

# UNFOLDING THE REALITY



## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Published by : South Asia Partnership International  
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Supported By : Oxfam Novib

Date of Publication : December 2007

Printed at : SAP-Nepal Publishing House  
GPO 3827, SAP Falcha, Babarmahal  
Kathamadnu, Nepal  
Tel: 977-1-4223230

## ABOUT THE REPORT

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This report, *Unfolding The Realities: Silenced Voices of Women in Politics* is an endeavor to explore violence faced by women politicians in the South Asian Region. It reflects on the realities of violence, intimidation and practices that adversely affect the active participation of South Asian women in decision-making.

The report is divided into six parts. Part One consists of introduction and has two sub sections. The first sub section provides an overview of violence against women in politics while the second sub section gives a brief description on politics, power, violence and women.

Part Two provides a concise description of women in politics in South Asia and consists of two sub sections. First sub section provides an introduction to gender perspectives of political history in South Asia and the second sub section describes international instruments and national legal provisions for protection of women and reflects on the inadequacy of laws and regulations minus translation in practice.

Part Three is about various forms of repression and resistance against women. It consists of three sub sections. The first sub section identifies and describes different types of violent actions and types of victims. The second sub section is description of the types of perpetrators and their aims of using violence against women. The third sub section is the analysis of nature and level of organization where violence is perpetuated.

Part Four is an explanation of those patriarchal devices used for manipulation of female subordination. It analyses the cultural, structural, institutional and agency explanations to reveal these as causing and reinforcing factors for violence against women in politics. It consists of four sub sections. The first sub section provides a brief on cultural factor as a device of patriarchy weakening female politicians. The second sub section tells about the structural devices to maintain patriarchal interest and power. The third and fourth sub section provides institutional explanations for understanding VAWIP and agency factors that perpetuate violence against female politicians respectively.

Part Five provides the portrayal of VAWIP in South Asian region. . It consists of two sub sections. The first sub section gives an idea of how media portrayal of women is mostly stereotypical and contributes to perpetuate violence against women, more so against female politicians. It also refers to the potential of using media in a positive manner so that the media becomes an ally in addressing the issues. The second sub section identifies the misconception at the core of VAWIP.

Part Six is conclusive and deduces the making and unmaking of female politicians. It provides conclusions of the report and forward-looking regional level strategies for future research and initiatives to counter violence against women in politics.

**UNFOLDING THE REALITIES**  
**Silenced Voices of**  
**Women in Politics**



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**KATHMANDU**

# FOREWORD

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Political participation of women in the state structure and mechanisms in South Asia is still a far dream even in this 21st century. Though, Constitutions of all the countries have ensured equal status of all citizens without discrimination based on gender in every level of governance, political participation of women is still very low. Higher positions of decision-making and policy formation remains dominated by males and majority of them with the patriarchal mindset.

This ***Unfolding the Reality: Silenced Voices of Women in Politics*** portrays dimensions of violence against women in politics. It reflects the issues pertaining to the structural form of violence affecting women at various levels of South Asian society.

The study has tried to pursue the reality of sufferings of women in their pursuit to achieve the career in politics. The patriarchal mindset of South Asian society has hindered actions of women in their effort to reach the goal to serve society at large. Continued violence beginning from family to society and political party have discouraged sincere women to indulge actively in political domain. Violence have emerged in various forms and nature within the sphere of their work at society and political levels. National laws and mechanisms have not favoured women politicians in the effort to democratize the polity through gender balance.

Political system and institutions are the primary actors which have to play crucial role to enhance political participation of women by minimizing violence in the political spheres. Political leaders, therefore, must admit this bitter truth and try to resolve in their capacity as policy makers. Many South Asian politicians have failed to realize the existence of culture of violence in politics which grossly discourages women to enter into this public domain.

Participation of women in politics in South Asian countries is primarily linked with the status of women in family, society and the state structures. Traditional moral code of the society expects women to remain confined within four walls of home, which is still a common phenomenon. In some of the countries of South Asia women are forbidden even to cast votes. The few women, who have been successful in positioning themselves in politics, either belong to rich ruling class or represent political dynasties. It is unimaginable for a common rural woman to enter into and acquire positions in politics.

Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWIP) is a South Asian regional program executed by SAP-International in collaboration with SAP-Nationals and partner with the support of Oxfam Novib. SAP-Bangladesh, SAP-Nepal, SAP-Pakistan, SAP-Sri Lanka and Youth for Action-India are collaborative partners to execute the program within their national territory. This regional study is one of the major accomplishments of VAWIP program. National Situation Analysis reports, Case Study Reports and other documents prepared by the SAP national and partner organizations form the basis for this document.

This study has not been able to accomplish all the dimensions of the issues of VAWIP. However, we feel that this is just a stepping stone towards building a new arena for addressing the issues of VAWIP by breaking the silence.

This study is expected to be a milestone on the way of individual and institutional initiatives to combat violence against women in politics in South Asia.

**Rohit Kumar Nepali, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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This regional study could not have been possible without collective efforts of many individuals and organizations. Being one of the pioneer study in the areas of violence against women in politics it was difficult for SAP International to access secondary information and appropriate persons to carry out the study of this magnitude.

In this endeavour towards laying down the foundation stone Dr. Manju Thapa Tuladhar deserves special thanks for her hard work and dedication in carrying out the critical analysis and writing the report, without whose untiring efforts the study would not have been accomplished.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to Oxfam Novib for the support in implementation of the two-year VAWIP program in five South Asian nations, including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

We would like to thank SAP Bangladesh, Youth for Action India, SAP Pakistan, SAP Nepal and SAP Sri Lanka for their tireless efforts in completion of this study. Since the country reports form the basis for this document, we express our firm appreciation to all the consultants, researchers and other members of the national study teams.

Binisha Shrestha Ranjitkar, Anshu Singh, Luna Malla and Upendra Kumar Poudel deserve thanks for their significant contribution in preparing this document. We express our sincere thanks to Shikha Shrestha for her continuous encouragement for completion of the study. Without their hard work, this report would not have come out into this form.

Thanks also goes to Prakash Shrestha for his contribution in editing the entire document despite the time constraint.

Geshan Manandhar and Nawaraj Puri also deserve special thanks for their contribution in cover designing and layout of the report.

## ABBREVIATIONS

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CEDAW	Convention for elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
DEVAW	Declaration on elimination of violence against women
ICCPR	International convention on civil and political rights
UDHR	Universal declaration of human rights
UN	United Nations
VAW	Violence against women
VAWIP	Violence against women in politics
SAP	South Asia Partnership
SAP I	South Asia Partnership International

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## **PART - I.** INTRODUCTION

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### **1. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS (VAWIP): AN OVERVIEW**

Violence against women in politics is a major problem in South Asia, yet it still remains a relatively new and unreported issue. “Violence Against Women In Politics” includes any act/s of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women politicians, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life; within family, inter or intra-political party level, at societal and at state level during their political career. It also includes any act of violence against any family member of woman politician, which can affect her mental well being deterring her political participation.

VAWIP also comprises acts of violence committed by an establishment, organization, institution, individual or individuals ways, which breach, obstruct, or curtail democratic processes of electing a female candidate running for political office, and as a consequence violating her political rights. All acts of violence committed before, during and after elections by the state, political parties or individual against any individual running for the election, undertaking power sharing process within political parties and supporting the woman politician’s election campaigns will be considered as violations of human rights, as well as an obstruction to the democratic processes of electing a female candidate to political office.

In spite of conflict prevention and gender mainstreaming policies made to address inequity, exclusion and indignity by multi lateral corporations, bilateral development agencies and non government organizations, women continue to face shortcomings in terms of meaningful commitment to address complex challenges at an operational level. There is a sad history in many institutions of ‘mainstreaming’ gender meaning ‘forget it’.

Among the much violence faced by women various hindrances that women undergo everyday in the process of their political career are also a major setback. Women’s political participation refers to their ability to participate equally with men in all aspects of public and political life. However, instead of being leaders or equal partners women are always expected to be either followers or supporters of men in politics. The low percentage of women occupying political positions in South Asian region reflects this inequality. Many South Asian countries have adopted a quota system or reservation for women’s political participation, but the level of participation of women from the grassroots and the lower social

strata is still negligible. Women's average representation in parliaments of South Asian nations was 11.7% as of February 2006, which is still far below the world average of 17%<sup>1</sup>.

South Asian states possess diverse political courses of development. However, seen from gender perspective, the region of South Asia bears a common political history. This is one of the regions in the world where there is wide gender gap in politics. Women's legislative representation in 2004 for Bangladesh is 2 percent, Bhutan and India 9 percent each, Maldives and Nepal 6 percent each, Pakistan 22 percent and Sri Lanka 4 percent.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Pakistan no other countries have reserved seats for women in parliament, which also explains its higher representation than other states. Sri Lanka may be the first country in the world to have chosen a female prime minister in 1960, but its female representation to date testifies its dismal progress in terms of broadening women's participation in politics.

Women's successful activism in politics began with struggles for independence and legitimized their political participation in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, producing various powerful female heads of state.<sup>3</sup> On the surface, it appears that female leaders or politicians in these four countries may have better standing in political parties or may exercise greater influence for gender empowerment. In reality, those heads of states have little to show of their commitment to gender representation and equality. Most female politicians are elites belonging to ruling or dynastic families, with weak grassroots legitimacy in politics. Nevertheless, the question of female representation in the legislature has become a hot issue, with demands for quotas within political party organizations and reservations of seats in the legislature.

At local level, South Asian states may have something to show statistically in terms of female representation, with 33 percent of reserved seats in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and 20 percent in Nepal.<sup>4</sup> In reality, these female representatives have little chew in local governance processes when it comes to exercising influence. That women's right to represent alone does not do justice to gender equality is an acknowledged fact. The emphasis to female representation minus empowerment has become a toothless act, and in spite of demands for both, most South Asian states favor the idea of representation (that too in little stages) over women empowerment.

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<sup>1</sup> Source <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Mumtaz, K, 2005, Women's representation, effectiveness and leadership in South Asia, Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference, Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten, Islamabad, 3-5 May, 2005

<sup>3</sup> Nepal does not have colonial history; however Nepalese women are known to have played a crucial role in struggles against Rana oligarchy during which time independence movement was rife in the Indian subcontinent.

<sup>4</sup> Sri Lanka does not have any quota system at the local level.

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Governments and political parties, including those headed by women fear challenging existing power relations and facing consequences of losing power or are indifferent to women empowerment (or both). Political parties play a crucial but dubious role in strengthening representative democratization processes in South Asia. The nature of the state that is in the making in South Asia is characterized by people's loss of trust in the very institutions that can strengthen democracy. Studies point out that such erosion of trust is due to the political parties' lack of responsiveness to people's need and their blatant abuse of power in public office.

The politics of representation characterized by exclusion of women and larger sections of the poor and disadvantaged population further isolates and continues to generate deep animosity towards political parties. Yet, political parties remain not only indispensable institutions for democratic politics but also agents of transforming the condition and position of women in South Asian society. Therefore, developing an understanding of political parties and their culture of politics in connection with political empowerment of female candidates and elected female leaders has become pertinent.

Women's political participation is a vital component of democracy and there is diversity in politics. However, arguments on representation of women in politics tend to be lopsided and miss out on the hidden factors restraining meaningful participation of women across diverse characteristics of class, caste, and ethnic, religious, linguistic or age groups. Women hesitate to enter politics because of the fear of violence that has become associated with the political process. Moreover, women in the South Asian Region have lower status than men that impedes women's political participation. Very few prominent female leaders with rural and dalit origin are in Indian politics, and almost nil in other countries. The question of diversity in politics has not become the subject of discussion and is not linked with female political empowerment. This also gives a very narrow glimpse of female suppression in politics and there is the need to widen and deepen the discourse on restraints and violence faced by female politicians across South Asia.

In South Asia, violence is one of the root causes of lower female participation in politics. Perpetuation of exclusive and traditional styles of political culture in the region raises alarming bells for government, non-government and regional actors to address the issue of violence against women in politics at the regional level. Politics and decision-making are closely guarded as men's privileged areas, enlisting male domination in formal political institutions and organization structures of political parties. Female politicians in the region face many forms of violence due to this entrenched gender insensitive and male oriented political culture. The intensely competitive world of men dominated politics, patriarchal

mindset and masculine model of political system, is a major obstacle to women's political participation. In South Asia, politics ensures status and is a lucrative source of income and power over which men desire to exercise singular control. The reluctance of political parties to nominate female candidates is a crucial factor, denying women's right to participation in governance. Moreover, the media as well as civil society are yet to acknowledge the essence and credibility of female participation in politics.

The status of violence against South Asian women politicians remains a scantily explored area, and available literature on the subject mostly consists of bits of isolated studies touching only some aspect of the issue. Men, women and various institutions of society and government have violated female politicians' right to participate in political governance, forcing many female politicians to quit their political career and at worse face various types of violent acts such as character assassination and blame, stigmatization, threats and coercion, sexual harassment, denial of rightful office, rape and sexual exploitation and, murder and physical assault. The first three are easily talked about and not even perceived as violence, while sexual harassment and denial of rightful office to deserving female politicians are much hidden and taboo in higher levels of decision-making. Far from acknowledging it as violence, there is silence surrounding these actions. Rape and sexual exploitation and murder and physical assault of female politicians become sensational news items and are limited to that.

The prevalence of a "Culture of Silence" among women is primarily responsible for unreported cases of violence. Many female politicians silently suffer violence accepting it as a part of the unchangeable South Asian culture. The deep-rooted cultural barrier and the inability to break this silence have for a long time hampered female political participation. There is hope that some concerted efforts of the VAWIP project<sup>5</sup>, female politicians, academics, media activists and women's pressure groups are contributing in breaking the cultural silence. Voices are resounding to reject violence and criminalize any forms of abuse and discrimination against women in general, and specifically, in this instance against female politicians, if South Asian states are to respect women's right to participate effectively at all levels of politics. It is important that perpetrators of violence are named, shamed and accounted for as Common perpetrators but not limited to these are political parties including members of own and opposition parties, male superiors and colleagues in work places, members of extremist religious organizations, security forces, bureaucrats, police officials and family

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<sup>5</sup> Violence against women in politics (VAWIP) project is initiated by South Asia Partnership International (SAP-I) with the financial support from Oxfam Novib during 2006- 2007. The purpose of the project is to contribute in creating enabling environment to establish democratic practices towards inclusion of marginalized women in political decision-making processes in South Asia.

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members. A common perception is that perverts, thugs or criminals perpetrate violence; the above list breaks this misconception. Female politicians can be at risk of violence from those they work and live with, at home, office and at in public places. And the horridness of this is that most violated women do not feel safe to talk openly about such violence happening to them just because society is judgmental against women in politics and state agencies choose not to take actions against violators. It is timely that this report<sup>6</sup> brings out all of this in many hues and colors, in chunks and pieces, sadly that this continues to happen but with firm determination that there is a lot that can be done to change the situation. It is essential to note that prior to knowledge creation, much in depth and wide ranging literature is yet to be produced on this issue, and SAP International's initiative comes as a breaking new ground in an arena where the issue of violence against women has traditionally received much focus on the private or domestic spheres or in contexts of conflict, war or disaster<sup>7</sup>.

Attempts have been made to produce comprehensive and de-simplified definition of violence against women and its reverberations for gender equality and political participation.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This report initiated under VAWIP project is the result of efforts of many individual and institutions and a mixture of variety of processes. Desk study of international and South Asian literature and primary research undertaken by various organizations and authors contributed in compilation and analysis of information for this report. SAP International's collection of a wide range of information on the issue of violence against women in politics in South Asia, gender issues and its network of national partners in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka contributed to the richness and diversity of information presented in this report. The country studies undertaken by SAP International and the national SAP partners in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were the primary source of information. Country studies excluded Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives and their inclusion would have benefited this report. Other important sources included country papers presented in the Regional Conference held in Kathmandu on September 18 – 20, 2007, Regional Conference report, web based materials, electronic discussion portals and networks. The participation of delegates from Afghanistan and two paper presentations contributed much to inclusion of information on Afghanistan in this report. It is also important to caution that this research concentrates on a few geographic locations and groups and individuals and does not reflect the overall general situation of countries or the region of South Asia. Its limited coverage and resource constraints make it difficult to generalize at this level and do not attempt to do so. Much analysis is limited to available knowledge and resources at the disposal of this research.

<sup>7</sup> This report thus uses individual case studies of key female politicians in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Information for individual cases were derived through semi-structured interviews or use of structured questionnaires and documented by national partners. Individual case studies contribute in adding to the background where individual cases in various socio economic and political context of South Asia inform to provide fuller picture of violence against women. This is highlighted with the gravity of the issue in the current context of gender equality and women's rights to participate in governance without fear of violence.

<sup>8</sup> This also became possible due to the comprehensive literature review provided by each country studies and the range of information supplied regarding political representation of women in each countries studied.

The assimilation of wide range of information derived from international literature, primary research and individual case studies of female politicians in the region<sup>9</sup>, and their consolidated analysis help to conceptualize violence against women as complex because its nature and scope differs according to diverse contexts, and is about exercise of power; addressing the issue is important at a higher level because of the institutional commitment required to translate gender equality and power sharing; it runs at a deeper level and requires understanding of the hidden issues and not just the visible symptoms of violence. Violence against women is interrelated because it has various forms, and is embedded in culture, structure, norms and institutions and in self-agency, which contribute to gender inequality, and rights violation at many levels of citizenship, governance and human development.

For all these arguments, several questions are raised in this whole scenario.

- Why is there fear of women empowerment?
- *What factor perpetuates the fear of losing power over feminist politics?*

Various studies in this issue of low female participation in legislative bodies indicate a complex set of factors ranging from economic, social and political disempowerment. Some reports throw light on why female politicians and heads of state have neglected issues of women oppression. Analysts argue that patriarchal values - that entitle men to greater power, prestige and wealth are deeply embedded in our social and political institutions – are used to perpetuate sex based inequality and that it was in the self interest of the elite female leaders to represent certain class interests over gender. Such values and interests are necessarily identified as ones that perpetuate male supremacy over females. These highly powerful female leaders would not have climbed the power ladder in the first instance if they did not follow the structured ideology of male dominance.

Despite these discriminations, some women have still managed to maintain a position for themselves and have reached high places. South Asia has given the world the first woman Prime Minister from Sri Lanka in 1960; Sirimavo Bandaranaike was the pioneer who laid down the emotional track for all the successive woman leaders in the region to follow her example and go on to being placed at prominent positions in local, national and regional levels of government. This was nearly 50 years ago, since then; the likes of Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Megawati Sukarnoputri, Hasina Begum and Begum Khalida Zia have set more examples for future generations.

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<sup>9</sup> Each country studies and other international literature elsewhere on the topic contribute in deriving a sense of urgency of attention required to learn and exchange more in depth on the issue and the need to create pressure for institutional commitments to address gender discrimination at a complex, higher and deeper level.



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No doubt most top-level female politicians in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka chose not to raise or address the larger cause of women oppression or even symbolically represent the cause of the majority of the rural grassroots women in South Asia. True, that even powerful female politicians and leaders in South Asia have failed to push for gender equality in decision-making bodies within their own political organizations. This raises attention to the problem that, apart from female representation much deeper issues of female suppression and learned indifference to women empowerment are being blatantly sidelined.

In most South Asian societies, a large number of women are illiterate or less educated and are economically, socially and psychologically dependent on men. These women lack leadership to take up issues on various levels due to several factors:

- Traditional societal standards of sexual inequality
- Lack of female leadership and lack of a powerful social movement
- Physical Incapabilities
- Loopholes in the judicial system and lack of proper legal protection
- Weak personality developed due to the socialization process
- Security problems, lack of mobility, lack of facilities, criminalization, humiliation by officials are other factors, which discourage women to participate in politics

Gender equality remains a myth and is an important issue with human rights and social justice activists. Despite much hype and the increasing number of 'sensitized' individuals and groups in the region who have taken up the issue and are perpetually initiating campaigns, rallies, conferences, publications at various levels, women continue to suffer deprivation in diverse fields and are still considered to fit best at the lowest rung of the ladder.

It is a fact that female oppression is largely a question of unequal power relationship between the sexes. Exercise of power by males over females is well structured and institutionalized in different ways in different cultures. Violence against women is one way of expressing this male supremacy. In politics this fear is hidden even though it is common knowledge that women in general dread to enter the world of politics. On deeper thoughts, questions should have been raised -

- How is fear experienced by female politicians different or similar across class, caste, ethnicity, social background, age or their area of origin?
- Who benefits from creation of fear in politics?

There is a huge gap in research on these questions. This research will not have adequate resources to answer even partially some of these bigger questions. Some incidental stories in the media, recent initiatives of VAWIP and a few other reports and studies through informal networks can be used to reflect on the gravity of some of these questions.

Firstly, to understand the hidden factor of fear, one has to first deconstruct the meanings of what we commonly understand by violence against women and how one defines key terminologies and concepts.

## **2. POLITICS, POWER, VIOLENCE AND WOMEN**

Politics consists of “social relations involving authority or power”<sup>10</sup> and refers to the regulation of a political unit,<sup>11</sup> and to the methods and tactics used to formulate and apply policy.<sup>12</sup> It is the process by which groups of people make decisions. Similarly, power can be defined as the ability or official capacity to exercise control. Violence is the abusive or unjust exercise of power. Women have been facing violence equally in public and private arena. One of the major consequences of to the unjust exercise of power of states, political parties and society as a whole is the women’s lack of participation in decision –making.

### **2.1 POLITICS AND POWER**

Politics refers to government and the public policy making processes.<sup>13</sup> It is the regulation and government of a nation-state or other political unit, and refers to the methods and tactics used to formulate and apply government policy. A broad definition of politics refers to the activities or processes, by which groups make decisions. Therefore it involves activism, exercise of authority or power or any maneuvering in order to enhance one’s power or status within a group. Politics in its most basic form consists of social relations involving authority or power. Politics includes a broad spectrum of the public sphere ranging across various disciplines or sectors.

Politics is seen as the highest arena where abilities to exercise power and command respect and honor (prestige) and the rights to economic wealth are solely entitled to men. Power, prestige and wealth are used in politics to create strong networks of men and maintain their own interests. Most discussions that highlighted on whether or how women’s political participation makes a difference

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<sup>10</sup> Definition of politics from die.net

<sup>11</sup> [http://everything2.com/index.pl?node\\_id=303454](http://everything2.com/index.pl?node_id=303454)

<sup>12</sup> Definition of politics from the free dictionary

<sup>13</sup> From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

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reasoned on two different arguments - the right to participate and represent in governance, and the qualitative difference women as distinct groups can make in politics. Considering the merit of both arguments, much debate is lacking on why even those women that have managed to make politics their career are still unable to gain positions of power and if they assume power, why they lose or are denied prestige.

