

Women in Power

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Time: MTWTh, 8:00-10:00

Office Hours: Thurs, 10:00-12:00

Introduction

A recent UN study (1992) presents a depressing picture of women's minimal involvement in political affairs all over the world. The right of citizenship and enfranchisement has failed to ensure the attainment of real equality in the world of politics, especially at a mass level. Despite women's under representation in modern political institutions, a few women have managed to ascend to the highest positions of power (prime ministers and presidents) in some countries, especially during the last four decades (1960-1995).

The most striking feature of this phenomenon is that the number of women in power positions is largest in underdeveloped, conservative and traditional societies where the common woman is still a victim of socio-political and economic inequalities, in countries like Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the Philippines. Interestingly, despite the attainment of equalities and freedom in so-called liberated, open and developed societies, fewer of these women have managed to occupy the highest echelons of political power in their societies.

Whether in developed or underdeveloped societies, it is interesting to note that all women heads of government have achieved their political positions not through "short cuts" or "back doors" like coup d'etats, monarchical inheritance or revolution, but through tough political struggles and by contesting general elections. They have always come to power with the consent of the male elite of their political parties and through popular mandate.

Course Objective

This course intends to examine the emergence and performance of women prime ministers and presidents in different parts of the world. The central assumption of this course is that to understand the phenomena of the rise of women political leaders, we need to discuss: 1) the socio-political factors for their ascension to power; 2) the presence or absence of the gender factor in their selection as party leaders; and 3) the similarities and differences between their struggles, achievements, and failures. The course will revolve around two basic questions:

- * How do women get selected as party leaders by the male party elite?
- * How do women get elected by the public in predominantly patriarchal socio-political systems?

In addition, there are many more queries which need to be addressed while teaching a course on the topic of women in power. They are:

- * Are there different factors responsible for the emergence of women political leaders in developed and underdeveloped countries?
- * Why are there more women in power in underdeveloped countries than in the developed world?
- * What kind of similarities and differences are present among women leaders' political struggles, party careers, and their performance as leaders in the developed and underdeveloped worlds?
- * Does it make any difference to the female segment of the society to have a woman prime minister or president?

The course will be divided into three sections:

- I. Survey of women leaders in the underdeveloped countries.
- II. Survey of women leaders in the developed countries.
- III. A comparative analysis of Sections I & II.

Readings

Since there is no single work available which covers biographical details or the political careers of most women leaders, it does not seem advisable to suggest any one textbook. I have managed to collect basic information about these women through daily newspapers reports and some scholarly articles from research journals and periodicals, and these will be made available in at the reserve desk of the library according to the weekly reading assignments.

Course Requirements/Grading

- I. Completion of weekly reading assignments.
- II. Class attendance and participation.
- III. Short analytical report due by end of Section I (25% of grade).
- IV. Short analytical report due to end of Section II (25% of grade).
- V. Final examination (50% of grade).