factors which ought to be considered in trying to account for women's representation or lack of representation in political office in any country. The first set of factors looks to the social conditions, to the class structure and to the religious and cultural life of the country as a basis for explaining the level of women's political involvement. The second set of factors identifies the political institutions themselves the process of political succession, the nature of the party structure etc. as supporting or opposing the recruitment of women to positions of political leadership. The distance that is visible world-wide between women and state power is more acutely felt when attention is focussed on the executive powers of the state. In the world history, so far (May 1998) only 21 women performed or are performing the responsibilities of head of state or government. Most of these countries are developing nations and four are situated in South Asia. It is worth noticing that while in the third world women's role in politics has become prominent, in the developed world women are lagging behind. U.S.A, Russia are yet to have a woman president. The role of women in politics in the developed countries is in crisis in contrast with their success in various professions and creative faculties. Very recently (March 1998) U.S.A had her first woman shuttle commandor Eileen Collins in charge of a U.S space mission. In the developed countries there have been some significant exceptions like Margaret Thatcher of Britain and GroHarlem Bruntland of Norway and few others. Except under special circumstances women's leadership in politics on a competitive basis is not easily accepted.
by the society at large both men and women. Besides there are religious and other cultural prejudices and superstitions.

Like in other countries in the world low political involvement of women is usually attributed to 3 factors (a) Socio-political (b) Situational (c) Structural factors.

(a) Socio-political factors usually include primarily a country's ideology as a rule assigning differing expectations to men and women. Men are usually put in the role of decision makers and given a privileged position in society while women are assigned inferior roles.

(b) Situational factors include women's place in society tied to performance of traditional roles in the family and the household learning the little opportunity to become actively involved in other groups or to devote the time and energy required to fight for positions giving them share in management.

(c) Structural factors — It is pointed out that even where women achieve higher education that education still prepares them for so called feminine occupations.

Participation in Politics in India, Pakistan, Srilanka and Bangladesh.

According to statistics published in 1988 it is estimated that out of a total of 31, 154 seats of legislative bodies (unicameral and lowerhouse of a bicameral legislature) in 145 countries worldwide where Parliament existed only 15% were held by women. Though there is a trend of very imperceptible increase in women's presence over the decade, the rate of increase is not uniform everywhere and even adverse trend is also noticeable. It may be stated on the basis of
available information from 73 countries that the representation of women in assemblies (unicameral and lower house) has increased from 12.5% in 1975 to 14.5% in 1988.77

Turning our attention to South Asia we will find that of the seven countries in South Asia, four countries had or are having women political heads and the general trend suggests that in most cases family, political linkages, political crises provide the background and serve as enabling environment for the entry and rise of these women in politics. The record of average Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan women in politics is not very encouraging. The causes of nonparticipation of women in politics may be — (a) There has been the problem of party backing (b) Women candidates have disliked the rough and tumble of political life78. The Indian Constitution empowers the state by Article 15(3) to make any ‘special provision for women and children even in violation of the fundamental obligations of non discrimination among citizens inter alia of sex. In view of this provision reservation of seats for women in local bodies or educational institutions has been held to be valid. The Directive principles of state policy also has provision. [Articles 39(a), 39(d) 39(c) and Article 42] and some of them concern women directly and have a special bearing on their status.79

In India there are a number of factors which account for low representation of women in national Parliament. Women in general do not have much interest in politics. This is supported by studies made by psychologists on women's aptitude and behaviour. The declining moral value, the increasing use of money to achieve political power and the criminalisation of politics are some of the factors which do not encourage women to take an active part in politics80.
No. of Contestants and those elected
and the Electoral Participation of Indian women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of M contestant</th>
<th>No. of F Contestant</th>
<th>Percentage F to M</th>
<th>Elected M</th>
<th>Elected F</th>
<th>Percentage F to M</th>
<th>Voting % of M</th>
<th>Voting % of F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1831</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>53.00</td>
<td>37.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>1474</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>467</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>56.00</td>
<td>38.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7.62</td>
<td>62.10</td>
<td>46.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>2300</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>489</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>66.70</td>
<td>55.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>2698</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>69.70</td>
<td>49.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>2369</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>65.62</td>
<td>54.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>4478</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>57.69</td>
<td>51.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>5149</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>8.64</td>
<td>63.61</td>
<td>68.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>491</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>70.90</td>
<td>43.90</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>52.56</td>
<td>47.42</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M = Male  
F = Female


The number of elected women in India compares favourably with other countries. As of June 1991 India's percentage of women in Parliament 7.1% compared favourably with U.S.A's 6.4%, the U.K's 6.3% and France's 5.7%.