The concept of power and differing dimensions and aspects of power, including the authority, relate to the social characteristics of the powerful and the powerless. A small minority of elite people belonging to high castes, with inherited power, rule in the current socio-economic realities of South Asia. Women in general do not stand a chance to represent in state politics, as they are powerless and marginalized in South Asian society. Existence of political inheritance syndrome makes it more difficult for women politicians to avoid violence in the process of sharing power and occupying the position in decision-making process through systemic processes. The consequence of such a tradition in politics is not only who rules in society but also how political power is created, legitimised and reproduced.

One way of doing this is through criminalization of politics. It is a highly dominating factor in the region: threat and violence inflicted by political parties and political cadres and vote rigging. This influences the acceleration of violence against women in politics and women are coerced to become pawn at the hands of male politicians either following or supporting them, instead of being leaders or equal partners. Men thus take major decisions in political parties and female politicians are asked to support their decisions. Political parties led by men also push female activists in the forefront of rallies and processions, so women absorb all beating and mugging. Therefore there are a slim percentage of women occupying political positions in South Asian countries, which reflects this inequity.<sup>14</sup>

Women participation is actually a manifestation of the democratic processes that exist within the family, the society and the political framework. The more democratic the structures the more power is given to women. As the current political structures in the democratic institutions of the region are more hierarchical, autocratic and non transparent, the power structures of political governance is dominated by men and do not provide much space for women to play productive role in promoting just society.

Reports from all parts of the world point to the fact that violence against women is a “manifestation of the unequal power relationship” between men and women and exists in all societies.<sup>15</sup> Yet such violence is underreported if not “normalized” as acceptable social behaviour.

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<sup>14</sup> Political Representation of Women of South Asia by Ranjana Kumari

<sup>15</sup> DEVAW, preamble para 4; WHO,2002, World Report on Violence and Health

Violence in the family, society and through religious bigotry and propaganda e.g. Fatwa<sup>16</sup> used against women's leadership to defame her by the political and religious extremism can be considered political violence. Ethnic, caste and class conflict along with existence of prevalent communalism also nurtures violence in South Asian politics. Existing patriarchy or patriarchal social structure in the region dominated by feudal norms and values forces discrimination to start from the family leading to political parties and ultimately at the societal level. Denying women of opportunities to be in power politics shows a demonstration of power by men in politics.

## 2.2 DEFINING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

### WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (VAW)?

When referring to VAW, this report adopts the definition of the International Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) as –

*Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.*

Violence against women is slowly emerging as a major issue of concern globally. Unfortunately information of violence against women is hard to come by because most of it remains unreported. This is not only because much of it takes place within the home but also because the women who survive violence of different kinds are also held responsible for provoking it, and so keep silent.

The situation with regard to violence against women in South Asia is being slowly revealed by a growing number of studies. South Asia is classified as the worst region in terms of indicators with the highest rates of different forms of violence against women.<sup>17</sup> This region is well known for its patriarchal social systems and there is a very high degree of culturally prescribed power and prestige associated. Violence against women is accepted as an intrinsic part of this social system. The patriarchal systems not only condone but also contribute to discrimination against women and denial of many of their fundamental rights, through various culturally prescribed practices and norms. Women grow up in a climate of violence at home as well as outside including the educational institution, community, and workplace as well as in state institutions. Women learn to accept and abide by violence. Violence also includes insults, restrictions, torture, kidnapping, trafficking, female feticide, etc.

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<sup>16</sup> Judgment given by the clergy in Islamic religion

<sup>17</sup> UNICEF 2001a A Reference Kit on Violence Against Women and Girls in South Asia, Kathmandu, UNICEF, ROSA

### **Box 1. Violence Against Women**

Violence against women occurs throughout the world, among the rich, poor, and middle class, and among those of every nationality, religion, and race. Violence is something that some men learn. Men's violence is a result of the way many men learn to express their masculinity in relationships with women, children, and other men. Many men learn to think that the use of violence is acceptable. Change will occur if: we each accept personal responsibility to make sure it happens; challenge sexist language and jokes that degrade women; learn to identify and oppose sexual harassment and violence in the workplace, school and family; support local women's programmes; work towards long-term solutions.

*\* The White Ribbon Campaign website*

**Domestic violence** is often called intimate partner abuse that has emerged as a distinct class of violence. The home, it is often assumed is a safe place for women, but it is increasingly becoming evident that this safe haven is perhaps the riskiest place for women to be in – no matter which stage in their lives they are in. While many consider abuse by the “intimate partner” – in most cases the husband as being the most important, the spectrum of violence within the confines of the home includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, desertion, deprivation of food, severe restriction on mobility and so on. These could be meted out to children, sisters, daughters, wives, sisters-in-law, to almost any female relative living in the household.

Domestic violence includes physical, psychological, or economic abuse of a woman by her partner or ex-partner or by another person within the home or family. Domestic violence interferes with women's participation in developing economic growth, building democracies, protecting the environment, educating children, and determining family size.

### **WHAT IS PHYSICAL OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE?**

**Physical violence** includes any violent act such as murder, rape, physical mutilation or disfiguring, abduction, etc, resulting in bodily harm. Such violence could lead to psychological harm or suffering.

**Sexual violence** is defined in the World Report on Violence and Health as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic a person's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless of relationship to the victim, in any

setting, including but not limited to home and work”. Sexual violence includes physically forced or otherwise coerced sex; attempts at coerced sex; assault with a sexual organ; sexual harassment, including sexual humiliation; forced marriage or cohabitation, including marriage of children; forced pregnancy; forced prostitution and trafficking in women; forced abortion; denial of the right to use contraception or protect oneself from disease; and acts of violence against women’s sexuality. Coercion can cover a whole spectrum of degrees of force. Apart from physical force, it may involve psychological intimidation, blackmail or other threats – for instance, the threat of physical harm, of being dismissed from a job or of not obtaining a job that is sought. It may also occur when the person aggressed is unable to give consent – for instance, while drunk, drugged, asleep or mentally incapable of understanding the situation.

### **WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE?**

Any form of violence or its threat, pressure or discrimination that leads to physical harm, trauma, stress and mental pressure are termed as psychological violence.

Violence against women is prominently seen or discussed only in relation to women’s physical suffering or deaths. Violence that is sexual or psychological in nature and those that occur in the public domain is omitted from public discourse and usually met with resistance or denial. Institutions that deal with such issues are yet to be set up or if they exist then their activism and influence is neglected or unacknowledged. Intense discourse on sexual harassment or discrimination that takes place in highly masculine work places and political institutions is missing. It is in this context, that the meaning of VAW needs to be further explored and brought to light.

### **WHAT IS SEXUAL HARASSMENT?**

One definition of sexual harassment, according to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is, any form of sex discrimination including unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. And when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual’s employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual’s work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment it constitutes sexual harassment.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Employees in the US are protected by Sex Discrimination Act. It explicates non tolerance of sexual harassment in its guidelines as “Prevention is the best tool to eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace. Employers are encouraged to take steps necessary to prevent sexual harassment from occurring. They should clearly communicate to employees that sexual harassment will not be tolerated. They can do so by providing sexual harassment training to their employees and by establishing an effective complaint or grievance process and taking immediate and appropriate action when an employee complains”.

## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Bernard and Schlaffer clarify that “like other forms of sexual violence, harassment has little to do with the individual woman and nothing to do with the sex; the issue is power”.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it is pertinent to see what power signifies in politics and what aspects of power reinforce what forms of violence against women in politics.

**Political Violence:** Political violence is categorized into various forms such as a) turmoil, b) conspiracy and c) Internal war. Turmoil considered being relatively spontaneous unorganized political violence with substantial political participation such as violent strikes, riots, rebellions. Conspiracy tends to be highly organized political violence with limited participation in the forms of terrorism, coup d’etat, mutinies, assassinations etc. Internal war considered to be highly organized, widespread popular participation designed to overthrow the regime or dissolve the state and accompanied by extensive violence such as large scale terrorism, guerilla wars, civil wars, revolutions.

### WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS?

Women’s participation in politics and political violence against women are two separate areas of discussion. While the first addresses woman’s involvement in governance and her taking a leadership in politics the second is about victimization of women due to political ideology. Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka share a common phenomenon in politics. Though all are dominated by a dynastic political culture each country has its own intricacies and histories. In Sri Lanka ethnic disparities combined with political ideology are the major causes for political violence against women. Casteism plays a vital role in the politics of India. In Pakistan gender combined with practice of traditional value is a prominent feature of politics. Within such context violence against women in politics is located in the overlap between women’s participation in politics and political violence against women.

This means that violence against women in politics consists of aspects relating to political rights of women rooted in various institutions, forms and structures of democracy and acts defined as gender related violence affecting women within and outside family, social structures, political parties and political system. Therefore, in order to understand the dynamics of violence, political violence, violence against women and women in politics one needs to identify their intersections and understand association of these factors.

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<sup>19</sup> Bernard and Schlaffer, 1983, “The Man in the Street”: why he harasses, In Richardson and Taylor, *Feminist Frontiers: rethinking sex, gender and society*.

Violence has generally been associated with revolution, war or organized crime. The 21st century has seen large-scale violence in these categories and much of mass violence has been a product of guerilla or undeclared warfare, including struggles of liberation from colonial rule, and conflicts between different power groups.<sup>20</sup> Carolina De Los Rios<sup>21</sup> explains that,

*“Violence is a common method used to achieving particular ends... at three different levels: economic, social and political. These levels are intertwined and converge toward the same purpose: the achievement of economic, social and/or political power. Social violence represents disturbances at a more interpersonal level such as domestic violence while economic violence could be ‘street crime, carjacking, robbery/theft, drug trafficking, kidnapping, and assaults’ among others. The political level portrays a more collective sphere manifested in ‘guerrilla conflict, paramilitary conflict, political assassinations, armed conflict between political parties, rape and sexual abuse as political act and forced pregnancy/sterilization’.”<sup>22</sup>*

These three levels of violence usually interact simultaneously, especially in developing countries where economic and social violence are triggered by the extreme conditions of deprivation and oppression. Under these circumstances the likely emergence of organized groups looking to achieve political power is very high. For example, in Colombian urban areas where indices of economic violence have reached alarming levels, economic disparity is used to the advantage of guerrillas and paramilitaries as a means for recruiting new members for their anti-revolutionary causes. Therefore, violence needs to be understood as a continuum influenced by different factors and circumstances, where the boundaries among social, economic and political violence are sometimes diffuse and difficult to distinguish. Perpetrators involved in any or in all of these instances of violence share similar desires for gaining and maintaining an idealized power that allows control over others. However, in order to understand the dynamics within which each type of violence is conceived, it is necessary to delimit and categorize them.

In absence of a common definition, and in light of the above discussions a functional definition of Violence against women in politics (VAWIP) worked out.

The definition of the word “women in politics” under this program denotes all women, who are participating in politics or who have been initiating or developing or have developed their career in politics at local or national level, within the

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<sup>20</sup> Williamson, The psychology of violence, Lehigh University

<sup>21</sup> Understanding Political Violence (p30-31)

<sup>22</sup> Moser and Clark, 2001a, p36



South Asian Region.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, in the course of implementation of this program “Violence Against Women In Politics” connotes any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women politician, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life; within inter-political parties level, at societal and at state level during her political career. It also includes any act of violence against any family member of women politician, which can affect her mental well being deterring her political participation.

### 2.3 GENDERED CONTINUUM OF VIOLENCE<sup>24</sup>

Violence is sexualized and gendered beyond the domestic to the political and economic level. Moreover, political violence and armed conflict are not distinct – one spills into the other. Nor is it necessarily helpful to identify discrete moments like ‘before’, ‘during’ and ‘after’ conflict. Violence flows through all of them, and peace processes may be present at all moments too. Global processes are creating a new and dangerous dynamic in the relationship between strong nations and powerful multinational enterprises and more vulnerable regions and markets. Wars in poor countries may be logical responses to economic marginalisation and political disempowerment.<sup>25</sup> In this way episodes of violence at opposite sides of the globe need to be understood as connected. The continuum therefore runs through the social, the economic and the political. Gender relations penetrate all other relations, including those of economic power, and all institutions from the family to the multinational corporation. For all that, a focus on gender may sometimes seem to highlight the social, the cultural. It may seem to suggest, especially when the conflict in question is fought on the terrain of a non-Western, less-developed country that the problem lies in the benighted, hate-filled people. It may deflect attention from the responsibility of the national and international actors that bear on those people and shape their world.<sup>26</sup>

The international financial institutions are clearly hearing arguments that their policies towards borrowing countries may fuel social disintegration and violence. The Bank’s Operations Evaluation Department warns that disparities may become intense or new conflicts may arise from the Bank’s adjustment process if undertaken without special attention to social needs.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the Bank

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<sup>23</sup> Surveillance System of Violence Against Women In Politics (pg17)

<sup>24</sup> Based on a paper by Nepali, R, The status of violence against women in politics in South Asia

<sup>25</sup> Duffield, Mark. 1990 War and Famine in Africa. Research Paper No.5. Oxford Oxfam Publications

<sup>26</sup> World Bank 1998b, Synthesis Report on the World Bank’s Experience with Post-Conflict Reconstruction

<sup>27</sup> IMF 1995; World Bank 1998b, Synthesis Report on the World Bank’s Experience with Post-Conflict Reconstruction

has introduced an energetic sex equality and gender-awareness policy in order to address inequity, exclusion and indignity as the best form of conflict prevention. In this spirit its efforts are directed to hiking this policy out of the ghetto of women's units and mainstreaming it throughout the Bank's departments and functions.<sup>28</sup> The challenge then is in getting these clearly stated policies operationalised. There is a sad history in many institutions of 'mainstreaming' gender meaning 'forget it'.

If violence is a continuum, understanding it seems to call for an integrated theory. And reducing it requires a coherent and consistent gender strategy linking all key national and international policy makers, the state and non-state actors. A central question might be posed on the implications of a feminist gender analysis for action to avert war and stop political violence or heal societies after bloodshed. Gender consciousness calls for a sensitivity to 'difference'. It invites us to see how women and men may be positioned differently, according to their needs, experiences and expertise; and how in different cultures these differences have different expressions. Secondly, it invites us to notice gender relations – to see how they shape institutions like the family, the military, the state; how they intersect with relations of class and ethnicity; to see how power, oppression and exploitation work in and through them and more importantly, to act for transformative change. Eliminating all forms of violence against women calls attention to understanding the intricacies and interconnectedness of the gendered continuum of violence.

## **2.4 FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS**

Much research has been concentrated on domestic violence or in the much broader context of political violence, which encompasses political repression, war and civil conflict. This study is unique because it attempts to understand the nature and forms of violence against female politicians in South Asia, itself a region having a paradoxically complex history of women oppression, female leadership in highest political positions, and successful grassroots women mobilization. The causes of violence against women have been investigated from diverse perspectives, including feminism, criminology, development, human rights, public health and sociology. Various explanations emerged from these empirical and theoretical inquiries. While they differ in the emphasis given to individual and societal factors in explaining violence against women, all have concluded that no single cause adequately accounts for violence against women. Such violence arises from the convergence of specific factors within the broad

## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

context of power inequalities at the individual, group, national and global levels. Therefore, an integrated approach of studying women oppression and gender gap in political participation is useful.<sup>29</sup> This framework takes into consideration the factors that widen or close gender gap in political participation to analyze in what ways these factors also perpetuate violence against female politicians. Even though violence against women is known to occur in different domains of the public (work, street or any public space) such as homes and neighborhoods of voters or election constituencies used during election campaigns and private (home of the politician), there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins. Therefore, conceptualizing violence as occurring in a continuum of factors or circumstances that enhance or motivate it can make its understanding less complex than placing it within segregated domains.

A study by Norris et al, use four interrelated arguments to understand why women participate less in political and associational life. According to them, women participate less “either because they can’t (they lack resources), because they won’t (they’re not interested), because nobody asked them (they lack networks), or because the rules deterred them”.<sup>30</sup> Based on this reasoning, they identified four possible explanations of gender gap in political participation in the UK. They argue that those structural factors such as women’s lack of access to resources (time, education and income) acted as structural barriers to gaining political knowledge, civic skills and interest. The practical ‘rules of the game’, for entry, contest and procedures in the political game are set by those parties and institutions to represent their own interest and values, which becomes the dominant culture. These structural and institutional barriers also helped to create gendered cultural attitudes, with women’s interest and confidence on the efficacy of political institutions, membership in political and mobilizing organizations and motivation in citizenship duties found to be low.

Even though it is difficult to derive a direct cause and effect relationship of violence against female politicians due to its complex interrelatedness of the forces acting against female empowerment, its origin can be attributed to a highly patriarchal culture of South Asian society.<sup>31</sup> Part of the ideas are found in Silva among various others who argue that the nation is cultural and that cultural

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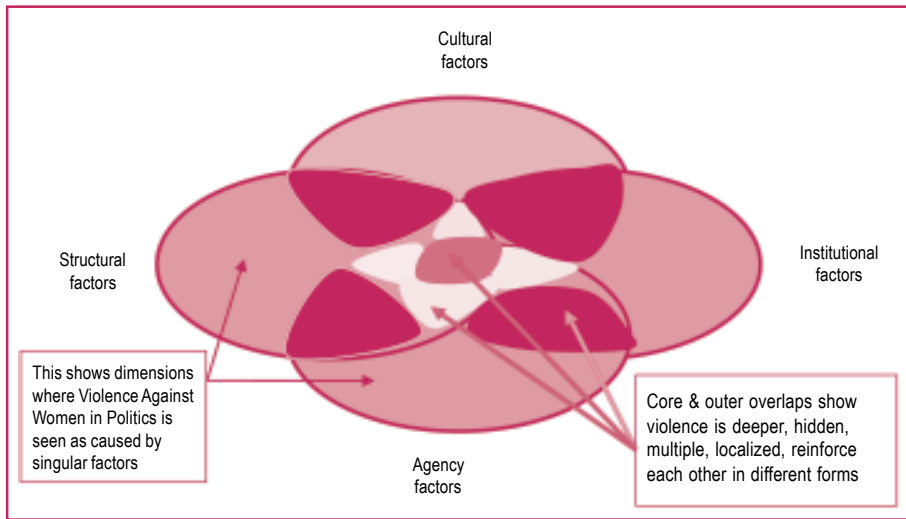
<sup>29</sup> Also see Nepali, R, The status of violence against women in politics in South Asia

<sup>30</sup> Norris, Lovenduski and Campbell, 2004, Closing the Activism Gap: Gender and Political Participation in Great Britain.

<sup>31</sup> Culture is the learned and shared behavior of a community of interacting human beings. The shared patterns of behaviors and interactions are learned through a process of socialization. Norms and values upheld by males to serve their own interest are structured and institutionalized to maintain the social order through domination of the female class, and more so in South Asia. Cultural beliefs of female subordination support violence both in the domestic and public sphere, more so against females who overtake or threaten high positions of politics in government and political parties since such positions are taken as a culturally preserved male domain.

values that perpetuate domination over women are deeply structured and institutionalized.<sup>32</sup> Another report reflects how violence is not only gendered but that it occurs in a continuum that flows from one level to another, is not confined to specific moments (but in a continuum of life experience), and therefore is connected to institutional and structural factors.<sup>33</sup> Violence against female politicians can be explained by using an integrated analysis of the four interrelated factors (Figure 1 shown below) that intersect at various points to reinforce patterns of female oppression and domination in politics.

**Figure 1. Framework for Analyzing Violence Against Women in Politics**



This figure illustrates violence against female politicians as the result of an interaction of multiple forces - cultural, structural, and institutional and agency related. These factors overlap to form or reinforce several complex patterns of attitude and behavior against women politicians that are sometimes not easily perceived as violence. Thin arrows show dimensions where violence against women in politics may seem as caused by singular factors. These dimensions are largely visible and simply attributable to certain singular causes. The dimensions where several overlaps occur as shown by thick arrows is a more complex area and the more the overlaps the complex and invisible the forces enhancing violence against women in politics. The core (in the middle of the diagram) reflects those dimensions where violence is hidden and requires understanding of all four forces that work to perpetuate VAWIP. Deconstructing these hidden factors is of prime essence to eliminating VAWIP.

<sup>32</sup> Silva, N., 2004, *The Gendered Nation: contemporary writings in South Asia*, Sage, New Delhi

<sup>33</sup> Nepali, R., *The status of violence against women in politics in South Asia*

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Discriminatory attitudes and acts against women are accepted as normal and get institutionalized. The most violent often remains embedded and hidden at the core. Hidden at the core will likely be more severe and intense occurrences of mutli-layered violence against particular groups of female politicians who are vulnerable by age, caste and ethnicity, religion, political ideology, social status, etc. What are easily visible are certain symptoms, which are attributed to certain types of violence. The visible symptoms such as wide gap in gender participation in politics and the arguments of importance of history of a country and culture change become dominant discourse.

Cultural aspects include beliefs, norms and values and behavior concerning female politicians. These are structured along gendered norms and institutionalized in various sectors of work and family as the dominant culture with the effect that political power is not only isolated from females but various forms of violence used to maintain dominance. The effect can be demonstrated in how each four layers reinforce the core - violence against female politicians. Challenging at value level of a society can be difficult without breaking this symmetry and layers of discriminatory cultural, institutional, structural forces working to weaken the agency of female politicians. Addressing the issue at a higher level is important because of the institutional commitment required to translate gender equality and power sharing; the issue is embedded at a deeper level and requires understanding of the hidden issues and not just the visible symptoms of violence. Violence against women is interrelated because it has various forms, and is embedded in culture, structure, agency and norms and institutions, which contribute to gender inequality, and rights violation at many levels of citizenship, governance and human development.



## **PART - II.** WOMEN IN POLITICS IN SOUTH ASIA

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### **3. GENDER PERSPECTIVES OF POLITICAL HISTORY IN SOUTH ASIA**

#### **3.1 SOCIAL CONTEXT OF SOUTH ASIA**

People in South Asia belong to eight different nations having a rich variety of cultures, language, religion, and ethnicity and with different forms of government. Across this variety certain similarities are more dominant than the differences in their stages of development and colonial, non-colonial and postcolonial histories. India and Sri Lanka have remained democracies for the past 50 years, while Bangladesh and Pakistan have mixtures of democracy, militarization and autocracy. Nepal is attempting to come out from various forms of monarchy to democracy. Afghanistan is slowly coming out of several decades of war and making way towards peace, reconstruction and democracy. Bhutan, the only monarchical state in the region is yet to take the challenge while the Maldives a very small island nation with its limited impact upon neighboring states in the region is a comparatively peaceful and stable democracy than the rest of the states in South Asia. Almost all countries except for the Maldives are challenged by burning problems of poverty, illiteracy, ill health, gender and caste discrimination, political conflict and religious fundamentalism. Women in these countries bear the greatest burden of all these problems and are the major victims of violence. Yet, the region celebrates millions of famed and anonymous female leaders, their courage and initiatives in mobilizing themselves at the grass roots, in rural and poverty stricken areas.

South Asian women's stories and experiences and their refusal to accept societal and political problems any longer are familiar to women all over the world. Even though women's participation in political and social movements is evident in South Asia, as they played important roles in mass mobilization, and supportive and backstage roles in enabling male leaderships to remain in the forefront of political struggles, male dominance in the formal political systems of South Asia is universal. It is only the degree and extent of dominance that varies from country to country or regime to regime. South Asian women face innumerable barriers to political participation from all sides, as those barriers arise from socio-cultural values and practices that are firmly entrenched in systems and structures of society. In general families regard female members as weak and in need of protection throughout their lives and women who interact outside prescribed relations are viewed with suspicion or contempt.

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Illiteracy severely limits women's participation. Female literacy rate in South Asia, with the exception of Sri Lanka and Maldives, is much lower than the male.<sup>34</sup> For illiterate women information about political processes is often difficult to obtain and political organizations like the trade unions and political parties are not easily accessible to most women. Violence against women further limits their interest and active involvement in political activities. Where women raise their voices or challenge male authorities in public places, or devote time and resources to political activism, they have often provoked violent anger of male relatives, neighbors and community leaders. Various ethnic and religion oriented conflict and further exacerbate the situation of violence against women.

In Afghanistan, the education sector continues to face an unprecedented and unrelenting assault, with attacks by the Taliban and other warring groups on women who step out of traditionally prescribed roles. The true scale of violence experienced by women does not get reported in the Western media, and the rhetoric of gender equality and the apparent interest in women's issues in Afghanistan among the international community and with donors hardly gets reflected in the realities of ordinary women. Access to basic services such as clean water, education, healthcare and livelihoods remain at bay. Women experience deep frustration due to almost nil space for exercise of voice in the manner the country is run and agendas of aid and reconstruction are made. For Afghan women insecurity continues to remain an overwhelming challenge characterizing all aspects of their daily life. This insecurity is made worse by grinding poverty, the two perpetuating each other.

Even though there are broad regional variations, or rural and urban differences, with regard to women's opportunities and access to resources, throughout South Asia women operate within fairly stringent manifestations of patriarchal structures and attitudes that devalue women's remunerated work, and promote her role as wife and mother. These attitudes permeate policy-making bodies, where women's representation is too small to make a significant impact. Development policies and budgetary allocations for women development programs are insufficient. Priority is given to economic advancement over social development and initiatives to promote women's involvement in political affairs if existing are virtually ineffective.

The general low status of women in the region and the entrenched nature of discriminatory structures have led to what is seen as a lifecycle of VAW. Even before birth women suffer from sex selective abortion, at infancy they may face female infanticide, as young children they will have to put up with incest and

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<sup>34</sup> Kabir Farah, (Pg 3) Political Participation of Women in South Asia

son preference, as adolescents they may be sexually abused or trafficked, as young women they may suffer rape, sexual harassment, acid attacks as wives they may experience domestic violence, dowry related violence, marital rape or honor killings, as widows they may be required to self immolate or be deprived of property and dignity. The vulnerability to violence at every stage of the life cycle makes VAW a terrible South Asian legacy.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the fact that forced marriages are considered criminal offences under the law of the land, this is common in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. In Afghanistan, forced marriages are rampant and occur for many reasons including the settlement of feuds, compensation for a crime by giving a young girl or girl child to the victim's family, and compelling widows to remarry someone from her deceased husband's family. Boys and girls are often forced to marry at a young age or are engaged prior to, or shortly following, their birth.

Across Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan and in the northern regions of India the institution of *purdah* (practice of screening women from strangers with the use of a veil or curtain) is widespread. *Purdah* sharply demarcates and divides public and private spheres, in such a way that the former (in which are located economic and political powers) are designated as male domains, and the latter, female. *Purdah* and rigidly defined sex roles contribute to high levels of female illiteracy and undermines women's access to traditional forums of adjudication and decision-making, such as the *panchayats* and *jirgas*. It is also a key obstacle for women's entry into formal electoral politics. Affirmative measures have however ameliorated the situation to some extent.

The issues that engage South Asian women politically are familiar to women elsewhere. These include resistance to militarism, the desire to become equal partners in new democracies, and a frustration about women's lack of representation in economic development programmes. Women's participation in political and social movements is evident in South Asia, as they have played important roles in mass mobilisation, and supportive roles in enabling the male leadership to remain in the forefront of political struggles.

The issues that engage South Asian women is universal, but the degree of dominance may vary from country to country or regime to regime. Even when women do become a part of the formal political process as members of elite political groups, they are usually assigned to soft portfolios 'appropriate' for women's concerns. The many barriers to political participation that South Asian women face exist at different levels, both formal and informal, and they arise



from socio-cultural values and practices that are firmly entrenched in systems and structures of society. By and large, in the entire Indian subcontinent, women who interact outside prescribed relations are viewed with suspicion. The family still regards its female members as weak and in need of protection throughout their lives. It is a popular perception that politics is a 'dirty game' not meant for women.

It is in this social context that this study seeks to remember the history of women's political struggles in South Asia.

### 3.2 POLITICAL CONTEXT AND WOMEN'S POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN SOUTH ASIA: A SHARED HISTORY

**Afghanistan** is a young nation that only came out of war in 2003 and "a window of opportunity had swung wide open for the international community to turn Afghanistan around and enable foundations to be laid for a lasting peace in this country which had endured nearly a quarter century of violent conflict. In particular, women's rights were at the fore of discussions around a new Afghanistan, as the Bonn Agreement was coming together in December 2001. Since then, 102 women delegates participated in the Constitutional Loya Jirga of December 2003 where a new Constitution was debated over and approved, granting Afghan women equality with men (Article 22). One year later, presidential elections were held, in the country's first direct election. In 2005, Afghanistan's new parliament was formed, with a 25% quota exceeded by women MPs. Using the provisions of the Bonn Agreement as benchmarks, it would appear that progress has steadily been made, and women are occupying central roles in the country's political life. In reality; however, 'paper rights' have not equaled rights in practice".<sup>36</sup>

The legal, civil and constitutional rights for women in Afghanistan makes little sense as there remains a great number of serious challenges that need to be urgently addressed. These are particularly concerning women's safety and protection; the actual realization of civil and political rights; and transformation in their social, economic and political arenas.

**Bangladesh** as a nation with a majority Muslim population, founded on the premises and principles of secularism is almost unheard of and unprecedented.<sup>37</sup> Religion alone was not enough to hold the two parts of Pakistan together and Bangladesh was born upon the fundamental principles, inter alias, Bengali

<sup>36</sup> Womankind Worldwide, 2006, Taking stock update: Afghan women and girls: Five years on, (pp6), October 2006, [www.womankind.org.uk](http://www.womankind.org.uk)

<sup>37</sup> SAP Bangladesh country study

nationalism and secularism. This ruffled many feathers in high and mighty places and upset the ideological status quo and the current thinking at that time. Conventional establishment propagating Islamic ideology found it very difficult to accommodate secularism within their mindset, whereas the people of Bangladesh found no contradiction with the concepts of secularism and Islam. Within the framework of a secular state, women's movement in the 1960s enjoyed an unbroken chain of history with the beginning of feminist movements in the country. Even though it was a golden opportunity to break away from the religious dogma and persecution based on gender discrimination, fundamentalist tried hard to prevent Muslim women from getting education. When the provincial education minister, Abdul Hamid, decided to close down the girls' schools, on pretext of lack of teachers and students, Jobeda Khatun Chowdhury, the first Muslim woman politician of East Pakistan, resisted the closure of Sylhet Women's College and with the support of a few other dedicated women succeeded in enrolling students through door-to-door campaigns. Such symbolic achievements helped to carry the movement further on its way to success.

The process of empowerment of women started with the micro credit revolution and caused a power shift from the clergy and the mohajan (moneylender) class towards more self-dependence of rural illiterate poor women.<sup>38</sup> This power shift started created a new order, a silent revolution changing the social and political landscape of rural Bangladesh. Rural women riding bi-cycle became a usual scene, and a symbol of mobility and independence. Thus the clergy and the mohajan class fought back with systematic violence against women through fatwas and attack on NGOs patronizing women with micro-credit and other social sector programs. Almost always persecution and fatwa were issued against women, subjecting them to inhuman, cruel and degrading treatment in the name of Islam through shalish.<sup>39</sup>

**Bhutan** is the only closed and monarchs run state in South Asia and with its own parameters of democracy without political parties and gross national happiness of its citizens, which is the goal of the nation. Bhutan is unique and nothing is much known about the political or socio economic conditions and the government follows a principle of secrecy and isolation from the external world. Some sources note that the government established mechanisms to foster active people's participation in the policy making process at local levels and that women seem to enjoy economic and political equality. It is said that there is increased involvement of women in development efforts as decision makers and that women representation in politics is a government priority, to ensure

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<sup>38</sup> SAP Bangladesh country study

<sup>39</sup> Traditional social institution with informal juridical authority.

decentralization and participation by all citizens. The fact that only 14 members in the National Assembly are women out of the 150 members does not portray the image that the state translates equality of opportunities for women to participate in policy formulation. Since there are no objective or external studies or information about the real situation and no reports that reflect voices of people, much information and analysis regarding status of women and their political empowerment is at nil.

It can also be seen that unlike the trend of affirmative actions to increase female participation in local and national governance in the neighboring countries, Bhutan does not follow a reservation or quota system for women either at the National Assembly or any other governing bodies.<sup>40</sup> There are speculations that over the years, the visible increase in the number of women in the civil service, may have effectively participated in the policy-making process of the government. It can be stated that awareness of issues in the population as well as the state actors, open society and policy environment, freedom of information and transparency are essential to understand and reflect the status of women in any country including Bhutan.

**India** became an independent State in 1947 after nearly 200 years of British colonial rule. Pre independence India encompassed today's Pakistan and Bangladesh. With the end of British rule and partition from India, Bengal became East Pakistan until 1971 and when an issue of language, economic exploitation and domination by the bureaucracy and military of West Pakistan, a new country Bangladesh was born in 1971 to fulfill the dreams and aspirations of its people. However, women's involvement in politics started in the late 18th and early 19th centuries before the birth of these nations. Although British imperialism profoundly influenced the political engagement of both elite and non-elite women during this period, its impact on the character and purpose of their engagement was very different. Non-elite women fought against the British colonialists. Moved by the hunger of their children, the British confiscation of their land, which was their only means of livelihood, and oppressive taxes, women participated alongside men in 'famine revolts' in the late 18th and 19th centuries, and other revolts in the 19th century.

Historically, two important movements characterized South Asia. One was the political movement of challenge and resistance to British colonialism, and the other, the social movement to reform traditional structures. The national movement against British colonial rule in undivided India, spearheaded by

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<sup>40</sup> Ghimire, D, Paper Presented at the 6th Asia Pacific Congress on Political Empowerment of Women Organize by the Center for Asia – Pacific Women in Politics, 10 -12 February 2006, Manila

Mahatma Gandhi, was instrumental in bringing women in large numbers into the public space. Gandhi played a crucial role in creating a favorable atmosphere for women's participation in the freedom movement by insisting that the struggle for women's equality was an integral part of the movement of *Swaraj* (self rule). His choice of non-violent *Satyagraha* as the mode of struggle also allowed women to play a far more active and creative role than was possible in more masculine-oriented movements.

While Gandhi wanted a vanguard role for women in the freedom movement, Gandhi did not encourage women to compete for power. Rather, he wanted them to enter public life as selfless, devoted social workers to undertake the crucial task of social reconstruction. He wanted women to cleanse politics, to feminize it by bringing in the spirit of selfless sacrifice, rather than compete with men in grabbing power, and thus prove their moral superiority even in the realm of politics. In Gandhi's view, "Women are the embodiment of sacrifice, and her advent to public life should, therefore, result in purifying it, in restraining unbridled ambition and accumulation of property." Gandhi, therefore, created a political space for women within the patriarchal system, projecting the concept of women's role being complementary to men's, and embodying virtues of sacrifice and suffering.

Gandhi, however, was very conscious of the power that women could have in a struggle based on the concept of non-cooperation. He stressed the importance of their participation in political and social matters, and exhorted them to join the nationalist struggle. Gandhi, therefore, played a vital role in attempting to feminise the nationalist movement in India. In the process, the values and views that he espoused influenced and shaped the women's movement in the early phase of independence of the other nations of the region.

To advocate women's equality and their right to participate in nationalist politics, the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) was formed in 1927 through an amalgamation of various regional women's groups. It also spearheaded constitutional reforms and other provisions for women. Consisting of reformist, revivalist and radical streams, the AIWC played a critical role during the freedom struggle, and helped women systematically articulate their political rights in public forums. They participated in all-night *dharnas* (demonstrations) of 1930 against foreign cloth, and in selling 'the salt of freedom' during the salt *Satyagraha*. These campaigns succeeded in breaking the myth of segregation and in articulating liberal sentiments like suffrage rights.

In the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, women became more and more subjects in the political and social spheres as is clear from the examples of

women's political struggles around a variety of issues in the countries in South Asia. Nevertheless the leading South Asian social and religious reformers in the 19th century were males, whose principal objective was to cleanse and reinforce family life. For those early pioneers, women were, at first, objects of emancipation. Therefore, the basic understanding of the national movement's leaders on women's issues continued to be filtered through the existing patriarchal system. Kumari Jayawardene observes, "The most revealing aspect has been the essential conservatism of what on the surface seemed like radical change. While highlighting and legally abolishing the worst excesses (like sati), emphasizing female education, and mobilizing women for *satyagraha*, the movement gave the illusion of change while women were kept within the structural confines of family and society. Revolutionary alternatives or radical social changes affecting women's lives did not become an essential part of the demands of the nationalist movement at any stage of the long struggle for independence, and a revolutionary feminist consciousness did not arise within the movement for national liberation... Thus while Indian women were to participate in all stages of the movement for national independence, they did so in a way that was acceptable to, and was dictated by, the male leaders and which conformed to the prevalent ideology on the position of women".<sup>41</sup> This is the reason why the historical perspective reveals contrasts in Indian woman's militancy for social and political change and their traditional ideal of womanhood.

**Maldives** as a small and peaceful island nation with vast majority of its population enjoying socio economic rights and development somewhat equally is perceived to be different from the rest of the nations in South Asia. There is no special quota system in the parliament for increasing female representation or any internal pressure to increase their participation in politics. In spite of the relative absence of severe and complex forms of social discrimination, it can be said that the society is not totally free from the culture of female subordination. This might be buried, invisible and much deeply rooted than people generally believe it to be. It can be useful to understand why even in this context of less socio economic cleavages, women's representation in the parliament stands at a mere 6 percent.

Lack of information about women's political participation and the status of women in Bhutan and Maldives in terms of whether they face violence and abuse of any form in private and public life make it difficult to assess whether there is presence or absence of any forms of gender discrimination in society and state or whether it is a taboo subject, hidden and shameful. If gender based violence

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<sup>41</sup> Feminism and Nationalism in the third world, (p107-8) ASR Publications, 1994, Pakistan

is absent or minimal it is pertinent to understanding what conditions contribute to it and can be helpful in creating measures for eliminating violence against women in other states in the region.

Stakeholders fighting the issue of violence against women need to gather and assess wider range of information, geographic locations and countries and not focus solely on Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka or only those regions where armed conflict and violence is overtly visible. Gathering information about violence upon women is severely restrained in Afghanistan however; even scant information has become available through international funding and research in that challenging context.

In **Nepal**, people were greatly influenced by India's freedom struggle against British colonial rule the 1940s. They rose against the Rana regime, which had suppressed the growing people's movement for democracy. Women like Magla Devi, Sahana Pradhan started coming together, and from 1947 until 1952, several women's organisations were born to raise the political and social consciousness among women in Nepal. In 1960, the King of Nepal subverted the democratic panchayat system to an autocratic one. This put a sudden end to all associations and their activities. Women, however, remained politically active. In protest against the undemocratic royal proclamation of 1960, a group of women organisations openly waved black flags in a public procession, and were imprisoned.<sup>42</sup> Later, in the people's movement of 1990, women actively participated to get rid of the autocratic panchayat system and to usher in a multiparty, democratic system. Women of various regions and ideologies contributed greatly to the success of this movement.

Following a decade of armed conflict which started in 1996 Nepal experienced people's uprising in 2006 and since then has been persistently trying to overthrow absolute monarchy, enter peace process and undertake a fundamental reorganization of the state, with the aim of instituting meaningful democracy and widening of opportunities regardless of gender, caste, ethnicity, area of origin and geographic location, language and religion.<sup>43</sup>

In **Pakistan**, election of two Muslim women, Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz and Begum Shaista Ikramullah to the Central Constituent Assembly in 1946 became seminal in organizing women in politics. That same year, Muslim women organized and held demonstrations to prevent the government's refusal to allow

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<sup>42</sup> Rahaman, Z and A. Kamal. 1991. *Accountable Administration and Sustainable Democracy* in R. Sobhan. Ed. *The Decade of Stagnation*. Dhaka: UPL.

<sup>43</sup> Nepal is carrying a republican movement and the government is under pressure towards declaring Nepal a republic.

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the Muslim League to form a ministry. Government used violence against women demonstrators and arrested them in Lahore and Karachi. It was the civil disobedience movement of January 1947, which mobilized even the Pathan women, considered the most conservative in the subcontinent. They marched in support of the movement, publicly unveiled for the first time. The most interesting form of political participation was the secret organization called the War Council, formed by the Pathans, in which women helped run an underground radio station until independence.

By 1947, Muslim women were organizing funds for the Pakistan movement, fighting oppression on the streets, and addressing issues such as education. This great strength of women were not mobilized around issues relating to women's rights or their political and legal status. Instead, the rallying cause was the Muslim homeland. The women believed that the newly created government would automatically expand women's rights and open avenues for equal participation at all levels.

In **Sri Lanka**, the erstwhile Ceylon, several movements characterized the fight against British rule. The Suriyamal campaign, which started as a counter to the sale of poppies to assist British soldiers, became a training ground for the rise of the leftwing socialist movement in Sri Lanka, which spearheaded activities against British imperialism. For the first time, women entered radical politics. They became vocal and visible, and a variety of women's organizations emerged, like the Mothers' Union, the Ceylon Women's Union, the Women's Franchise Union, the Women's Political Union and the Lanka Mahila Samiti. The formation of the Eksath Kantha Peramuna (the United Women's Front) was another great event in the political history of the country. It was the first autonomous socialist women's group in Sri Lanka, which asserted its socialist policies in its declaration seeking changes in the fundamental structure of society. The women of these organisations continued to take part in active politics as members of parliament and cabinet ministers.

Kumari Jayawardene notes, "While middle class women were fighting for education, suffrage and equal political rights, the working women of the country were in the struggle for more material gains, for equal wages for men and women, and for more humane conditions of work".<sup>44</sup> She reasons that since women of Sri Lanka started receiving education from early 19<sup>th</sup> Century onwards - way before women in other countries of Asia - their "consciousness brought about by education was channeled primarily into struggles for political and franchise rights".<sup>45</sup> This consciousness was also directed towards social issues.

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<sup>44</sup> Feminism and Nationalism in the third world, (p131) ASR Publications, 1994, Pakistan

<sup>45</sup> Ibid (p130)



The process of education for women also contributed to the socializing of women into roles that were only superficially different from those of traditional society. Sri Lanka is thus an interesting example of a society in which women were not subjected to harsh and overt forms of oppression, and therefore did not develop a movement for women's emancipation that went beyond the existing social parameters. It is precisely this background that has enabled Sri Lanka to produce a woman prime minister, as well as many women in the professions, but without disturbing the general patterns of subordination".<sup>46</sup>

## **4. INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL INSTRUMENTS FOR PROTECTING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN**

### **4.1 INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS**

States that have ratified the international conventions are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national periodic reports, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations. Some of the landmark international conventions on equality and combating violence against women are briefly reviewed as follows. The Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR), Convention on Political Rights of Women (CPRW), Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Declaration of Elimination Of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) and the Security Council Resolution 1325 all contribute towards equality and elimination of violence against women. See Annex II for Articles of UDHR, CPRW, CEDAW and Security Council Resolution 1325.

#### **UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHT (UDHR), 1948**

The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the UDHR on December 10, 1948 and proclaimed it as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. It combines civil, political, social and economic rights in one standard-setting document. Subsequent human rights treaties reflect the efforts of the international community to give these rights a legal basis at the national and international level. Articles 1 and 2 express the inherent rights and dignity, freedom and equality of all human beings without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Article 19 states that everyone deserves the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Article 21 has provisioned the rights to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives and to equal access to public service in



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his country. It states that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government and shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedure.

### CONVENTION ON POLITICAL RIGHT OF WOMEN (CPRW), 1952

Women's right to participate in governance and decision-making is ensured by the CPRW, 1952. In accordance with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations and of the UDHR the CPRW, 1952 came into existence in 1952 in order to equalize the status of men and women in the enjoyment and exercise of political rights. Articles 1, 2 and 3 provisions that women shall be entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms with men, without any discrimination, that women shall be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination and that women shall be entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination. 140 state parties had ratified the CPRW in 1998.

### CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)

In spite of the UDHR and CPRW, violence against women became the focus of international concern and action only from the late eighties. The CEDAW became the UN General Assembly Resolution 34/180 of 13 December 1979 and entered into force on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1981. The CEDAW is a legally binding international instrument addressing women's rights and equality and has the potential to be a powerful instrument for accelerating gender equity in political life. By 2004 there were 178 states that ratified CEDAW which legally obliges states to guarantee equality to its citizens and to eliminate discrimination against women in all aspects of public and private life. Articles 4 and 7 call for the implementation of affirmative measures to achieve women's equal participation in political decision-making bodies.

Bangladesh ratified the CEDAW in 1984 with reservations on Articles 2, 16.1 (9c) with the argument that the articles conflict with the country's personal laws. Nepal ratified the CEDAW in 1991 and India and Sri Lanka in 1993. Pakistan ratified the CEDAW in 1996 with a reservation on Clause 29 pertaining to disputes and a clarification that the Constitution of Pakistan would hold supremacy over the provisions of CEDAW. Afghanistan ratified the CEDAW without reservation in March 2003, which requires Afghanistan. In all the countries, violence against women is rife and majority of the critical areas of concern remain largely unaddressed.