In Pakistan as far as Islam is concerned, women may participate in political and public life. They are required neither to wear the veil nor to live in domestic seclusion but merely to behave in a modest fashion and to cover the body. The introduction of community councils with female members has given women...
the opportunity to participate in political and public life. According to the Pakistan Government, 4000 women are at present representatives in various urban and rural councils. Women are also calling for fair representation in those occupational groups being considered for separate admission to Parliament, including the so called professionals. The participation of the Pakistani women in the developmental process can be assessed by the fact that only 13.6% are economically active while the female literacy rate is 16%. If Pakistan gained international fame as the first Muslim country to elect a woman Prime Minister in 1988, only 6 women managed to win seats in Parliament in 1997 a representation of only 3%. The women of Pakistan have the political equality with men in the matter of political suffrage and the right to stand for election to any office and to contest any seat in the provincial or central Governments or local bodies. In 1957 there were 11 members of Parliament in West Pakistan, twelve in East Pakistan. The West Pakistan Cabinet then had a woman Deputy Minister of social welfare, Begum G. Ahmed Khan. Women played an important role in political parties. The Pakistan Muslim League and the Punjab Muslim league had women members and a considerable number of councillors. Begum Liaquat Ali Khan was the Ambassador in the Netherlands and Princess Abida Sultan was the Ambassador in Brazil. But the political power of women cannot be measured by this very small enlightened minority. Not only in Pakistan the women representation in other countries is not very encouraging. The percentage of women in Parliament has dropped over the years. The ratio is quite disproportionate to their population. Strangely enough 10 Parliament in the world do not even have a single woman representative. There are 33981 men Parliamentarians in the world whereas the number of women is only 4512 (13.28%). Only 7.7% Parliamentary group leaders and 9% of the Party spokespersons are women.
In Bangladesh during the movement for Pakistan Bangalee women's participation was marginal. Unlike the Congress, in the Muslim League's top hierarchy there was no woman. There was a separate women's wing of the party and Muslim League's women's wing's major function was to recruit the support of the Muslim women electorate for electoral purposes. The Bangladesh constitution provides for 15 reserved seats for women in Parliament. However the 1972 constitution did not prohibit women from contesting in general seats. Two women contested but failed to win from general seats in the March 1973 election. Because of the existence of a separate women's wing of the party, the top post a woman can aspire to in the party hierarchy is that of a women's secretary of all the political parties, only one woman held the post of an organising secretary — Mrs. Motia Chowdhury of the National Awami Party (Muzaffar Group). There is no woman in the Cabinet and two woman ministers of state during 1973-74 were in the traditionally women's portfolios social welfare and education. In the section dealing with fundamental rights, the constitution pledged that the state should not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of sex and accorded women equal rights with men in all spheres of public life. Atleast initially the Bengali Government fostered some political participation on the part of women. In its first national election, which was held in 1973, one year after independence, 56% of the electorate voted, of this 56% perhaps as many as 10% were women. Women from middle and upper class families and women who were educated had higher rates of participation. The deteriorating economic situation means that women who traditionally are the last to be fed, clothed and educated will receive even less. In a region of extreme want women and young children will be the most vulnerable to
diseases related to malnutrition. This may raise the infant mortality rate even higher and by doing so, depress even more the worth of child bearing\textsuperscript{86}.