### **Box 2 : CEDAW Articles**

*Article 1.* For the purposes of the present Convention, the term “discrimination against women” shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

*Article 4.1* Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.

*Article 5a.* States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.

Women around the globe have used the CEDAW to press for their rights. In Nepal women used CEDAW to demand their government for tougher laws on rape with the result that marital rape was legally recognized by the state. To check lack of compliance by states, the convention’s Optional Protocol, which came into force in 2000, is used as an enforcement mechanism. The protocol formally investigates persistent violations of women’s human rights that fall under the CEDAW provisions, and recommends and follows up on specific steps to correct them. However, the optional protocol has not been used for cases related to discrimination in politics. Articles four (see box below) and seven (see Annex II) call for the implementation of affirmative measures to counter discrimination so that gender equality becomes achievable.

At the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 women made demands for a UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (DEVAW) and for creation of the UN reporting mechanism. Accordingly, the UN General Assembly passed the DEVAW (see Annex III) and the UN Human Rights Commission created the post of Special Rapporteur to report on violence against women. Coomaraswamy notes that it was “a success story of international mobilization around a specific human rights issue, leading to the articulation of international norms and standards and the formulation of international programmes and policies”.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Coomaraswamy, R, The Varied Contours Of Violence Against Women In South Asia, A Paper Presented In The Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference, Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten, Islamabad, Pakistan, 3- 5 May 2005 (p 2-3)

The International Conference on Population and Development in 1994 in Cairo and the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 further stressed the need for states and NGOs to carry forward the principles of the CEDAW and DEVAW.

**Box 3: Review of the implementation of the BPFA, Beijing 5+ and 10+**

Licuanan notes the significant gaps at implementation level. Though many countries passed new or amended laws on sexual harassment, rape, domestic battery, sex trafficking and human rights abuses, they lacked commitment for implementation. A very harsh discovery is that in spite of great emphasis to human rights of women and equality, exercise of rights by women belonging to particular disadvantaged groups and ethnicity lagged behind, and that the mechanisms encouraged through BPFA could not address these groups' needs and concerns adequately. Women facing various forms of oppression due to their ethnicity, gender, area or origin, cultural identity, profession, age, sexual orientation, physical ability, and other factors continued to remain at risk of increasing human rights abuse. Trafficking of women and children and domestic violence are far from elimination. Cultural norms remain unchanged to a large extent and many governments consider domestic violence a family matter rather than a structural issue of gender inequality. Such challenges in eliminating violence against women continue to be a major setback for women's movement.

Even more deplorable is in exercise of power and decision-making. Globally, women's representation in the legislature, judiciary and policy making bodies, has remained terribly low. There is very low increase in the presence of women in government offices. Only 16 countries in 2004 reached the critical mass of thirty percent government representation, yet only a few women have gained top leadership positions, and continue to lack the support they need to advocate women's concerns. The review noted that women officials are continued to be assigned to stereotyped fields of government such as children's or women's affairs, social affairs, education and health, and rarely in top positions in the defense or finance ministry or diplomatic affairs. Licuanan remarks that "economic disparities between women and men, patriarchal structures, socio-cultural beliefs promoting gender stereotypes, and even conflict between women's political groups have continued to limit women's political representation" (p6).

#### FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN (BEIJING, 1995)

Licuanan's review of work on violence against women stresses some of the triumphs of the Beijing conference that helped to break new grounds in espousing violence against women as not only a private domestic concern but of public policy.<sup>48</sup> It further confirmed women's sexual rights as her human rights and the rights of the girl-child. It sensitized governments to addressing issues of gender discrimination and protect girls and women from all forms of abuse and exploitation. Licuanan's review highlights some noteworthy achievements of the Beijing Conference such as the creation and use of gender focal units with gender planning and budget allocation, gender sensitization and monitoring, emphasis to women's health, transformation of individual women and their organizations, heightened awareness of identity politics, strengthened networking and starting of culture of partnerships. The review makes note of progress made in addressing gender violence through use of various national coordinating bodies to develop and implement programs. The establishment of special units in police departments to handle violence against women cases, women police stations, special courts as well as special judicial processes to handle sex crimes, etc. Yet efforts and gains in addressing violence against women are very far from satisfactory. Box 3 highlights the gaps in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA). Licuanan's review mirrors South Asia's countries' progress with the CEDAW. The common underlying lesson that many gains in policy and legal aspects have been made while a majority of its implementation is starkly wanting.

#### SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325 (S/RES/1325)

Resolution 1325 was the first and formal resolution passed unanimously on 31 October 2000 by the Security Council to specifically address the impact of war on women, and women's contributions to conflict resolution and sustainable peace. It is regarded as a supplementary document of UDHR, CEDAW, ICCPR and other relevant UN declarations and has mandatory provisions for state parties. *The Security Council takes* the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and shows concern that civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict. It reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace building and recognizes the urgent need to mainstream a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, and urges the

<sup>48</sup> Licuanan, P.B, After Beijing + 10: The Road Ahead, Miriam College, Philippines, South East Asia Women's Watch (SEAWWatch)

<sup>49</sup> Resolution No. 1, S/RES/1325

Secretary-General to ensure that, where appropriate, field operations include a gender component. It calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly gender-based violence like rape and other forms of sexual abuse. It recommends:

- Member states to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict.
- The Secretary-General to implement his strategic plan of action (A/49/587) calling for an increase in the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace process.<sup>50</sup> Requests the Secretary-General to provide to Member States training guidelines and materials on the protection, rights and the particular needs of women, as well as on the importance of involving women in all peacekeeping and peace building measures, invites Member States to incorporate these elements as well as HIV/AIDS awareness training into their national training programmes for military and civilian police personnel in preparation for deployment, and further requests the Secretary-General to ensure that civilian personnel of peacekeeping operations receive similar training.
- To all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to adopt a gender perspective, including, inter alia: measures that ensure the protection of and respect for human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the police and the judiciary.<sup>51</sup>

### 4.2 NATIONAL INSTRUMENTS FOR PROTECTING RIGHTS OF WOMEN

In recent decades, people have made significant progress in using the international arena to articulate and demand their rights. This part of the report describes international instruments and national legal provisions for protection of women and reflects on the inadequacy of laws and regulations minus translation in practice.

#### AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan's new constitution framed in 2004 guarantees women equal rights and prohibits any kind of discrimination and privilege among citizens Article 7 which similarly addresses human rights requires the state to uphold its

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, Resolution No. 2

<sup>51</sup> Id, Resolution No. 8 (c)

international legal obligations by abiding to international Conventions and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>52</sup> Article 22 of the Constitution offers to combat the injustices faced by women under customary law. Discriminatory customary laws can be challenged on the basis of these equality guarantees. Article 54 explicitly deals with the rights of women, recognising the family as the fundamental unit of society and requiring the state to adopt necessary measures for elimination of traditions contrary to the principles of Islam. This provision can be of assistance to roll back customary laws that permit forced marriages, which, although accepted under custom, are prohibited by law. To promote female participation in government, there is a provision for each province, to have at least two female delegates elected to the House of Representatives.<sup>53</sup> Women are guaranteed at least a quarter of the seats in the Wolesi Jirga. 50 per cent of the members to the Senate appointed by the President must be female.<sup>54</sup> National divorce laws have been revived recently and a few women are beginning to exercise this right. Women who are abused or whose husbands are reported as missing are now able to divorce within Afghan law. The Kabul Family Court granted approximately 40 divorces for women in 2004.

However, there are various contradictions in the laws. The new Constitution, for instance, says, "When there is no provision in the Constitution or other laws regarding ruling on an issue, the courts' decisions shall be within the limits of this Constitution in accord with the Hanafi jurisprudence. Hanafi is one of the four main schools of thought in Islam and some forms of Hanafi law give women's testimony only half the value of men's in certain court cases".<sup>55</sup> Various legal systems are based on custom and tradition. These systems - local, provincial and federal - have contradictory laws and practices. A traditional council, known as a Jirga, is called to resolve community disputes. Afghans regard these decisions as law. Women's participation is limited in this process, as Jirgas are generally composed of men. People in need of legal redress also go to Shuras, another forum for settling community disputes. Although the Constitution has the potential to overrule customary laws and give women access to justice they so urgently need, its impact has been limited. The legal age for marriage in Afghanistan is 16 for females and 18 for males but this is rarely adhered to. Forced marriages are common and gains legitimacy under the local systems of justice.

## BANGLADESH

<sup>52</sup> Based on paper presentation in the Regional Conference, Invisible Faces of Violence Against Women in South Asia: Breaking the silence, Kathmandu, SAP International

<sup>53</sup> Article 83(6) of the 2004 Constitution

<sup>54</sup> Article 84 of the 2004 Constitution

<sup>55</sup> A paper presented in the Regional Conference, Invisible Faces of Violence Against Women in South Asia: Breaking the silence, Kathmandu, SAP International

## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

In Bangladesh there are two separate laws: Constitutional and General. The General Law or laws are not directly governed by the Constitution. Personal or Family Laws fall under these and are mostly governed by the civil law. Personal laws are not uniform and there are Muslim, Hindu, Christian and General Personal Laws - all of which subject women to discrimination. Even though the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (1972) ensures equal opportunities to all citizens and guarantees equal rights for men and women in all spheres of public life, this equality of rights and opportunities does not extend to the private sphere where various family laws based on religion are recognized. Religious laws govern personal affairs like marriage, divorce, children custody, property inheritance, etc. In the case of Muslims, personal laws are governed by Shariah Law, which is based on the Holy Quran and Sunnah. The Hindu population is governed by Hindu Laws. There is a constitutional provision of reserved seats for women representatives to be elected under universal adult franchise in the local government (Union Parishad, Pourashava and City Corporations).

Mainstreaming women in development planning became a national agenda in 1990 with the Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-95). The National Policy for Women's Advancement and National Action Plan guides implementation of women's development programs in different sectors. There are various acts and regulations that prohibits violence against women in Bangladesh. Some of them are listed as follows:

- The Penal Code lists kidnapping, wrongful confinement, trafficking, slavery, assault, battery, causing miscarriage, rape, acid throwing and forced labour as crimes committed specifically against women.
- The Dowry Prohibition Act of 1980, amended as the Dowry Prohibition (Amendment) Ordinance, 1982, prohibits dowry in all forms and makes it punishable by imprisonment
- The Cruelty to Women Ordinance, 1983, provides punishment for kidnapping or abducting women, trafficking in women, dowry-related cruelty and rape, as well as abetment to such offences. The Suppression of Immoral Traffic Act provides penalties for detaining girls under 18 in a place where prostitution is carried out.
- The Family Courts Ordinance, 1985, provides for summary trial of offences regarding marriage, dower, maintenance and guardianship and custody of children.
- The Muslim Family Laws (Amendment) Ordinance, 1992, restrains indiscriminate divorce and polygamy.
- The Special Tribunal Act, 1995, is used in cases of rape or death due to rape for which punishment is 14 years rigorous imprisonment or death.
- The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 has stringent

provisions for crimes such as rape, trafficking, abduction, death caused by rape, gang rape or rape in police custody.

- The Legal Aid Act, 2000, provides free legal aid to citizens of the State and the Acid Crime Prevention Act 2002 punishes acid throwers whereas the Acid Control Act 2002 aims to control accessibility of acid.

## INDIA

The Constitution of India ensures freedom, equality and social justice. It contains a number of provisions for women empowerment. Women's right to equality and non-discrimination are defined as fundamental rights and explicitly clarifies that affirmative action programs for women do not contradict with the principle of non-discrimination on the grounds of sex.<sup>56</sup> Article 15(3) states that "Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provisions for women and children". Article 16(10) guarantees "equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment for appointment to any office under the State" and Article 16(2) forbids discrimination "in respect of any employment of office under the State" on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them.<sup>57</sup>

The Directive Principles of State Policy (Articles 36 to 51) are 'women-specific' and explicitly requires the state to direct its policy towards securing equality between men and women. There are provisions concerning equality of rights of men and women to an adequate means of livelihood and equal pay for equal work.<sup>58</sup> The state is also required to make provision for securing just and human conditions of work and for maternity benefits – and obliges every citizen to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.<sup>59</sup> The constitution ensures reservations of 33% seats in every Panchayats and municipalities for women.<sup>60</sup> Youth for Action lists some important Acts and Legislations affecting women as follows:

The Special Marriage Act, 1954; Hindu Marriage Act, 1955; Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956; The Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Act, 1956; The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971; The Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1986; Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986; The Commission of Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987;

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<sup>56</sup> Youth for Action, India Case Study, YFA, India

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, (p66)

<sup>58</sup> Articles 39 (a) and (d)

<sup>59</sup> Articles 42 and 51 (Ae)

<sup>60</sup> Articles 343 (T) and Article 243 D (3)



## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Hindu Succession Act, 1956 amended 1993; Amendment to Criminal Laws; Family Courts; and Prenatal Diagnostic Technologies Act, 1994; Legislations affecting economic activity of men and women are the Factories Act, 1948; Employees State Insurance Act, 1948; Plantation Labor Act, 1951; Mines Act, 1952; Maternity Benefits Act, 1961; Factories (Amendment) Act, 1976; Equal Remuneration Act, 1976; and the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1976.

India's Ninth Five-Year Plan lists the empowerment of women as one of its principal objectives. Yet due to strongly entrenched patriarchal values there is deep persistence of gender inequalities, neglect of women's concerns, lack of control over reproduction and a corresponding lack of male responsibility, unequal access to and control over resources, and above all, the systematic denial of women's freedoms.

### NEPAL

The Constitution stipulates that non-discrimination and equality are fundamental rights. However the country's traditional and cultural values and State laws are discriminatory against women. The National Country Code, in its Eleventh Amendment, sets out women's right to property and a conditional right to abortion, an increase in minimum age of marriage (from 16 to 18) and equality in grounds for divorce.<sup>61</sup> The "women's bill" became the most controversial one and got Parliamentary endorsement in March 2002, but short of women's unconditional right to inheritance. Although the 11<sup>th</sup> Amendment conferred women with many legal rights, 137 legal provisions were identified as discriminatory against women. Legal contradictions as well as traditional values perpetuate women's inferior status. For example, a daughter had to return her share of family property after marriage until very recently, when a new court decision has overturned this arrangement. Above all legislators, legal interpreters and law enforcers' failures to accept sexual equality prevents women from exercising their fundamental rights and freedoms.

The Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85) contained Nepal's first specific provisions to enhance women's participation in the development process. Successive plans have focused increasingly on improving the status of women through programmes geared to mainstreaming and empowerment. The Tenth Plan has, for the first time, included gender and human rights as a crosscutting as well as

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<sup>61</sup> Abortion is allowed in circumstances such as 1) up to 12 weeks gestation 2) up to 18 weeks in case of rape or incest, 3) if the life and physical or mental health of the mother is at risk, if the fetus is affected with a condition incompatible with life or where the fetus has a disorder that might result in severe mental or physical handicap. It is not permitted for sex selection or without the consent of the pregnant woman.

sectoral issue. The National Women's Commission (NWC) was established in 2002 to advise the government on effective implementation of the international human rights instruments and to develop policies and plans specifically aimed at advancing women. However, the Commission lacks a clear legal mandate. Although Gender Focal Points have also been established in the sectoral ministries, government programmes still lack gender sensitivity.

Nepal's 150 special measures for women regarding political and public participation, education, employment, health, violence against women, court procedure and gender justice, and marriage and family life are spread among 56 different laws, including the Constitution. Despite some positive outcomes, these special measures have been limited to discrete areas, such as political participation and maternity benefits and lack holistic approach to fighting gender discrimination.

## PAKISTAN

Pakistan's constitution guarantees women equal rights and empowers the government to take action to protect those rights. However, parallel Islamic legal systems are encouraged which undermine those rights. The controversial Hudood Ordinances were introduced in 1979 when General Zia modified the country's legal system in accordance with Islamic scriptures. It stripped women of the legal protection and rights previously available to them. Some of the discriminatory acts and regulations, and its their amendments are listed as follows:

- Rape laws were dramatically changed. No longer part of the Penal Code, rape was included in the Zina Ordinance (a sub category of the Hudood Ordinance). It blurred the line between rape and adultery and strengthened the possibility that a woman can be convicted of adultery if she cannot prove rape.
- The Federal Shari'a Court was established in 1980. Under this, women were subject to unequal rights on inheritance, termination of marriage, minimum age of marriage, and natural guardianship of children.
- The Qanun-e-Shahadat, the Evidence Act was introduced in 1984. It reduced the value of a single woman's testimony to half that of a man.
- The Qias and the Diyat Ordinance, promulgated in 1990, lets off men who perpetuate violence against women. It was passed as an Act without parliamentary debate or consent.
- The jirga system (traditional system where village elders sit together to make a decision) also works to pull down women's rights.

Positive legislation has come in the form of Women and Distress Fund Act, 1966, that provides relief to victims of violence; amendments in Section 167 of the Criminal Procedure Code that provides that a magistrate cannot detain a female in police custody, except in cases of dacoit and murder; and making

death penalty mandatory in case of gang rape.

There is no legislation against domestic violence in Pakistan. Redress is possible only in the most extreme cases. The issue of killing for honour began to appear on the political agenda in 1999 as a result of growing pressure from NGOs, media, activists and UN agencies. In 2000, General Pervez Musharraf, the Chief Executive of Pakistan announced that such killings would be treated as murder. The Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan has endorsed that honour killing would be treated as intentional murder but the killings continue.

### SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka's Constitution of 1978 defines the rights of political participation of women but no specific constitutional or legal provisions are made for female participation in politics or to increase representation in government. Women's groups in Sri Lanka support for introduction of quota system both at local and provincial council levels, to ensure that a minimum of 30 percent of women are elected.<sup>62</sup> They argue that a mere reservation in the party nomination list does not guarantee the election of a substantial number of women, and in absence of a mechanism that positively guarantees a place for women they continue to be marginalized from political and decision-making processes. And vital issues concerning women continue to be determined by men in Sri Lanka.

There is widespread concern that no positive action has been taken to put in place measures to increase women's representation in government despite the Cabinet decision in 2004, which recognized that it was necessary to increase women's representation.<sup>63</sup> Some experts are of the view that the existing laws on women are sufficient to protect against violence inflicted on women in politics and that there are no legal barriers for women to participate in political bodies and government institutions.<sup>64</sup> However, majority of others are of the opinion that those laws enhance violence against women. They argue that there are issues of ethical enforcement, particularly by politicians and heads of state and law enforcing agencies. There are sources that state ways in which these agents use violence against women as a pretext to control power.<sup>65</sup> They state that contradictions exist when politicians and police justify in the women's bill of rights and other existing laws; and in intimidations violence. They raise issues of the gaps in the implementation of policies with a focus on the need to eliminate the law - violence in good faith. They have asked for legal amendments and electoral reforms on a number of issues concerning women and their right to

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<sup>62</sup> Satkunanathan, A, July 2, 2006, The politics of 'empowerment': widening political opportunities for women, Dailynews

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Chandra de Silva, (1999). A Historical Overview of Women in Sri-Lankan Politics. In women and Politics in Sri Lanka A Comparative Perspective. (Ed) Sirima Kiribamune

<sup>65</sup> SAP Sri Lanka, Country Study (draft)

political participation.

Several reports claim that even though a Women's Charter was developed in 1992 with the participation of several academics, members of women's associations, and officers at the women's ministry on the initiative of President Premadasa, the Women's Charter lacks legal authority. They however, note that a key factor in the Charter is the inclusion of women in politics and the mention of the state as her protector. Although not having legal authority, the Women's Charter gives assurances to women for taking steps to safeguarding their political and civil rights, and upholding their status as equals individuals to their male counterparts.<sup>66</sup>

#### **4.3 LEGISLATIVE REFORMS AND AFFIRMATIVE MEASURES CONCERNING QUOTAS AND RESERVATIONS: UNIQUE CASES OF BANGLADESH, INDIA, PAKISTAN AND NEPAL<sup>67</sup>**

Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Nepal initiated different types of legislative reforms and affirmative measures to ensure that women are not entirely excluded from political structures. At the national level, Pakistan's National Assembly and Bangladesh's Parliament experimented with a system of reservation for women through indirect elections. In India, the 81<sup>st</sup> Amendment Bill, which proposed the reservation of one-third seats for women in the parliament and State assemblies, has a tempestuous history and is yet to be passed. Since its proposal the Bill has been subject to acrimonious debate in the parliament and subverted by physical and other means from being passed. A section of parliamentarians who oppose this Bill, base their objections on the provision of blanket reservation for women without ensuring representation of women from socially backward groups.

Even though the 1990 constitution of Nepal made a mandatory provision to nominate at least five per cent of women candidates for the House of Representatives, and to provide for seven seats for women in the National Assembly, this country has not held elections for over a decade. Since 2006, there is an interim constitution with a mandate to organize constituent assembly elections, which will draft a new constitution. Provisions to ensure women candidacy through proportional representation to the constituent assembly elections are made. However, elections and all other reforms are subsequent to this process. In Sri Lanka, the ministry of women's affairs has taken an initiative to increase the level of women's participation in local and national bodies. Even

<sup>66</sup> Jayawardena, K. (1998) Options. Special 50th Anniversary Issue No.2. Celebrating Women.

<sup>67</sup> Extracts from Saheed, F, Politics and Power, A Gender Perspective from South Asia

though the government proposed for constitutional reform and the introduction of a quota of 25 to 30 per cent for women in local government elections, its translation is pending.

At the grass-roots level, constitutional provisions have ensured reservation for women in India, Bangladesh and Nepal. In India, there is a 33 per cent reservation for women through direct elections to *panchayats* or local-level self-governance institutions that function in almost every State.

### RESERVATIONS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL: ELECTIONS BY NOMINATION IN BANGLADESH AND PAKISTAN

**Bangladesh** provides for reserved seats for women in the parliament and promotes special representation of women in local government through constitutional provisions.<sup>68</sup> In the first two elections of Bangladesh, in 1973 and 1979, the reservation provision ended up in women being nominated to parliament. Direct elections to the general seats became a male privilege as women were nominated in quotas to ensure a minimum representation in parliament. This provision ended up as a pawn in the hands of President Hussain Mohammad Ershad who used the provision of 30 women seats to make a majority in his party's favour and to ratify his illegal usurpation of power and imposition of arbitrary martial law from a legally constituted government. Given the party positions then, it would have been difficult to win the required majority. He promulgated a special ordinance, which said that if the returning officer receives a nomination paper proposed and seconded by more than half of the eligible voters (MPs), the candidate would be declared automatically elected.<sup>69</sup> In other words, 30 candidates nominated and seconded by 151 MPs would be considered elected, without an actual election being held. President Ershad's Tenth Amendment of the constitution was his gift to the future parliament, the beneficiary being the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) in 1991 and the Awami League (AL) in 1996. This amendment reintroduced the quota, whereby the members of parliament elect female candidates for the 30 reserved seats. In this system, the majority party nominates 30 women candidates, and since the election to these seats is seen as a foregone conclusion, other parties do not bother to nominate anybody.

This process renders women politicians dependent on male patronage in the party in power, undermines women's representative status and accentuates

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<sup>68</sup> Articles 65 (3) and 9

<sup>69</sup> No. XLVII of 1986

women's subordination in the political sphere.<sup>70</sup> This arrangement lacks accountability, and not many female politicians are engaged in developing their constituencies to enable them to contest from the general seats in the next round. Several groups wanted the abolition of indirect election of women representatives and to have provisions for quotas through direct election from territorial constituencies, and establishing quotas from political parties to run for general seats. However, indirect election for the reserved seats found support among a section of women politicians as well, because it eliminated the need for, as well as the risk of, electoral investments, both political and material.<sup>71</sup> In the election of 1991, several women MPs in reserved seats attained greater political stature and visibility, with commensurate public and political roles, primarily through their association with the BNP and its leadership back in the eighties, personified by the then prime minister, Begum Khaleda Zia. The women's seats have become a deciding factor for almost all political parties. The trend in recent elections, where no party wins absolute majority, means that there are only small margins of victory. In such a situation, the reserved seats can decide who forms the government. That is why, despite a decade's lobbying and advocacy by women's groups, Bangladesh's political parties have not amended the system.

Though the women elected by nomination to the parliament have a geographical constituency they have few links with the people and do not represent anyone, except the party that selected them. They also do not represent women in general, as Bangladesh's women themselves have no role in their election. Due to these factors, their directly elected colleagues regard them as 'vote banks' and are taken less seriously. Despite this, indirect election has also gained popularity among women MPs. Women advocacy groups constantly question the role of these MPs and are reminded of their accountability to women. This has led to an incremental, qualitative change. But the female politicians still do not feel secure enough to question and pressure for major electoral reforms.

In **Pakistan**, reservation for women's representation in the National Assembly goes back to 1956, when 3 per cent seats were allocated for women through elections. Women voters enjoyed a double franchise to exercise their choice for the general as well as the reserved-seat women candidates. However, constitutional amendments altered this provision according to the whims of the leaders at different points of time. For example, General Ayub Khan changed

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<sup>70</sup> Rahaman, Z and A. Kamal. 1991. *Accountable Administration and Sustainable Democracy* in R. Sobhan. Ed. *The Decade of Stagnation*. Dhaka: UPL.

<sup>71</sup> In 1990, the Tenth Amendment to the constitution re-inserted Clause (3) to Article 65, providing for 30 reserved seats for a further period of 10 years from the first sitting of the next parliament.

## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

the procedure for electing women from a direct to an indirect one in 1962. He mandated deputies of national and provincial assemblies (mostly men) to elect women representatives. This principle of indirect elections (Mumtaz, 1989) continued, but the reserved seats were increased to 5 per cent in 1973, in both the National and provincial assemblies for a period of ten years. In 1984, it was doubled to 10 per cent only for the National Assembly, paving the way for 20 women to be indirectly elected. However, this provision lapsed in 1988. In 1989, a bill was moved in the Cabinet, seeking consensus for extending the provisions in the Constitution for reserved seats for women. Since 2002, a provision for 17 percent reservation in proportional representation system at the national level has been made, thereby bringing in 74 women representatives out of 342 are public representatives at the national level.<sup>72</sup>

### RESERVATIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL: THE CASE OF BANGLADESH, INDIA AND NEPAL

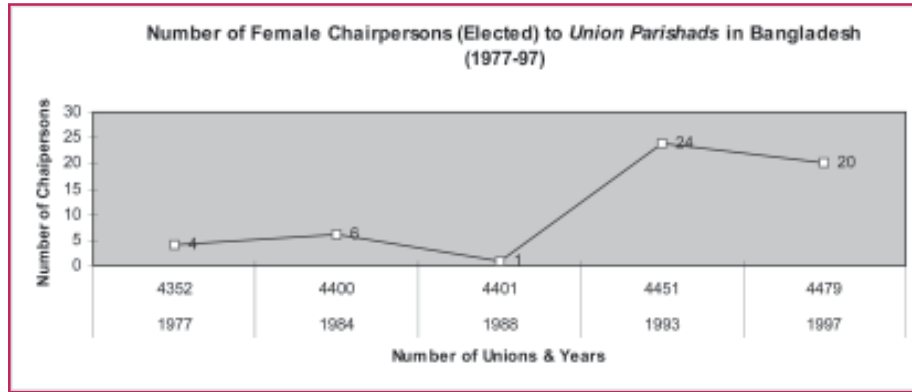
In **Bangladesh**, two presidential ordinances (1976 and 1977) ensured women's representation in local bodies. In 1982 and 1983, President Ershad's government passed two more ordinances, which changed the number of women representatives as well as the procedures for their nomination. Women members were to be nominated to represent each of three wards of a union. The 1997 report of the Local Government Reform Commission, suggests a four-tier democratic local government structure, namely *gram parishad* (at the village level), union *parishad* (at the union level), *upazilla parishad* (at the *thana* level) and *zilla parishad* (at the district level). In 1997, during the first year of the Awami League regime, a bill was moved in parliament that sought to reserve three seats for women in each union *parishad*. The women were to be chosen through direct election, for the first time. The participation of women voters in those elections to local bodies was the highest ever recorded. That was possible due to the creation of an institutional space for women through the Union Parishad Ordinance (1997), which required all women members to be directly elected to all the three reserved seats. Previously, the three reserved seats for women in each union *parishad* were filled by nomination. However, the new legislation remained silent on the specific powers and jurisdiction of elected members.

#### Figure 2. Female Chairpersons in Local Government in Bangladesh

<sup>72</sup> Raffi, M, Violence against women in politics, A paper presented in SA Regional Conference, Invisible faces of violence on women in politics: breaking the silence, 18-20 September 2007.

## UNFOLDING THE REALITY

Source: PLAGE, (1999), Ministry of Women and Children Affairs



A positive side to the 1997 union *parishad* election is that it significantly increased women's participation not only as voters but as contenders both for general seats with men and as candidates for reserved seats. The 1997 election saw more than 46,000 female candidates competing for 12,828 reserved seats. Nearly 4,000 female candidates competed for the general seats. In Gaibandha district, northwest of Bangladesh, 25 female candidates won through direct elections. In Union Parishads received as many as 20 female candidates were elected to the posts of chairpersons (See Figure 1 below). This is a negligible number of female chairpersons, which strongly indicates the marginal political status of women in local power structures. Nonetheless, the massive participation of women as candidates for directly elected positions will be considered a landmark in the institutionalisation process of women's participation in Bangladesh's politics.

The introduction of direct election to the reserved seats for the local elected bodies is undoubtedly a breakthrough for women in Bangladesh. In no other way could women have moved into these institutions and participated in them. However, their experience so far has been riddled with diverse problems. In one extreme case, five women union *parishad* members were raped, one because she refused to give in to her male colleague. The woman member was not, however, intimidated, and was bold enough to file a complaint with the police. The fact that the police have been negligent is another matter, but her courage became an example for the other women elected to the *parishad*. The entire campaign process was an uphill task for the women candidates. There were media reports of husbands hiding the only sari a woman candidate had, to prevent her from leaving home to campaign. There were also reports of physical abuse. The campaign period was trying, and, on being elected, female politicians found the situation more complex. They were not allowed to operate as elected members, and, within months, they were complaining against their male counterparts.



## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

minister, at a national convention. The elected women submitted a memorandum of their complaints. That was the first case of assertiveness from women at the local level in Bangladesh. Another issue is that the women are elected to the *parishad* from a constituency of three wards, thus by an electorate three times the size of the voters who elect the male members. Thus, the expectations of, and demands on, the women are greater. This puts them under serious difficulties. The lack of clear guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of the women members compounds the problem. There is worry that the gap between the expectations of the electorate and the performances of the representatives may end in alienating the women and negatively affecting their future in politics. As it is, the women have no, or very little, experience in running local elected bodies. The elected women now bear an additional burden, as there is no support system to relieve them of domestic responsibilities. Financial dependency is also a serious drawback.

A major issue is that despite several attempts by successive regimes to reform local government institutions, elected local government officials never enjoyed constitutionally guaranteed political rights since the birth of Bangladesh. Central bureaucratic control over administrative processes, lack of power and capacity to mobilise local resources, lack of women's participation in local government institutions, and institutional inability became characteristic of local governance over the past decades. This created a situation where local governments are neither promoted nor become effective in bringing women into the political arena.

In **India** the government introduced the Panchayat Raj Act (the term panchayat means local, and raj means governance) to amend the constitution to introduce 33 percent reservation for women in local-level self-government in April 1993. The panchayat raj is basically a three-tier structure for local-level self-governance in the States of India, namely, at the district level, at the intermediary block level and at the village level. Together, they pave the way for local-level self-governance in India. The Panchayat Raj Act legitimizes the role of a total of 2.25 million village councils, 5,100 intermediary councils and 4,750 district councils in the country. This confers decision-making power on around 22.5 million people at the village level. Reservation for women has ensured that one million women have emerged as leaders in the villages of India. The Act also ensures that one-third of the positions for chairpersons are reserved for women. In the first round of elections, five million women stood for elections to the one million seats.

The larger objective of strengthening the panchayati raj in India was to infuse the development process with social justice. Poverty eradication and helping people to access a broad range of rights was envisaged as a corollary to this process. The panchayati raj plays a critical role in a society like India, where power, hierarchies and patronage circumscribe the process of implementing

development projects for the people. In an ideal situation, it enables people to decide the course of development, according to their felt needs, and allocate resources to sectors prioritized by them. The implementation of government-sponsored schemes is ideally decided within a framework of social justice for the poorest and the marginalised. However, the process and experience of substituting a corrupt system of governance with a socially just one has been fraught with problems. And one million women leaders, mostly in rural areas have been catapulted into this system with little experience, to tackle the difficult task of overhauling the system and process of governance.

Various experiences with panchayati raj have been reported from the different regions and States in India. With some exceptions, the common picture that emerges is one of the reluctance of the State governments to give up power and devolve financial resources, and of a bureaucracy reluctant to hand over their decades-old patronage. There is a great deal of skepticism about women leaders, who are viewed as proxies for men. These are very real problems. However, a select review of women's experiences is a fascinating story of how such affirmative measures do make a difference to the process of governance and to the women themselves, despite heavy odds.

Whether it is the backward State of Uttar Pradesh with high female illiteracy and poverty, or the developed state of Kerala, which enjoys the highest literacy rates in India and is considered to be relatively better off, women's agency in exercising their leadership roles against many odds in the panchayat is evident. The most common story across India that emerges is one of corruption-free governance strived for by the women leaders. This is not to say that women leaders are not corrupt. But, by and large, the stories that emerge tell of women standing up to contractors, enforcing transparency in the system, and facing violence in return, in some instances.

The other common story is about changing priorities in development. Women's practical gender concerns, like water, sanitation, children's education, healthcare, domestic violence and alcohol abuse, are gaining currency within the development agenda of rural areas. A process of empowerment among the leaders is more than evident, particularly when there is access to support structures within the village, such as proximate women's organizations, women's awareness programmes or training and orientation programmes by non-governmental and governmental apparatuses. Literacy makes a big difference to women's ability and sense of confidence. However, throughout India, whether it is women from the literate state of Kerala or illiterate women from a village in Karnataka, the initial years in office have been characterized by many struggles waged against a patriarchal society, and domination by men in the meetings.

These teething problems were overcome in the first two years and “women have gained a sense of empowerment by asserting control over resources, officials and, most of all, by challenging men” (Jain, 2000). Most women leaders report a sense of self-confidence in dealing with officials or giving public speeches, an increase of knowledge in administrative matters, writing reports and ability to conduct meetings.<sup>73</sup>

Women’s representation in local-level self-governance institutions has brought out the advantages of proximity. Leaders are available within easy reach to address the problems faced within their geographical constituencies. This has allowed for mobilization of struggles around a variety of issues affecting the people. For instance, in Kerala, when a moneylender refused to return a woman laborer’s jewellery even after she had paid her dues, the leaders of the panchayat went and met him. Though he promised to return the jewellery, he did not. A group of women gathered and sat on strike in front of his shop, threatening dire consequences. The moneylender had to relent.<sup>74</sup> This is just one instance among many, of accountability being demanded from the system.

**In Nepal**, the new ordinance of 1997 ensured a 20 per cent reservation of seats for women, and contributed to the breakthrough participation of women in local elected bodies. One seat is reserved for women in each ward of the Village Development Committee. The new ordinance forced all political parties to support at least one female candidate. This fact encouraged women to get more involved in political activities in Nepal. About 40,000 female candidates were elected in the local elections of 1997. This provision has increased the numerical involvement of women in the local government units. However, their involvement in positions of decision-making and influence is insignificant. Overall, a strong male domination prevails and continues to marginalize women politicians in local decision-making. In spite of various setbacks, war and political instability the local development processes and women empowerment can be said to have similar experiences in the rural and urban, poor and remote areas as the Indian PRI described above.



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<sup>73</sup> See also Seema and Mukherjee, 2000, for more on Kerala’s unique experiments with decentralisation.

<sup>74</sup> Seema and Mukherjee, 2000, Local Democracy and Development: The Kerala People’s Campaign

## PART - III. REPRESSION AND RESISTANCE

### 5. VIOLENT ACTIONS AND VICTIMIZATION

Case studies of elected female politicians and the VAWIP research in South Asia reveal seven different types of violent actions against female politicians.<sup>75</sup> Each is described briefly as follows:

#### MURDER AND PHYSICAL ASSAULT

The VAWIP study in India reveals that murder and physical assault is pervasive at local level, and the fact that this is not dealt with earnestness by law enforcing agencies.<sup>76</sup> Cases in the boxes below are a few examples to illustrate that this occurs blatantly and with impunity of murderers.

#### Box 4 Murder And Physical Assault Of Women Politicians At Local Levels

Janaki Devi, a semi-literate and married woman of Purnia district of Bihar was murdered at her house on May 26 2006 when she refused to withdraw her candidacy for local panchayat elections. After filing nomination, she had started canvassing and the village people were totally in support of her candidature. The candidates belonging to other political parties namely Md.Habib and Md.Jamal saw Janaki Devi as a big threat to their political survival.

They tried to persuade Janaki Devi and her husband for withdrawal of her candidature. When Janaki Devi and her family did not want to withdraw on their request those men threatened her. On the fateful day, around 2.00 a.m when she was in deep sleep, Janaki Devi's daughter heard the cries of her mother and saw her in the pool of blood. She accuses Mr.Habib Jalal and Mr.Ismail of repeatedly killing her mother with a knife and fleeing away. The villagers brought her mother at District Head Quarter, but her mother was already dead. Janaki Devi's family registered the case in Babsy Police Station in Purnia and the case no: 49/06 u/s 302 /34 of IPC. The case is not yet settled and her family speaks sadly of these ghory incidents and asks whether any woman can dare to come into politics.

*\* Adapted from YFA, India, 2007*

<sup>75</sup> For case studies of Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, refer to list of county studies list in References.

<sup>76</sup> For detailed study refer to Youth For Action, Violence against women in politics: National study report, YFA India.

Across South Asia influential female politicians, activists and leaders have become victims of murder and physical assault such as beating, tearing of clothes, cigarette burns, other torture and physical abuse. Throwing acid on female politicians is particularly rampant in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In February 2007, a young female Pakistani minister was shot dead by a male fanatic for not wearing a veil to cover her head. Media reports claimed that she became victim to widespread discrimination against females in a

**Box 5 Children of Female Political Candidates Becomes Victims\***

Three children of Uma Devi of Islamnagar, Jamui district, of Bihar were murdered on March 19 2006 simply because she wanted to contest local panchayat elections for the post of Mukhiya. Uma Devi, her husband, and three children aged seven, four and one and half years were sleeping in their home at night in Islamnagar village on 19th March 2006 when Surender Yadav, the local police dfadar, knocked on the door and said that the daroga wanted to meet them. He forced Uma Devi's husband to open the door and a mob of around 14 people including the village Mukhiya – Krishanand Yadav started threatening Uma Devi's husband with weapons and warned him not to scream or they would fire on him. The criminals forcefully picked up Uma Devi's three children and her husband and dragged to the outskirts of the village where the infant girl was brutally murdered in front of everyone. Pareman Yadav and Surendra Yadav held on to the little girl, the Mukhiya Krishanand Yadav tore open her belly with a knife and his nephew Nepal Yadav strangled her. Then the criminals took the two young boys further away from the village, strangled them and tore open their bellies as well.

The reason for the brutal murder of Uma Devi's three innocent children was the Mukhiya did not want to lose his position and he alongwith his two brothers had started terrorizing the villagers unhindered as Krishanand Yadav's closeness to RJD Leader Shri Prasad Chaudhary gave him protection and patronage. They also used their money to control the local administration. The villagers were angry that the Mukhiya illegally had 14 kata gair maujurwa lands under his control and had offered Uma Devi forty thousand rupees not to file her candidature. The Mukhiya's family had threatened the villagers that if Uma Devi contests elections then punishment would be meted out to her even before the elections and that there would be a massacre.

An FIR of this murder was lodged as case no: 42/2006 dated on 20.3.2006 carrying the articles 302, 307 and 34 IPC and nothing was settled so far.

In another village, when Madhuri Gupta of West Champaran district of Bihar announced her interest to contest for elections in the local panchayat, the local elites discouraged and threatened her not to do so. When she stood by her decision, local goondas murdered her son.

\* A case from Bihar, India

profession dominated by males. Though, such violent cases are rarely reported in Nepal the VAWIP study conducted with a focus on two districts reveals that in one district 25 percent of the respondents have personally experienced physical assault and 10 percent of the respondents received threats and experienced attempt to murder.

Many female candidates like Janaki Devi, do not even get an opportunity to enter the world of politics; they are murdered early in the process of filing nominations for elections.

Families of female political candidates have fallen prey to election related violence. The case shown in Box 5 accounts the gory details of these acts of violence against female politicians in one of the poorest districts of Bihar in India. It is recorded that both these women whose children were murdered, went ahead with the nominations with the support of villagers, but it is unknown whether they won the elections. Even if they won the elections, the price these female politicians paid is personally hurtful and too devastating.

A similar study of VAWIP in Bangladesh shows a record for a single year that reveals a shocking number of 96 percent of reported victims with political identity receiving different types of physical violence such as injuries during demonstrations or under arrest, while killings and kidnapping are recorded at 3 and 1 percent respectively. However, this record is for both gender and a female disaggregated data is lacking. The same study also shows a high number of acid burning, bodily harm, and other cruelties against women, though it is difficult in both records to speculate whether the women are victims of domestic violence or whether they became victims as a result of their work or profession in the public sector.

In the case of the two countries some speculations can be made by looking at the types of perpetrators. In the absence of a comprehensive reporting system on aspects of violence against women and a research that identifies and analyses violence against female politicians not only by type of violence but also by types of perpetrators and the types of female victims, analysis is limited. Usually, media reporting in South Asia is also found to focus on the victim as women and not on the game of politics that leads to gendered violence. This attitude conceals in part the gravity of violence against women in South Asia.

### **RAPE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

Even though most reports of rape and sexual exploitation depict situations of armed conflict, war and breakdown of law and order, such cases are known to occur in states having some form of democratic governance, law and order, peace and normalcy. Occasional media reports particularly in India, Pakistan

and Bangladesh reveal cases of rape and sexual exploitation of female politicians. The VAWIP study enquiring such cases against female politicians in Pakistan (and this will be true for other South Asian countries) imply that there is a tendency of 'othering' the victims of rape and sexual harassment.<sup>77</sup>

#### Box 6 Shenaz Mirza \*victim of rape and torture

An elected District Councilor, associated with Pakistan Peoples Party for 25 years, was the city president in 1995. Her hard work and devotion towards the party elected her as a councilor after defeating Mr. Salim Aktar\*, a renowned politician. He could not take the defeat from a woman, which provided him an excuse to take revenge. When his brother was elected as MP from Muslim League in the National Assembly elections, he had power to take the revenge for his defeat.

One day, on the way to the village Mrs. Mirza and her family were attacked by a group of veiled assailants, bursting the tires of the car. Her husband and son were dragged out from the car, mercilessly beaten and left tied up on the road. She too was beaten brutally and her clothes torn apart. *Torturing her physically ..... they raped her and filmed video of that incident. They burnt her body with cigarettes* and threw her at a nearby bus stop threatening that the videotape would be exposed to the whole city if she discloses any of the perpetrators' names. The FRI submitted by Mrs. Mirza's husband and son was only registered under the pressure of PPP and finally the culprits were arrested. She was hospitalized for two months. Though mentally, physically and sexually abused, she never lost her hope and had the personal strength to continue in the profession and was reelected as the councilor.

\*Name changed

This 'othering' is possibly due to lack of a safe environment where victims can talk about rape and abuse, access justice and receive full support and understanding from family or society. In absence of an open and bias free environment 'othering' the victims is safer. Moreover, official records hardly provide any clues other than number of cases, if at all they are reported. This context is not helpful in finding out the intensity and gravity of this type of violence faced by female politicians.

However, the known case of an elected district councilor, aged 45 who became a victim of rape and torture by her defeated opponents while her husband and son were physically abused is testimony to the fact that such heinous acts

<sup>77</sup> SAP Pakistan, Violence against women in politics: Pakistan's perspectives

occur.<sup>78</sup> Her family found it hard to file a case against the opponent who is a brother of the defeated opponent with strong opposition party (Muslim League) connections. She also used her political parties' connections (Pakistan People's Party) to finally register her case and arrest the criminals. It is hard to find a woman like her who can brave it out openly and yet find the support from family and society in exposing perpetrators and have the personal strength to continue in the profession and get reelected as councilor. From such cases, it ought to be sufficient for the state and political parties to take measures to prevent and punish perpetrators of such heinous acts.