In Srilanka, the Buddhist value system which was dominant in Srilankan society provided conditions for women's participation in religious, social and economic activity which were less restrictive than other indigenous traditions such as the Hindu and Islam. The response to employment through education was mixed because employment opportunities for females were limited. Females in lower strata of society entered the labour force at the lowest paid jobs in the unskilled and service sectors of the employment market\textsuperscript{87}. In Srilanka like many other countries the participation of women in politics in very low. In the Srilankan context names of Lady Molamure, Vivienne Goonewardene, Kusuma Gunawardena, Wimala Wijewardene (first woman Cabinet Minister won the Mirigame seat in 1956), Wimala Kannanangara, Sirimavo Bandarnaike\textsuperscript{88} deserve special mention. Srilankan women are now entering many spheres which were male dominated till recently but there is still paucity of women political leaders. Although Srilanka was the first modern nation to install a woman Prime Minister, Parliament has remained an overwhelmingly male institution. Along with 145 men, six women entered the House of representatives in 1970, the largest number of women ever elected to the chamber. Four women were returned as M.P.s in 1965, and earlier the number of women ranged between one and three. Till 1970 only two women have ever served in the Cabinet including Sirimavo Bandarnaike\textsuperscript{89}.

The basic career histories of the six women leaders of South Asia are more or less the same. Most of them had served a substantial period of political
apprenticeship before becoming P.M/President. They were married and typically about 40-45 years old when they became P.M/President. They did not have any other career option which their political active father/husband and main political rivals had. The most striking similarity of all the six women leader under study is that they all came from the politically active families of their respective countries having father/husband as country's ex-P.M/President. In South Asia we find that women have entered the arena of politics usually following the hereditary line. But this inheritance is not gained as a right for being a member of the family but rather based on the moral and personal qualities. They had to pass the test of leadership before being firmly established in power. In most cases a personal tragedy — political assassination in the family compelled these somewhat reluctant politicians to become proper politicians becoming P.M./President in due course.

Despite these basic similarities there are a number of marked differences. Indira Gandhi was groomed by her father to join politics though she was never seen as his political heir after his death. This is not true for the other five women leaders. Benazir and Chandrika had to face strong opposition from their brothers who wanted to carry on the political legacies of their parents. The political scenario within which the leaders function also differ to a large extent. Though poverty, underdevelopment, discrimination on the basis of sex are common to all the four countries, Pakistan and Bangladesh had several military coups and severe military interventions in the political process, Srilankan politics is threatened by violent ethnic strife and frequent assassination of the top political leaders, India though had somewhat stable democratic setup was often torn by ethnic crisis and perils of British imperialism. According to Marcus
Franda unlike other areas of South Asia, major social institutions such as caste, community, village and extended family are extremely weak in Bangladesh. Though Bangladesh does not have innumerable linguistic, religious and caste divisions found in India but personalistic conflicts have often proven to be far more intractable than straightforward ethnic divisions. (Stanley A. Kochanek, Patron-Client Politics and Business in Bangladesh, 1993; Pg-46).
REFERENCES:

1. Sanat Kr. Saha - Literacy and Development in South Asia, Contemporary South Asia, Nov 1996, Vol 5, No 3 Pg-266.
3. M.B. Naqvi - Challenges and Opportunities for South Asia, Contemporary South Asia Vol-1, No-1, 1992, U.K., Pg-143-146 (Pg-143).
34. Manisha Behal - Status of Women in Asia, Link, June 14, 1992, Pg-34.
35. S.K. Ghosh - op.cit, Pg-3.
37. Manisha Behal - op.cit, Pg-34.
40. Ibid., Pg-ix (Preface).
41. Georgina Ashworth - op.cit, Pg-146.
43. H.E.M. Perera - op.cit, Pg-71.
44. Ibid., Pg-71.


47. Georgina Ashworth - op.cit, Pg-148.

48. Raunaq Jahan - op.cit, Pg-60.

49. Farah Kabir and Farzana Hossain - op.cit, Pg-25.


52. Raunaq Jahan - Ibid., Pg-58.


54. S.K. Ghosh - op.cit, Pg-185.

55. Shanta Bhatt - op.cit, Pg-186.


69. Chandra Ranaraja - op.cit, Pg-78.

70. Georgina Waylen - op.cit, Pg-11.

71. Urmil Yadav - op.cit, Pg-64.

72. Georgina Waylen - op.cit, Pg-12.


79. K. Jayalakshmi - op.cit, Pg 325.


82. Heinz Guntherklein and Renate Netrogel - op.cit, Pg-97-98.


88. Chandra Ranaraja - op.cit, Pg-75.