In Nepal, study of VAW literature shows that there is an obvious absence of reporting on rape and much concentration on sexual discrimination and harassment faced by female politicians. This obvious absence of reporting could be due to lack of awareness and insight or maybe even severe constraints felt by victims to talk about rape. However, a study of VAWIP in Nepal<sup>79</sup> mentions that 5 percent of the respondents in two districts acknowledged being victims of rape. This figure itself is appalling; however minute the sample.

### THREATS AND COERCION

In South Asia, majority of young, active and outspoken female politicians experience some sort of threat and coercion during their political career. Most commonly female politicians encounter threats and coercion when they show concern to improper practices, raise issues or take actions against wrongful

#### **Box 7. Malalai Joya kicked out of parliament**

Malaiya Joya, the most outspoken of the 68 women currently elected to the parliament of Afghanistan, was suspended from parliament. A relentless critic of the warlords and assorted war criminals in the Karzai government, the legislators kicked Joya out after viewing a television interview in which she likened the parliament to a "zoo".

*Joya first made global headlines when still in her early 20s; she denounced the presence of warlords and fundamentalists at the loya jirga preceding the 2005 elections when the young feminist, aided by the grassroots supports she garnered, was elected. In parliament, Joya has continued to speak out against the presence of human rights violators in government, including many former Mujahideen fighters and commanders.*

<sup>78</sup> SAP Pakistan, Case studies

<sup>79</sup> SAP Nepal, Violence against women in politics: national situation analysis report



## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

deeds or exposures of such deeds by anyone including fellow politicians of one's own party or opposition parties. They receive threats to kill or harm them or their families and coerce them into silence, inaction or even resignation from positions. Such incidents against female politicians are widely known and reported. Very little is known about the types and extent of violence faced by female politicians in Afghanistan. However, recently, there have been wide coverage and media reports of an instance where statements made by a young female politician, Malaiya Joya caused political furor in the parliament dominated by men leading to vicious anger and threats to rape and kill her. Appeals for her right and security are made by various organizations up to now. This incident gives room for ample speculation about the environment female politicians operates in that country as elsewhere (see box in this section).

The study of VAWIP in Pakistan shows that almost 20 percent of the female politicians that received threats were from the lower level bodies.<sup>80</sup> It states a case of an elected general councilor, aged 38, who was physically tortured, abused by tearing off her clothes and threatened to throw acid on her face during election campaigning in 2005. She won the elections, but continues to receive threats about kidnapping her daughters. There possibly are many female politicians who face such situations and also continue to work in such danger and yet there are no serious concerns shown or any steps taken to make the work environment safer for women who continue despite such challenges.

In Sri Lanka the VAWIP case study notes a surprising recent development in politics. Respondents noted that female candidates are increasingly threatened with the support of gun violence and vote buying. As a result there are increased feelings of insecurity and female candidates fear that the trend of increased spending in election campaigns will eventually lead to some sort of cooption with various parties that want deals for financial backing of election campaigning.

### SEXUAL HARASSMENT

There is a lack of clarity about what sexual harassment implies in the countries studied. It is used in the general sense of the term to imply any kind of discrimination and abuse against women. None of the countries studied in VAWIP have carried out a discussion on what constitutes sexual harassment. The box in this section also refers to sexual harassment but without explicitly wording the act. In fact the VAWIP study of Bangladesh does not mention or report it while Pakistan refers to it with examples of why sexual abuse of female politicians persist and who are likely targets of sexual abuse. The VAWIP study in Pakistan

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<sup>80</sup> Pakistan: Case Studies

### **Box 8. Female UP member violated by UP Chairman**

Meher Afroza, a member of female reserve seat of Kantal Union Parishad under Astogram Upozila in the Kishoregonj district, raised her voice against the Chairperson of the same Union for violence against women in a press briefing at a crime reporters' association auditorium in Dhaka. She said in her written speech, "While I went to Union Parishad on 16<sup>th</sup> May'06 for distributing food crops, the chairperson called me at his personal room. Once I got there, he said, "you are my wife, our marriage was done through marriage registration. This is the certificate." Along with his speech, he attacked me in a means of sexual harassment. Finding no other alternative ways, I started shouting for help. The people of the local market immediately responded. They came forward and rescued me. After the incident, Afroza lodged a case with the Astogram Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Act (*The Daily Janakantha*).

suggests that the difficult context does not allow direct discussions or disclosures of sexual harassment at the personal level. However, most of the female politicians studied knew about the fears, dangers and difficulties of becoming a female politician, knew the reasons why they had become victims of sexual abuse and who among them were the likely victims and the prevalence of sexual harassment at different levels of the organization. The study states that since about 20 percent of female politicians in the Union Council are aware of sexual harassment potentially vulnerable or possibly might even have become victims. This is a helpful indication given the context and can be taken as a reference to start some discussions on the topic.

In the VAWIP Nepal study, out of 14 identified constraints for participation in politics, sexual harassment of female politicians stands as the fifth highest. Yet, female politicians fail to prioritize the issue, due to the fact that it is discomforting and stressful to openly state it as problematic. In many instances there is a tendency to lump sexual harassment together with domestic violence.

Therefore, a thorough discussion of what constitutes sexual harassment and the conditions that are likely to prevent or reinforce sexual abuse of female politicians is pertinent across all countries in the region.

### **CHARACTER ASSASSINATION AND BLAME**

One of the most pervasive actions used against almost all female politicians in most countries such as Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka is slander. Giving a lower social status to female politicians, insulting their character,

greater public scrutiny and interest in their personal and social behavior, ridicule and blaming them for most social ills and misfortunes whether in the family or community are widely reported by female politicians across all class, caste or ethnicity. In Pakistan the VAWIP study shows that 85 percent of elected female representatives complained about discrimination and humiliation while performing their duties. The VAWIP study conducted in Bangladesh detail is the extent of this type of violence faced by female politicians.

**Box 9 “Politics is always Politics”**

Jyoti Subba (46) is a resident of Inaruwa-7 and represents the Nepali congress. She has experienced many positive changes since her involvement in politics including leadership and confidence.

However, because of her friendly and straight forward nature, people interpret her differently. Jyoti has been working hard for social causes in Inaruwa and has been popularly known by her colleagues. Due to her friendly nature, people mistaken her and accuse her for having demoralize character.

When talking about violence against women in politics, Jyoti says, “Besides domestic and other forms of violence, women into politics suffer from political violence as well.” It was Jyoti herself who has been recently deceived by a senior woman politician of Sunsari district for pressurizing to withdraw her nomination for District committee of the party. The worst was when her nomination form was misplaced by someone. Jyoti sadly accepts that the party was also not able to provide justice for her in that case due to lack of provisions against political violence.

Though there is a prevalence of gender discrimination in politics but she describes women are themselves involved in violence against women. She briefs that women has a pulling leg attitude that is one of the reason they are behind. She urges for the solidarity among the women for their uplift.

Female politicians in South Asia become easy and common targets for malicious acts due to dislike of the very idea of females taking part in politics, personal enmity or any other ideas not concerned at all with ideological beliefs or professional skills, attitude or behavior of female politicians. Such distaste is shown more vehemently towards female politicians of lower caste, social and economic status.

On the other hand, female politicians receiving patronage from male politicians irrespective of their higher social and economic status fall victim to slander. Using this form of violence against qualified female politicians is no less damaging than other forms of violence, because society is judgmental against women. This shows that being a female is a cause of the problem rather than their wrongdoing in politics.

### **DENIAL OF RIGHTFUL OFFICE AND BIAS**

Knowledgeable sources in politics suspect some male conspiracy against female leaders in South Asia. Political parties refuse to give rightful office to female leaders and prefer to fill high positions with male leaders. In Nepal, the VAWIP study and media reports carried stories on how the former deputy speaker of the House of Representatives was denied the rightful office of the speaker. Even though the female politician proved her abilities was qualified for the job, political parties found various reasons to give the position to a male. In this case the political parties considered women as unfit for top leadership due to male bias and abused the principle of gender equality.

There are ample stories in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka when female politicians accused male colleagues of misconduct, decisions were usually biased against females. According to them this suggested that male decision makers had the tendency to protect men and ignore violation faced by females as forgettable or minor incidents. The accused usually escaped with no punishment or even got promoted in many instances. Such cases left the accusers worse off.

#### **Box 10. Bangladesh: Female UP member violated by UP Chairman**

Meher Afroza, a member of female reserve seat of Kantal Union Parishad under Astogram Upozila in the Kishoregonj district, raised her voice against the Chairman of the same Union for violence against women in a press briefing at a crime reporters' association auditorium in Dhaka. She said in her written speech, "While I went to Union Parishad on 16<sup>th</sup> May'06 for distributing food crops, the chairman called me at his personal room. Once I got there, Chairman said, "you are my wife, our marriage has done through marriage registration. This is the certificate." At on stage of his speech, he attacked me in a means of sexual harassment. Finding no other alternative ways, I started shouting for saving me. The people of the local market immediately responded. They came forward and rescued me. After the incident, Afroza lodged a case with the Astogram Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Act.<sup>81</sup>

### VULNERABILITY AND STIGMATIZATION

South Asian women politicians are facing new forms of violence as they attempt to leave the private domain of the household, and get actively involved in politics. As some women decide to speak about their experience of violence newer and indirect forms are revealed that had not yet been perceived as 'violence' but as tricks of the game in politics, or as minor incidences that sometimes happen. Such acceptance of indirect forms of violence and practices has not only severe consequences upon women politicians' well being but also results in female marginalization from political decision-making, and in the minimal political participation and enjoyment of political rights and equality by women.

Such increasing levels and hybrid forms of violence against women politicians and the inability of the state to protect and promote women politicians, reflect the urgent need for introducing an integrated analysis of violence that will shed light on the power dynamics within which violence against women politicians evolves. Any attempt at understanding violence needs to address how power is conceptualized and exercised. Specifically, in the context of South Asia, violence against women politicians needs to be situated within the socio-cultural and political history of women's oppression and subordination. Considering that prominent South Asian women leaders such as Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Bandaranaike, and Chandrika Kumarthunge preferred to project a traditional image, deriving political authority and office from their 'fathers' and 'husbands', a key question is what such political images mean for women leaders of other classes with no family legacy or with a differing political history or social background. And how socio economic diversity is used to reinforce gender related violence while fulfilling political duties or pursuing their career. It is likely that factors of accumulated aggression – multiple forms of violence by females belonging to specific categories of groups- may be highly invisible and deep across certain groups.

Patriarchal values that undermine their role in politics - the symbolic space where male power and authority is demonstrated - make them extremely vulnerable targets of violence. Female politicians in Nepal and elsewhere in the region are known to be more vulnerable to sexual and psychological forms of violence and this deserves serious attention. Some studies suggest that it is extremely difficult to collect data on such issues and therefore, a beginning for opening up taboos is essential.

In South Asia there is much stigmatization attached to those women who speak openly about particular types of violence (related to social conduct, moral attitudes and sexual behavior). Any further work on this issue will enhance

understanding of the need to counter stigmatization and the specific culture and context within which women struggle to transform. The cultural myths or attitudes about women's sexuality and behavior and the lack of space to speak openly or take redress measures by those women who encounter violence at work face much stigma. Violated female politicians are seen as guilty rather than as victims and if they speak out against institutionalized sexual violence in politics they are constantly at risk of public humiliation, indifference, disbelief or ridicule by colleagues and opposition parties, isolation and political career loss and further harassment at home.

## 6. PERPETRATORS AND THEIR ACTION

In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, murder and physical assault is known to be perpetrated mostly through organizations such as one's own or opposition political parties, extremist religious groups or *fatwabaj* (arbitrary judicial ruling by clergies), state agencies, warring parties and family members.

Political parties are known to perpetrate such violent means in order to settle scores or win inter and intra party political wars, maintain their status quo and to satisfy their own insecurities likely to arise from female activists and politicians. Even within own political parties, male colleagues and superior leaders are reportedly the perpetrators in a majority of instances in most of the countries studied. An elected female politician confided to VAWIP study in Bangladesh, In most cases, known male colleagues from their own party organizations tried to take undue advantage of female colleagues. *"A party activist came to my house, and I gave him shelter. Suddenly he gets excited and tries to embrace and kiss me. And I gave him a slap on his face"*. In many instances, women do not know how to retaliate against the perpetrators and are frightened and humiliated by such incidents.

Extremist religious groups ascribing to a strictly codified patriarchal value system aim to maintain their authority over women and safeguard their role as staunch gatekeepers.

The VAWIP study in Pakistan particularly listed state agencies such as the police and army as common and top perpetrators of disappearances, murder, rape, and sexual harassment. These findings will not be uncommon in other countries. The warring parties in most violent conflicts in parts of South Asia are also perceived as common perpetrators of such violent acts.

A case of VAWIP Bangladesh study reveals how a female politician is married off early because her parent serving in the bureaucracy was pressured by a governor of state. This is one violent tactic applied by the state to control political opposition especially coming from young female politicians.

**Box 11. A Threatened Case\***

I decided not to get married in my student life but suddenly I took the decision to marry when my dad got a letter from the Governor, Monayem Khan. In his letter, Mr Khan threatened my father saying 'Control your ward, otherwise departmental action will be taken against you.' To keep my father free from all these botheration – I decided to marry.....It was really painful that my father had to suffer for me. In his departmental examination, he used to stand first position but he was not promoted; rather to harass him, the authority transferred him very frequently. So I decided to get married.

\* An extract from the report (SAP Bangladesh, p22)

In many instances in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, family members are perpetrate violence in the name of honor killing for disgracing the family or community for conducting public actions or speeches that are considered to be indecent, offensive or socially or religiously unacceptable to groups and communities ascribing to such norms or strictures. Overall in all countries in South Asia, family members perpetrate psychological violence upon female relatives that aspire for careers as politicians. Discouragement, prevention, threats and coercion of female member by male and female relatives are common.

In most of the cases the perpetrators of murder and physical assault against female politicians are known and even in cases where a FIR has been lodged with the police, nothing has been done and perpetrators are never even named as suspects. They are free and roaming with impunity with boosted morale in the locality.

**7. LANDSCAPE OF VIOLENCE AND PERPETRATORS**

The VAWIP studies show the institutionalized nature of violence against female politicians and that the more localized it is at the community, the more widespread is the extent of violence. At the grassroots level, violence originates from communities and families. Local bodies, law enforcing agencies and political party organizations not only perpetuate but provide it systemic and institutionalized character by encouraging its members and staffs to violence as a means to deter female politicians from stepping into their traditional domain of work and influence.

**Table 1. Miniature Landscape of Violence Against Female Politicians**

Types of violence	Place of its occurrence	Types of victims	Types of perpetrators	Aims of violence
<u>Physical</u>	Grassroots level: community, local politics  Family	Influential women leaders, women activists, candidates for elections, children and husband of female politicians	Family, opposition & own parties, extremist religious organizations, <i>shwabaj</i>	Win inter and intra party war, maintain status quo role of women in society, satisfy patriarchal insecurities
<u>Sexual</u>	Political and law enforcement level: armed conflict	Activist women, candidates for elections	Security forces, warring forces, male politicians, bureaucracy	To deter political mobilization of women
<u>Psycho-logical</u>	Political level: Electoral processes - nominations and election campaigns;  State level: office, parliament,  Family level: controlling from entering politics	Young women aspiring a political career, active women leaders and family, established women politicians	Opposition parties or members of own parties, male superior,	To deny tickets and from winning elections; stop active and rightful fulfillment of duty; jealousy, male ego and own weakness; manipulations and maintain male authority
<u>Threats &amp; coercion</u>	Parliament, police stations, councils, party organizations, committees, home, office	Established female politicians, male relatives, women exercising political authority, members of local bodies, leaders at grassroots level	Party men, police men, subordinate staff, male colleagues, family members	Deter and overthrow female politicians exercising power, revenge, settle vendetta, stop from contesting elections and joining political office, to frustrate ambitious and committed female politicians

The increasing use of various forms of violence that are not only life threatening but psychologically damaging and abusive of the liberty of female politicians are motivated by specific aims at controlling the exercise of power, the maintaining of status quo and male authority in politics. Pervasive uses of violence that are sexual, socially insulting and psychologically and bodily abusive are perpetrated against young women, irrespective of their marital status. Victims of violence are not always the stereotypically weak or illiterate female politicians but include strong, capable and powerful female leaders. The children, husband and father of female candidates and established politicians have also become victims.

The study of Pakistan and India shows that violence with its damaging forms are more widespread and severe against those women lacking political patronage, education, social status, awareness of rights and from minority groups and religion, having rural background. This finding is also true for other countries.



## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

There is an indication of a pattern in the different forms of violence used by different perpetrators at different levels of organization (Table 1). More physical violence is reported at the grassroots level, where the members of the family and community and opposition local political organizations are the perpetrators. Families, especially children of female candidates have become victims. Male bureaucrats, members of or those receiving patronage from political parties and law enforcement agencies, such as the police, security or warring forces, reportedly perpetrate sexual violence. Psychological violence originates and extends to the state level and spreads to the electoral processes and the parliament where the office and parliament become a playground to exercise violence against female opponents. The parliament, police stations, local councils, party organizations, office, committees, neighborhoods and homes have become spaces where violence against female politicians occur to prevent them from exercising any sort of power in South Asia.



## **PART - IV.** PATRIARCHAL DEVICES OF MANIPULATION

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We put forward a framework using four factors that act as patriarchal devices of manipulation against female politicians in Part II. Explanations of each are carried out below. These analyses are further supported by findings from primary research conducted by SAP International in various countries.

### **8. CULTURAL FACTOR - A DEVICE OF PATRIARCHY WEAKENING FEMALE POLITICIANS**

The family is the key to every successful female politician in the countries of South Asia. Family support is the biggest factor in their political aspiration or career development. In spite of external obstacles, many women in all the countries studied receive support from families to become successful leaders and have positive influence in society and government. However, this is true for only a few lucky ones in contrast to the experiences of the vast majority of female politicians. The general plight of a female politician is different from that of a powerful female head of state or political party in South Asia.

South Asia is one of the regions in the world with the highest incidence of domestic violence against women. Literature on domestic violence explains how male domination is culturally accepted by men and women in the private sphere of home and family. We have documented in earlier chapters how various forms of violence used to preserve male domination over females in politics. And this is only one small study in the minute arena of politics.

Respondents in the country studies of this research and various international literature reviews reveal that domestic violence when used by men or family members with power against females without power have endangered the lives of female politicians in most cases. The whole range of violent acts - physical, sexual and psychological injury or harm that threaten life or liberty of women and girls - in such a small scale study points out that violence perpetrated by actors in the private and public spheres do have its seeds hidden in politics, home and society. As long as domestic violence is tolerated by state and society, female politicians cannot easily be protected at home or in public space.

**Box 12. Facts of Sexual Violence Against Female Combatants Revealed**

*Numbers of female Maoist Combatants are suffering from the ailments recurred due to unsafe abortion. The medical team that came to the Maoist Cantonment from Nepalgunj Medical College for examination revealed the fact. Earlier, such problems used to remain undisclosed. But now, the truth came out as many women combatants with the similar ailments came in the cantonment and the medical team visited there for treatment. Almost half of the women combatants who came for treatment have severe or normal infections caused from unsafe abortion. The medical team examined and treated a total of 661 Maoist combatants from various camps under the 7th Division, Talbandi, Kailali including Sisnegam of Masuriya Badaipur, Bahabiryoddha Smriti and Basu Smriti brigades.*

*Source: Himal Khabar Patrika (Nepali vernacular, fortnightly, 31st Dec 2006 to Jan 14, 2007)*

Testimonies of several elected female politicians in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka show that in general the socio cultural attitude is against women in politics. Some excerpts from the case studies in the box below highlight gender discrimination and how it affects the morale of female politicians.<sup>82</sup>

**Box13. Because I Am A Woman**

***Because I Am a Woman***

*“All those things have happened as I am a woman and unmarried. I work well and there is no stain in my character and I never collect money from the people. People love me (but) this (my gender) is the only cause to do this violence against me”*

*“From the early days it is because of patriarchal society and traditional values that women are not permitted to do politics.”*

*“My feeling is if I were a male person it (violence against me) would not happen. My weakness is I am a woman and I do not have any power to take revenge in response to any unwanted steps taken by others.”*

In countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, women also face mobility constraints due to cultural mechanisms of sex segregation and “purdah”. While politics requires women to interact with male and female constituents and address public meetings, cultural norms do not support women to assume roles in this domain.

<sup>82</sup> See VAWIP Country reports of Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

In general, cultural notions of female modesty, purity and subordination conflict with the types of roles that actors play in politics. Many writings reflect the various ways in which cultural views and highly powerful female leaders in South Asia use images of women's subordination, modesty, purity and integrity. Even though South Asia has produced female leaders in the highest positions of government in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, they have emerged as staunch followers of these views. And as they assumed power in politics in none of these countries did they ever challenge the general patterns of female subordination or give priority to female political empowerment.

The country study in Nepal particularly indicated that even though male politicians encouraged more women to join politics, in general their perception and behavior towards female colleagues was negative because of their attitude that politics is a male domain. Even the female politicians found this arena and culture not conducive to women. Although female politicians within one party seemed to be united for some common cause they are divided when it comes to holding a position, forming committees, recommending a female colleague for a position of 'power' or traveling abroad on special quotas. Some said that though there is a sense of solidarity in addressing 'women's issues' when it comes to getting a position or privilege there is immediate friction and sides start to change, opinions differ, etc. Partisan interests dominate attitudes of female politicians and their behaviour towards female members of opposition parties is found to be even more negative especially when it comes to fighting elections. They are also unable to show cooperation and support to female colleagues when they are in trouble or when they fall prey to some prejudice. They will not raise any voice against leadership for fear of getting in the bad book of leaders.

The study further came up with findings that female politicians normally hesitate to nominate or recommend another woman to a committee. Many respondents to the study pointed out that a female politician in power would go alone and become a member of various committees, running from one place to another rather than appoint another woman, be it her own assistant. This, they reasoned was further worsened by lack of trust, jealousy, accusations, character assassination and immense backbiting among themselves. In one instance, which is common in Nepal, one political worker out of vengeance reported another political worker to the police with a false allegation that she was a Maoist (during the insurgency).

The political culture in Nepal is such that there is antagonism between female colleagues having diverse backgrounds, i.e. the underprivileged versus the privileged women belonging to the upper class with good economic support<sup>83</sup>. As the elite female politicians can resist and fight the cultural ills in politics they continue to do so leaving behind the female groups that belong to poor and marginalized communities.

Therefore, the political culture makes it very difficult for women to create any kind of solidarity in politics. Female politicians usually lack finances and do not have independent economic power and are too economically insecure to hold a stand in the party or get a ticket from the party to contest elections.

Most feminist authors on the subject reason that female leaders in South Asia were brought in to establish or maintain the patriarchal order and being women they mattered little. In the highest levels of government and political organizations, it is men who set the parameters for what a nation ought to represent, and what the role of women should be. In this perspective their interests clash with the political emancipation of women and so long as female politicians' authority is derived from structures devised by male architects, violence perpetrated against female politicians will be neglected. The crux of the matter is that so long as culture (whether socio economic or political) favours one gender over another, or ascribes higher values to one over another society implicitly encourages violence against the weaker and less valued.

## **9. STRUCTURAL DEVICES TO MAINTAIN PATRIARCHAL INTERESTS AND POWER**

This raises the question of how these cultural beliefs are structured in South Asian politics. Most writings - historical and contemporary – reflect the legacy of dynastic or class based power structures in South Asia. Women's leadership in politics in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka presents a unique paradox. These countries have had a woman leader at its helm at some point in time, a phenomenon unparalleled in other regions of the world. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have had the unique distinction of two women leaders in the course of their political history. This is in stark contrast to the dwindling numbers of women who are elected to national parliaments and legislatures during each election. The high visibility of women leaders is fully matched by the invisibility of women representatives in the national assemblies. This apparent paradox can be explained in terms of a unique phenomenon termed as 'over-the-dead-body syndrome' by Diane Kincaid. She observed that, between 1920 and 1970, American women legislators assumed political roles after the deaths of their husbands. The same is true with women leaders of South Asia. A woman leader continues to derive her legitimacy for leadership from being a close relative of a dead leader, as a wife or a daughter. This phenomenon of catapulting women as leaders from 'dynastic' families, and offering limited options to the others for contesting elections, is a part of the common patriarchal legacy of South Asia. Such exclusive structures and elite style of governance surely have played on their limitations of female representation and legitimacy to govern. It is only a matter of contemplation on the ways such exclusive or elite structures reinforce violence against female politicians who have potential to challenge or change this established order and style.

**Table 2. Representations of South Asian Women in Lower House and Upper House**

Rank	Country	Lower or single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Elections	Seats*	Women	% W	Elections	Seats*	Women	% W
25	Afghanistan	09 2005	249	68	27.3	09 2005	102	23	22.5
48	Pakistan	10 2002	342	73	21.3	03 2006	100	17	17.0
48	Nepal	01 2007	329	57	17.3	—	—	—	—
73	Bangladesh	10 2001	345	52	15.1	—	—	—	—
107	India	04 2004	545	45	8.3	07.2006	242	26	10.7
120	Sri Lanka	04 2004	225	11	4.9	—	—	—	—
127	Bhutan	N.A.	150	4	2.7	—	—	—	—

Source: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm>

2 - Bangladesh: In 2004, the number of seats in parliament was raised from 300 to 345, with the addition of 45 reserved seats for women. These reserved seats were filled in September and October 2005, being allocated to political parties in proportion to their share of the national vote received in the 2001 election.

In the case of **India**, a land of one billion people and the world's largest democracy, representation of women in parliament is very low. Despite the fact that India is the largest democracy in the Asia-Pacific region, it only has 8.3 % women MPs in Lok Sabha and 10.7 % in Rajya Sabha. Currently India has no reservation for women in the National Parliament. At the local level, 33% of seats are reserved for women as a constitutional quota.

The Lok Sabha, or the lower house of parliament, is a major decision-maker that charts the socio-economic and political lives of the people of India. Although the constitution of India guarantees equal political rights to women under Articles 15 (1) and 15 (3), the proportion of women members in the Lok Sabha, since 1950, has ranged from a low of 3.4 per cent in 1979-80 to 8.1 per cent in 1985-90. Subsequently, to date, the percentage of successful women candidates has not altered much, as Table 3 indicates.

Women continue to remain invisible and marginalized in decision-making bodies, leading to lack of a feminist perspective in political decision-making. It was only with the setting up of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in September of 1971 that the demand of greater representation of women in political institutions in India was taken up in a systematic manner.

**Table 3. Representation of Women in Lok Sabha, India**

Lok Sabha	Total Seat	No. Of women contestants	No. of women elected	Percentage to the total
First	499	—	22	4.4
Second	500	45	27	5.4
Third	503	70	34	6.7
Fourth	523	67	31	5.9
Fifth	521	86	22	4.2
Sixth	544	70	19	3.4
Seventh	544	142	28	5.1
Eight	544	164	44	8.1
Ninth	517	198	27	5.2
Tenth	544	325	39	7.18
Eleventh	544	599	39	7.18
Twelfth	544	271	48	8.8

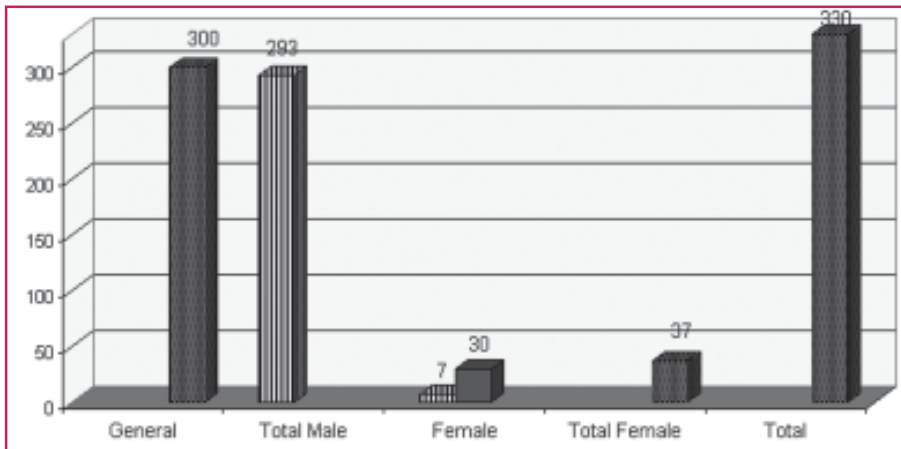
Source: Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 1998

In **Pakistan**, there were 22 women in the National Assembly of 200 members in 1985. In 1988-90, 4 women successfully contested in general seats, in addition to the 20 reserved seats, raising their total number to 24. Pakistan also elected its first woman prime minister during that period, and the elections saw a peak in the number of women contesting provincial seats (19), though only one was successful. However, in 1988, the provision for reserved seats for women lapsed, and in the absence of this enabling provision, in 1990, women's representation dropped to two and three women respectively in the National and Provincial Assemblies, with one additional woman being elected on a seat reserved for minorities. The situation until 1999 was hardly better, with six women sitting in the National Assembly and an equal number in the Provincial Assemblies. In 2002 the allocation of 17.5 percent to women at the National and Provincial Assemblies and an additional 14 women returning through direct elections increased women representation to 74 out of 342 - member National Assembly. Though this quota is lower than the 33 percent demanded by women advocacy groups, it still higher than provisions in other countries in the region. Women also received the same proportion of seats in the Senate for the first time.<sup>84</sup> As of 10 2002 election out of 342 seats in LH 73 are women 21.3% women and as of 03 2006 election, out of 100 seats in UP H 17 are women which is 17.0%.

<sup>84</sup> Mumtaz, Khawar. 1989. Political Participation: Women in National Legislatures in Pakistan. In Shaheed, Farida, Sohail Akbar Warraich, Cassandra Balchin and Aisha Gazdar. Ed. Shaping Women's Lives: Laws, Practices and Strategies in Pakistan. Lahore: Shirkat Gah.

In the case of **Bangladesh**, a cursory look at the present National Assembly reflects women's position. Only seven women were elected directly, and, in a parliament of 330 members, 30 women occupied seats through nominations based on the constitutional provision of reservation in (See Table 4). As of Bangladesh the latest representation of 10 2001 election, 345 seats Lower House 52 women 15.1%

**Figure 3: Parliament Members in the National Assembly of Bangladesh**



The position of women in Bangladesh's political parties, of both the rightwing and leftwing ideology, has not been encouraging.

In **Nepal**,<sup>85</sup> women started entering the field of politics in 1990 so they are still resistant to the game. Prior to that Nepal was under the *Panchayat system* and monarchy for the last 30 years, but women have been excluded from the formulation of the Constitution in 1990

And there has been systemic exclusion of women in the legislative, judiciary and executive bodies.

For the 1991 election only half of the 6 percent of the female candidates fielded won in the House of Representatives, as shown in (Table 5). The results declared showed that of the 205 candidates elected, seven were women - five from the Nepali Congress Party and two from the UML. Since the 1990 constitution required that women make up five percent of the upper house, three women were also nominated to fill the quota.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Report Framework for South Asian Regional conference "Invisible faces of Violence on Women in Politics: Breaking the Silence" 18-20 September 2007

<sup>86</sup> Kabir, F, Political Participation of Women in South Asia



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At the district level, although women constituted a negligible percentage of candidates, there was a 100 percent victory for women, with all seven women winning. In the case of the two leading parties, the Nepali Congress Party had 11 women among its 204 candidates, while the United Marxist-Leninist (UML) party included only 9 women among its 177 candidates.

**Table 4. Number of Candidates fielded and elected at 1991 Election Nepal**

Gender	Candidates at national elections	Elected at national elections	Candidates representing districts	Elected district representatives	Candidates at village level	Elected village representatives
Male	93.6	96.5	99.7	99.4	99.1	99.5
Female	6.4	3.5	0.3	0.6	0.9	0.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Ghimire, D, (May 1991 election to the House of Representatives)

In the 1994 elections, there was a representation of less than 5% candidature of women although mandated by the Constitution and in 1999, the major parties announced 10% candidature of women but the actual candidature was 6.3% with 5.85% being elected. As of 01 2007 elections out of 329 seats in the lower house 57 are women which is 17.3%.

In this case a serious effort is being made to ensure women's participation in politics by constitutional and legal procedures. The spirit of the recent *Jana Aandolan II* still seems to be alive and the commitments various political parties and policy makers made have to be monitored so that these guarantees are transformed into reality.

Democracy is being broadened in today's world in terms of its definition and its methodologies. The nations in South Asia are conscious of this fact and are attempting to redefine their respective agendas and bring in leadership reform which consists of placing women's involvement and gender issues at the priority level.

Political bodies need to revise their values and principles, which have been built on a patriarchal foundation, which allows very little space to women in politics and government. This occurrence has handicapped women's entry into public life and has made gender based violence a prominent element in the South Asian region.

In **Sri-Lanka**, the high literacy and education status of women has made little difference to their representation in institutions of governance. There is a glaring gender disparity at all levels, within the national parliament, in local municipal councils, urban councils and pradeshiya sabhas. Representation of women in the national parliament is 4.9 percent, in provincial councils 3.1 percent, and in local authorities at the in 1997 elections, only 1.1 percent in the pradeshiya sabha. The 1997 local government elections showed a drop in female participation since 1991. In fact, there is a consistent decline in women's representation at all levels. In municipal bodies it came down to 2.3 percent in 1997, from 2.9 percent in 1991; in urban councils, from 2.4 per cent in 1991 to 1 percent in 1997; and in the pradeshiya sabha, from 1.6 per cent in 1971 to 1.1 percent in 1997. Sri Lanka after the 2004 elections has 11 women representatives in 225 seats- a 4.9 % representation.

During the recent provincial council elections in Sri Lanka, women's organizations appealed to political parties to field the minimum number of women candidates and to include women's issues in their political manifestos. But the escalation of violence, witnessed at recent elections, kept women away from politics. Due to these structural impediments, women's presence in Sri Lanka's parliamentary politics has been low. Though political parties do have women's wings, few nominate women to contest elections. Except for Sirimavo Bandaranaike and Chandrika Kumaranatunga, who headed political parties after their husbands were assassinated and who became prime minister and president respectively, no woman has headed a Sri Lankan political party.

An examination of the statistical records of the Department of Elections reveals the small percentage of women candidates who contested both at the national level and in local government elections. In 1970 and in 1977, the percentage of women was 3.4 and 1.9, respectively. These figures have not improved. Though the percentage in the general elections increased to 3.2 in 1989, it dropped to 2.7 in 1994. The only visible improvement, albeit amidst some fluctuations, is the number of women ministers in the cabinet. In 1977 it was 7.1 percent, and in 1989, just 3.7 percent, while in the present cabinet 13.7 percent of ministers are women.

Sri Lanka has recorded 44 cases of election violence during the Presidential Election of 2005.<sup>87</sup> The incidents of violence included bomb blast assaults, arrests, shooting and injury, murders, chasing of voter's threats and intimidation, snatching of poll cards and other election offences. A report on the election related violence in the General Election of April 2004.

Several reasons account for the low representation of women in South Asia's national political bodies. Among them is a low priority accorded by political parties to women's candidature. This situation is consistent throughout South Asia.

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<sup>87</sup> The People's Action for Free and Fair Election(PAFFREL)

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While women form a sizeable proportion of members of political parties across the spectrum of right, centrist and left, they are mostly absent from party leadership and 'ghettoised' into women's wings of the parties.

### STRUCTURE OF POLITICAL PARTY ORGANIZATIONS

The study of political parties in South Asia also reflect that their organizations are highly male dominated and tend to have elite base in top decision-making levels, with the exception of some parties in India.<sup>88</sup> Party leaders and male members will exploit gender identities to benefit them during campaigns for garnering votes. This study also highlights the fact that women's issues and struggles are subordinate to the political struggle and to the male groupings in political parties. Kumari Jayewardene succinctly explains the way male politicians consciously mobilized women in the freedom struggles in India, and once independence was achieved, pushed them back into their 'accustomed place'.

Both studies indicate that the political parties can do more than they are willing to and that they lack commitment to give adequate space to women in leading decision-making bodies. This lack of space in power exercising structures reinforces female subordination. A look at the composition of membership in most political parties across South Asia does not reflect the rich diversity of the society they represent. Political party manifestoes also do not reflect a necessity for broadening their membership base nor refer to violence against women explicitly. The VAWIP study in Bangladesh, India and Nepal plainly point out the lack of sensitivity and commitment of political parties to address the issue of violence against female politicians. The position of women in Bangladesh's political parties of both the right and left wing is not encouraging. See Table 6.

**Table 5. Women's Position in Political Parties**

Name of party	Party Organ	Total Incumbents	Female Incumbents
Awami League	Presidium & Secretariat	23	4
Awami League	Working Committee	27	-
Muslim League (Sabur)	Central Executive	11	3
BNP	National Standing Committee	11	1
BNP	National Executive	114	14
CPB	Central Committee	34	-
Democratic League	Central Committee	61	5
JCD	Central Committee	59	1
UPP	Executive Committee	24	-

*Source: Najma Chowdhury, Women in Politics in Bangladesh, Ministry of Social Welfare and Women's Affairs, Government of Bangladesh, 1995*

<sup>88</sup> Suri et.al, 2007, Political parties in South Asia: the challenge to change, IDEA, Sweden

The VAWIP study in Bangladesh shows that although women leaders head the two major political parties in the country, the issue of violence against female politicians in their respective political manifestoes has not figured much since the restoration of democracy in 1991. Of the five political parties, only two, the Bangladesh Awami League and the Communist Party of Bangladesh mention their interest to address violence against women while the other three (Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jatyo Party and Jamat-e-Islam) do not refer to it. The election manifestos of Bangladesh's major political parties do not incorporate any comprehensive programmes to ensure and encourage women's participation in politics.

In both the 1991 and 1996 elections, the major political parties gave election tickets to only three or four women candidates. The manifestos of the political parties did not explicitly deal with women and their issues or concerns, but merely carried small statements on women and development. Only the Jamaat-e-Islami clearly stated that women could not contest elections. Though they hold positions in the party, these are nominated ones. The other political parties remained ambivalent on women in politics.

Moreover, the VAWIP study in Nepal reports that mere mention in manifestoes means nothing as even though the two major political parties made some commitments to bring in female participation, these never got fulfilled. The Nepali Congress' commitment to address the issue of women's 'equitable' representation at all levels in formal political structures and their participation in decision-making never got priority and there is a large gap between the party's formal commitment and activities. Similarly, the Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist's emphasis to launch social movements by formulating laws to abolish all forms of discrimination against women never saw its actual commitment and they also proved that they were playing a rhetoric game.

More progressively, even though one of the ideological thrust of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist is oriented towards expanding the rights of women, they are often criticized for failing to represent women in the peace dialogues or to bring up women's issues seriously at the political level.

Due to failures to address women's issues and their contribution to national development, democratic multi party organizations in Nepal and their plans and policies on equality are viewed as a mockery of the very essence of women. Consequently, with an ever widening gulf between males and females, exploitation and violence escalated and culminated in women joining the Maoist insurgency. Despite this knowledge, all political parties including the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoists) are resistant to any fundamental changes that will

imbalance male monopoly of power exercise or create structures that can enhance meaningful participation of women in politics. The present Interim Government of the eight political parties in present Nepal has only 18 percent women representatives; after so much rhetoric and war for justice and equality, political structures for so long have been created to maintain patriarchal interests and they continue to exclude women. Addressing violence against female politicians within such structures will be a tough battle in Nepal.

Similarly, in India the Bharatiya Janata Party and Nationalist Congress Party mention their commitment in party manifestoes to enact laws against sexual harassment. It is almost as if sexual harassment and discrimination do not exist in political structures and no political parties consider it their responsibility to address it within their party organizations. In spite of most political parties having women's wings in all countries studied they do not address the issue of violence against themselves within their organization and so long as they do not do this, increasing political participation will remain rhetoric for long time. The VAWIP study in India reasons on political party commitment and role of politicians as follows:<sup>89</sup>

*“Looking at ideologies and manifestoes of various political parties, one can perhaps conclude that majority of the parties are conscious of women related problems as a result they have women's wings in their parties and have specific promises or programs for the enhancement of their status in general. However, most of the political parties strongly advocated women empowerment and participation in electoral process. But, the issue revolves around the share of freedom practiced by the political parties. It is clear that majority of the political parties practiced opportunistic political agenda and hence, we found that only 8-9% women are in Parliament. If these political parties are committed, then it should be around 30-50%. The choice is in their hands as they are also policy makers of this country.”*

Generally South Asian women lack access to fundamental resources, such as education, civic knowledge and skills, time and money that are important for facilitating political participation. These weaknesses also enhance structures that perpetuate female exploitation in politics, thus becoming a degenerate practice and a norm in various political institutions.

A comprehensive research to study the work environment for female politicians within political party organizations is necessary. It is important to study what male politicians perceive on the issues raised by female politicians, what their commitments are for addressing the issue of sexual harassment and what measures can be forthcoming to work jointly on this issue.

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<sup>89</sup> VAWIP Country Report, India

The subordinate status of women vis-à-vis men is a universal phenomenon, though with a difference in the nature and extent of subordination across the South Asian Region. The gender status quo is maintained through low resources allocation to women's human development by the state, society and the family. This is reflected in the social indicators, which reflect varying degrees of gender disparities in education, health, employment, ownership of productive resources and politics in all countries. Additionally gender is mediated through class, caste and ethnicity that structure access to resources and opportunities. The socio-cultural and economic dependence of women is one of the key detrimental factors to their political participation in public political domain.

Politics is increasingly becoming commercialized. More and more money is needed to participate in politics. Women lack access to and ownership of productive resource, limiting the scope of their political work. Women often lack social capital because they are often not heads of communities, tribes or kinship groups, resulting in the absence of constituency base for them and means of political participation such as political skills, economic resources, education, training and access to information.

## 10. INSTITUTIONAL EXPLANATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING VAWIP

Women's relationship in politics is shaped by patriarchy as a system of male domination. It transforms male and female into men and women and construct the hierarchy of gender relations where men are privileged (Eisenstein 1984). Andrienne Rich defines patriarchy as:

*“A familial- social, ideological, political system in which men by force, direct pressure or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.”*  
(Rich 1977:57)

The gender role ideology is used as a tool by patriarchy to place women within the private arena of home as mothers and wives and men in the public sphere. This is one of the vital factors that shape the level of women's political participation globally. However, this ideological divide is not reflective of the reality. The boundaries between public and private are often blurred in the daily lives of women. Nonetheless, domestic domain continues to be perceived in North as well as in the South as the legitimate space for women while public space is associated with men. Women have to negotiate their entry into and claim on public space according to the discursive and material opportunities available in

## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

a given culture and society. Although the gender role ideology is not static it has remained in flux while intersecting with economic, social and political systems of a particular society. Women continue to be defined as private across countries, which has resulted in their exclusion from politics.

Even when women do become a part of the formal political process as members of elite political groups, they are usually assigned to soft portfolios 'appropriate' for women's concerns. The nature of politics is an important factor for the inclusion or exclusion of women in politics. Vicky Randall defines politics as an "articulation, or working out of relationships within an already given power structure", which is in contrast with the traditional view of politics that defines it as an activity, a conscious, deliberate participation in the process by which resources are allocated among citizens. This conception of politics restricts political activity only in the public arena and the private sphere of family life is rendered apolitical. This public-private dichotomy in the traditional definition of politics is used to exclude women from public political sphere and even when women are brought into politics they are entered as mothers and wives.

Male domination of politics, political parties and culture of formal political structures is another factor that hinders women's political participation. Often male dominated political parties have a male perception on issues of national importance that disillusion women as their perspective is often ignored and not reflected in the politics of their parties. Also women are usually not elected at the position of power within party structures because of the gender bases of male leadership. Meetings of councils or parliamentary sessions are held at odd timings conflicting with women's domestic responsibilities.

As politics is furthered as a lucrative source of income and power, men attempt to monopolize the profession through violence and coercion institutionalized as rules of the game. One important factor that discourages women from taking active part in politics is the amount of violence, corruption and manipulations within institutions of governance. The VAWIP report also suggests that the reluctance of political parties to put up women candidates is due to their self-interest to exclude women from any effective role in governance. In India and Nepal, special provisions were made to increase women's political participation, yet the percentage of women at higher levels of the political power structure did not increase, mainly due to the rules of the game that men so vehemently guard. The election codes of conduct are simply farcical against female politicians.

Social and political institutions also blatantly work to prevent women from exercising their right to vote – particular studies and media reports amply point

out such violations (case of Bangladesh, and also true for other states) merely because the male guardians, *Fatwabajs* or local male elite think it their prerogative to exercise any kind of ban they think fit upon women. Abductions of female candidates during elections, members of parliament or cabinet are common events, which do not create any uproar, because society tends to think – “It (violence) serves you right for trespassing the male boundary!” And institutions that are mandated to protect its citizens without discrimination fail to do so, and apart from some shouts of injustice, institutions and law enforcing agencies do not consider it imperative to hold the perpetrators accountable. Perpetrators are not only individuals that abuse but also the institutions that fail to take notice, become aware and act against violence.

The very slogan for politics in a South Asian public mindset is one of a ‘dirty game’. Politicians are not uncomfortable with this image for it enhances the male prowess and demarcates the gender boundary. Political institutions also do not correct this image or clean up the procedures for contest with the exercise of money, muscle and mafia power to win votes. Such practices though allowed for male politicians are forbidden for female politicians and are held to be incompatible with the norms and models of behavior set for women politicians.

Male politicians support the elevation of a female politician to a position of power as long as they derive their own political gains. When there are threats to their power, male politicians have opposed political power to women while publicly upholding the view that they are not in opposition. This is an act of double-crossing women and the public and leads to an action of depriving female politicians of any agency power.

## **11. AGENCY FACTORS THAT PERPETUATE VIOLENCE AGAINST FEMALE POLITICIANS**

Although South Asian states have made structural reforms through quotas or reservations for women in local government including the parliament of Pakistan, engagement with leaders and decision makers have not been meaningful for female politicians. Even influential female leaders in South Asia continue to be used as agents of dominant classes or ruling dynasties. Therefore, some questions arise, ‘How can female politicians perform at all without agency power? Whose interests will they further without self-agency? What is their work environment like? Who asked women to join politics or become members of political organizations? Were women approached directly, face-to-face to get politically involved based on their self-agency? Or were they hand picked by parties before elections? Were they given any training, responsibilities and authority after winning elections? Were they asked to take part in any of the



decision-making of political parties or government? Are there active civic or political organizations that work beyond women mobilization for electoral participation to their empowerment for exercise of political rights and authority? An excerpt from one case study below amply reflects on the questions raised above and the female agency question.<sup>90</sup>

### **Box 14. Men Decide on Behalf of Women if it Serves Men's Interests**

In many cases studied under VAWIP in South Asia it was found that male political decision makers took decisions on behalf of women, sometimes even without their consent. A female politician aged 37 recounts her experiences when she was announced as the party president at the death of her husband, as follows:

I accepted the announcement to go against my ideology and willingness. So I became the president of that political party in our area. This is because they wanted to utilize my popularity that I inherited from my husband. This was totally political game and I was the victim of that process.

Most feminist authors on the subject reason that female leaders in South Asia were brought in to establish or maintain the patriarchal order and their being women mattered little. In the highest levels of government and political organizations, it is men who set the parameters for what a nation ought to represent, and what the role of women should be. In this perspective their interests clash with political emancipation of women and so long as female politicians' authority is derived from structures devised by male architects, violence perpetrated against female politicians is neglected. The crux is that so long it is obvious (see box 14) that female politicians do not exercise any agency power at all. Power and position handed by others do not give self-agency and so long as this is not inherent in the person, that person cannot exercise self-authority; women have no autonomy and cannot advance their own interests. People or institutions having power in most instances, males, give women agency. Hence most of the time women come to politics through someone's wish, decision or appeals representing patriarchal interests. Seldom are self-authority, will and self-interest of the women given attention in the first place.

A country level study in Nepal states that 18 percent of the respondents were nominated against their will for elections and they account this as one of the three reasons for failures in politics.<sup>91</sup> The other two being lack of publicity and

<sup>90</sup> Ashrafee, S.S, 2007, VAWIP country report (p35), SAP Bangladesh

<sup>91</sup> Shrestha, A.V, 2007, Violence against women in politics: Study report, SAP Nepal,

the weak status of the party. In many instances it was found that grassroots level female representatives when nominated against their interest in politics become vulnerable to discrimination within their own political parties. Since many of them suffered different kinds of social aggression after entering politics, they have no high hopes for their future in politics and have no interest to continue. These women knew that their candidature was just for fulfilling the 5 percent quota set aside for women's participation.

On the contrary, those respondents who had developed their career in politics out of self-will are quite happy with their decisions. Many of these have received opportunities for capacity building and vocational trainings, and are found with increased level of confidence to do their job. It was found that 19 percent of the respondents' self-interest to participate in politics was one motivating factor for joining politics and in becoming successful in elections.<sup>92</sup>

Women feel that they are sidelined or discriminated against in situations like public functions because male colleagues seem to feel publicly humiliated to be seen working with female politicians. Nepotism and favoritism also undermine their eligibility to access opportunities, such as trainings, exposure visits, conferences, income generating activities etc. 55 percent of the respondents in the Nepal study said that lack of regular contact, meeting and coordination was one of the major weakness of female politicians at the national level.<sup>93</sup> This shows that female politicians are greatly disadvantaged due to cultural attitudes about their role and expected behavior - this prevents them not only from creating networks in politics but also from joining existing ones which are mostly male dominated.

The questions of self agency are very important because various studies of political participation of female politicians have pointed out that women do not have strong and exclusive networks. They are easily mobilized for campaigning but get marginalized in decision-making for which they are seldom asked by men. Answers to these questions will hardly be in the positive; however these questions raise the very fundamental issue of who gives female politicians agency power. Agency power needs to be inherent in every female politician as it should be in every citizen of a democratic country. As long as the state does not ensure this through appropriate mechanisms female politicians cannot overcome exploitation, discrimination, abuse and assault of any kind. Therefore it is not the women per se who are exclusively the focus and catalyst for transformation in politics. Focus should be on the interrelated complex web of institutional structure, beliefs, norms and practices that deprive female politicians from means and opportunities to overcome barriers and legitimately exercise equal citizenship.

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<sup>92</sup> *ibid*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

**Box 15. Case of Rangana (Aged 46)**

....during City Corporation election... the supporters of opposition party threatened and rebuked me....I was responsible to look after the 3 voting centres in a ward... the opponent party threatened polling agents... I saw there was no polling agent in the centre when the election was going on...cadres of the opponent party also gathered over there and asked the duty police....to “Get this lady out of this place by pulling off her shoulder”. The Police asked me to leave the place. As I did not agree....one cadre.....broke the table that was in front of me.....saying “Bessha” (prostitute), “Khanki” (whore), ‘we would take off your cloths’ and ‘will cut the beech into pieces’..... My husband heard all the stories and shouted to me ... said I deserved that... called me ‘a rascal’....I said...”torture me or leave me you can but I could not leave politics.”..... According to him, I was like a prostitute.....He believed that I could not sleep without seeing them. Then he started beating with a stick. I had nothing to do but shedding tears. My confidence and respects to my husband had gone right away....he totally stopped my all political activities and threatened me to give divorce if I would keep any connection with them. I bear all those to think of my kid’s future....I gave up politics and my all sorts of outside work.....We are now living in 21st century.....I could not take any strategy to overcome this.... I love my politics, also I love my kids. What will I leave? Politics or kids? I gave up my dreams, my loving place to save my family to save my kids.....

The case of Rangana<sup>94</sup> (See box 15) and several other cases in Nepal, India and Pakistan illustrates how political institutions employ and endorse abusive language, violent behavior and character assassination to fight against female politicians during elections. Families prefer to perpetrate physical and psychological violence at home to stop their women from a career in politics rather than fight back those norms of violence in various institutions sanctioned by men, the state and society. These abusive tactics substantiate male power in the institution of political organization, the state or the home. Women suffer institutionalized violence at the home and at the work place. They have to live with the pain of giving up a dream of working as a politician to serve the people, or for that matter in any profession of their choice. They experience a loss of respect for their own families who use force to control their autonomy and choice. It is a sad and fearful state of mind and society to be in. And what credibility can politics claim when it is based on such erosion of trust?

<sup>94</sup> Ashrafee, S.S, 2007, VAWIP country report (p19-20), SAP Bangladesh

## UNFOLDING THE REALITY

Power, prestige and wealth are derived from society and the various state and civil institutions and feeds back into them to define their meaning, use and limitations. Overcoming female oppression necessitates openness in transforming general connotation of power, prestige and wealth their source, users and norms. It is necessary to go back to the basic meaning and it's understanding.

Therefore, cultural factors interact at the levels of structure, institution, and the rights and agency of female politicians to perpetuate sexual discrimination, harassment, assault and abuse. These negative 'connects' against female politicians result in dirty politics, institutionalized violence, bad governance and abuse. This report underlines the findings that it is this connectivity of such negative forces working against women that need to be addressed in all its hideous complexity.



## **PART-V. POTRAYAL OF VAWIP IN SOUTH ASIA**

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### **12. WOMEN POLITICIANS IN MEDIA<sup>95</sup>**

The electronic and print media in contemporary South Asia have emerged to play a major role in creating a climate of public opinion that caters to the middle class. This has been possible due to the rapid and expansive technological advances in the last few decades which have revolutionized the media and opened a world of communications hitherto unknown to the mass.

It can be said that there is a distinct role for the print and electronic media in the region regarding coverage of women's rights and issues, particularly the nature and forms of violence faced by women, and in exposing the perpetrators and highlighting the interests behind the use of violence against women. Various reports speak about media growth and its role in democratization in the region. The media is considered to enjoy relative freedom in India where it possesses potential, reach and power compared to the media in other countries of South Asia.

Media coverage of violations of human rights occurring in all corners of any country has made boundaries and distances minute and almost non-existent. Due to the advancement of the electronic media in India, the South Asian urban population has come to be one group of consumers. For instance, media reporting on human rights violations committed by police officers in the state of Gujarat during the communal riots in 2002 played a big role in giving information not only to the common Indian mass but also to all subscribers of the Indian cable television network and those who identify with the geography, history, language, culture and politics in the region. In other countries, similar effects have not occurred due to a weak media and the under development of cable television and reporting. The common mass in South Asia is slowly beginning to discover cases of violence against women in the newly free country of Afghanistan through the web but nothing is known of Bhutan.

The past decade has seen a growing number of women journalists in India, and their effort to give greater coverage to gender issues is visible though inadequate in terms of the extent and severity of the problem. In all countries of South Asia, human rights organizations, women's organizations and advocates of women's issues use the national media to make not only a greater public impact but also to reach the attention of influential groups and opinion makers. In India, major

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<sup>95</sup> This chapter is derived largely from YFA, 2007, India country studies, and Manchanda, R, Paper presented at the SA Regional Conference, Invisible faces of violence against women in politics: Media Perspectives, 18-20 September, 2007.

women led campaigns against dowry murders, rape or domestic violence have made head lines and create furor. This tactic is not so prominent in Bangladesh, Nepal or Pakistan. A key weakness of women's organizations in these countries is their inability to utilize the media effectively as they lack deep understanding of the forces that are governing and shaping the media in these times of rapid social change. In spite of having a vibrant and free media and human rights organizations in India, women practitioners have not made a lasting impact because they have not succeeded in making a strong connection with the media to achieve common goals. Most women in the media identify themselves as professionals rather than women in the first place due to the highly competitive nature of media work which fosters individualism rather than solidarity and due to the larger patriarchal interest from which the media is also not free.

Cable television transformed the worldview of urban consumers in the Indian sub continent. The Indian television channels and the film industry have gained widespread popularity in all of South Asia. The portrayal of female characters in the electronic media has gone through a shift, reflecting the societal changes in the middle class. Urban middle class women can be seen as self-conscious and wanting to break away from the narrow stereotyped ascribed roles. The Indian cinema, teleserials and reality shows have helped to project this dilemma in the choice of lifestyle in the face of rapid social change, family and societal values, problems of marriage, infidelity, divorce, remarriage, or violence against women. Significantly, many harp back to traditional morals and customs, celebrating family values and the joint family.

The VAWIP analysis of India (Youth for Action, India) cites a study on "Change in Gender Relations in Hindi Masala Movies" (1995) which reveals that the Hindi cinema has influenced women to take physical action against violence, injustice and wrongs done to them, instead of males taking acting on their behalf. This portrayal of women acting for defending themselves is a significant change, in part reflecting the changing role of women over the years in society. This new found role and changed society allows women greater autonomy and self-empowerment in terms of decision making and breaking the dictates of traditional norms of behavior. However, reality is complex as revealed by Indian cinema's depiction of violence, the mafia, smugglers and criminal gangs, who are in turn, backed by politicians and state agencies (corrupt policemen). By observing the portrayal of such reality in the media women are reluctant to join politics in spite of increased opportunities.

In general the media has been used in the region to build or reinforce patriarchal stereotypes commonly through the use of language in advertisements, entertainment, events reporting, and the sense of acceptability of unjust customs and institutions, emphasizing the weak, inferior, subordinate, victimized, objectified status of women thus insidiously justifying the violence on her.

## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Study of the role of media in India shows that even though media has remained the most vigilant watchdogs over the operations of the police in the country it has not been able to contribute equally in highlighting or exposing issues of violence against women to the extent it could have been utilized. (This is due to the interests and culture of patriarchy). In rural Nepal, radio being the single medium of information dissemination, is found to be widely used for advocacy and awareness creation of women's rights but has not yet been used to provide investigative reports from the grassroots or raise issues of violence against women at the local level.

In all countries of South Asia, the media is not free of the allegations that they provide selective or biased information sometimes through inadequate coverage of serious issues or that they distort information and sometimes just lack the resources to work in depth on women's issues. Most media organizations in India, as in other parts of the region and the world, are either state- or corporate-owned. Therefore, it has specific interests in reporting on issues or areas lucrative to their business and not necessarily oriented towards public interest and their right to information without bias and prejudice. Bias and a lack of sensitive appreciation of the issues involved have affected the quality of coverage, the selection of subjects and the content of media reports. In South Asia news that is political or concerns politicians and celebrities dominates media coverage and gets privileged attention.

The South Asian media itself faces accountability issues. Most analysts and consumers perceive the mainstream national media as providing greater coverage and attention to human rights violations and holding state agencies accountable rather than the local media. In India, some newspapers in Gujarat were found to be deliberately distorting facts and promoting hate campaign against the minority Muslim community in 2002. Various reports including the Human Rights Watch (HRW) observe that local media face greater issues of lack of accountability because of state or local government support. They refer to instances when the national Indian press played a key role in covering not only the communal violence but also in exposing official neglect and misconduct and raising issues of accountability of state agencies. Even though the national media raised issues of local press accountability in inciting communal violence, it was difficult to hold the management of the local press accountable for violating criminal laws and infringing their own code of ethics, because they enjoyed local government support and remained beyond legal sanction.

So, it is not only the state government but also the central government that occasionally pressurizes or intimidates the media that to expose corruption or abuse of power by politicians, particularly national politicians and senior bureaucrats. There were reports of how recalcitrant journalists were subjected to raids by income tax and law enforcement authorities and humiliatingly harass.

Most widely known is the case of coercion by law enforcing agencies of the editor and staff members of Tehelka.com, an internet portal that succeeded in videotaping important politicians, bureaucrats and army officers accepting bribes and fixing arms deals with decoy arms dealers belonging to Tehelka.

These cases show that even a relatively free and strong media in India compared to others in the region, has remained lacking in taking up issues that are against the interests of those in power. It also highlights how lack of accountability within the media worsens the situation and how their lack of ethics in reporting sensitive issues such as communal violence or corruption gives reason not to trust them with reporting on violence against women. The common people are afraid to use the media which is similar in other countries of the region.

On the other hand, the national media run by corporate interests and catering to the metropolitan consumer and their interests is allegedly less connected to grassroots realities. A rising trend is that national newspapers are run with a profit motive in their interest to increase advertising revenue where the female body is used as a product for business and fashion. Big newspaper companies increasingly and aggressively promote beauty contests and fashion shows, which have given male voyeurism a new respectability. Studies of consumer behavior and media reflect that the metropolitan middle class is the largest consumer in the beauty business. A variety of fashion businesses centering on the female body have sprung up to satisfy the new cravings of the consuming classes. The media and its creation of the image of woman mainly promote this business.

The media uses a woman's body to project beauty and class as well as image of a helpless. In this manner, the South Asian media enjoys the liberty of exploiting the female body as well as ignoring the context and gravity of the causes of violence against women.

There are several issues raised regarding the role and interest of the media in VAWIP:

- The contemporary media in South Asia show a lack of interest in reporting on violence against a female politician who may happen to be from a poor, dalit or minority group, because the social and political mindset towards violence against such groups and classes has become natural in the sense that such cases happen everyday and to millions. The media is at a loss to find anything new in this issue. And the portrayal by the media of violence against women with this mentality and loss of compassionate intelligence has become dangerous because it spreads the sense of VAW being acceptable and politics a territory not to be disturbed by women.



- There is a tendency to treat VAW as general crime and not as gender related crime. A serious question for the media is ‘What happens when VAW and VAWIP are reported as general crime?’ The media being a part of the patriarchal system has reinforced gender-based violence by patronizing the woman as victim, and failing to question the larger structure that accepts violence against women. While media has espoused some cases numerous others have suffered due to a lack of appropriate and adequate coverage.
- How can the media be used as an ally in countering VAWIP?
- How can the media challenge the culture of impunity that encourages violence against women in private and public spheres?

### **13. MISCONCEPTIONS AT THE CORE OF VAWIP**

The VAWIP study is a breakthrough in clarifying several misconceptions associated with violence in the public domain. This project plays a chastising role in disclosing buried skeletons of violence against female politicians in work situations and generates public interest and discourse. The following are seven common myths deconstructed by the VAWIP study:

#### **VIOLENCE IS ONLY PHYSICAL**

Not really. Creation of psychological fear and trauma and sexual harassment of female politicians and gender discrimination in politics are other kinds of violence. These forms of violence are more pervasive because they are hidden and not treated as violence.

#### **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IS MORE PERVASIVE IN THE PRIVATE DOMAIN**

Wrong. As women move to the public realm and become active in the public work place, violence is duplicated, not removed with change in roles. Moreover, violent behavior against women simply gets spread to the public domain. Since there are no means of effective redress at the disposal of the victims in South Asia, such acts in the public sphere hardly ever gets reported except for some sensational and sporadic cases.

#### **SOCIAL MISCREANTS, PERVERTS, THUGS ARE LIKELY PERPETRATORS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Wrong. Topping the list of perpetrators are government officials, political representatives at higher levels and law enforcing agencies. This is also the reason why perpetrators hardly get accounted for their acts. They perpetrate violence against females who seek or work in the extra-domestic sphere (public sphere) and have every means at their disposal to get away with their actions.

### **SEXUAL HARASSMENT DOES NOT OCCUR IN A RESPECTFUL PROFESSION OR SOCIETY**

Wrong. It occurs even more so as women make a move or aim to move higher in the hierarchy of power and prestige. Therefore, sexual harassment is used to assert power and maintain male dominance or interests in the highest levels of government.

### **VICTIMS HAVE TO LIVE WITH GUILT AND SHAME**

Not Really. Victims have a right to grievance and complaint mechanisms that are supportive and non-patronizing. Name and shame the abusers not the victims. Only when abusers are punished will the victims become free of guilt and shame. Their ignorance and negligence of any forms of violence against women is seldom costly to institutions whether they are family, community or the state and its agencies.

### **IF FEMALE POLITICIANS WANT TO ENTER POLITICS THEY MUST BE STRONG ENOUGH TO FIGHT VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION**

Wrong. Not as long as perpetrators of violence are strong because they are not only encouraged but also well equipped to perpetrate violence against female politicians. It is unintelligent to assume such qualities from them. It should be the perpetrators who must be strong enough to accept female politicians' right to a profession in politics and their right to be free from gendered violence, which includes bodily harm, discrimination and sexual harassment. Perpetrators belonging to any sex need education and *delearning* of cultural, structural, institutional norms and values regarding sex based identities, inequalities, rights and roles of individuals. There is not only a dichotomy in the very misconceptions that women are the natural storehouse of power and goodness and that women are the weaker sex who must be kept safe from politics. These myths distract attention from addressing the real issue of empowerment and power sharing.

### **POLITICS IS A DIRTY GAME**

Not as a rule. Its image is especially dirtied to exclude women whose image as clean, symbol of purity can be maintained and played to the advantage of men in the game. If there is dirt in politics the pressure should be applied to dirt, not to women. It is not impossible for women to learn the tricks of the game, as female leaders in high positions in South Asia have shown. Therefore, the issues are the rules of the game and the interests, qualities and legitimacy of female leaders to demand changes based on equality and fairness. The task is to isolate the dirt and not the female sex from politics.



## **PART - VI.** THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF FEMALE POLITICIANS

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### **14. POLITICS, WOMEN AND POWER DYNAMICS**

Genuine democracy cannot exist without the equal participation of men and women in politics. Efforts to support women's political participation needs to be at the forefront for a region like South Asia. However, women are still under represented in the vast majority of political institutions in South Asia. The world of politics, which is intrinsically conflicting, is very unwelcoming to women. The making and the unmaking of female politicians directly relates to issues of dynastic politics, nationalist attitude and perception of women's traditional role. It determines why women are under represented in politics in South Asian region though more than half of its population encompasses women. It tells us about how hegemonic domain of nationalism, religion and masculine culture threat women in politics. It portrays facts on women leaders who occupy the forefront in politics through a male family connection. It also informs the fact about how women can retain the power position if she can masculine her role.

Women politicians who have successfully managed to accomplish the role to suite the mindset and culture of the South Asian societies have survived to lead the politics be she Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Sirimao Bandranayake, Chandrika Bandarnaike Kumarhanga, Sheikh Hasina, Begum Khalida Zia, Mamta Banerjee, Mayawati or Chitra Lekha Yadav. The dynastic leaders like Indira Gandhi or Sirimao Bandarnayake or Sheikh Hasina could play the role efficiently and effectively in comparison to other leaders like Mamta Banerjee or Chitra Lekha Yadav. The later leaders had to go through lots of violence to achieve where they are today. The leaders like President of India, Pratibha Patil had to confront the challenge to prove her caliber to be a successful women leader of one of the old democracies of the region. Many of the women leaders, who had started their career as student leaders or local leaders dynamically, have not been as lucky as them and left their political career or it went into vein. The fighting spirit, with calculated move, political connections and adaptation to masculine environment are some of the factors that have helped women leaders to lift themselves to the levels they are today, often sacrificing gendering role too.

One of the greatest threats to women politicians situates on the hegemonic domain of nationalism, established as a unifying force against imperial domination.

The women's role in the anti-colonial struggle in India was marked by contradiction. Women fulfilled an ideological and practical need. Their input into the struggle against imperialism began as early as the 1880s and figures like Swarnakumari Debi (1886-1932) - Rabindranath Tagore's sister, Sarala Debi Ghosal (1872-1946) and Sarojini Naidu are now regarded as the 'architects of a militant mother-centered nationalism' which was followed by the Swadeshi movement of 1905-8 where women were mobilized on a larger scale. Although Gandhi believed that women should have equal rights, his 'liberal thinking' was confined to the political sphere. The issue of their purity was brought into the equivocations of the political sphere in order to legitimize the mobilization of women into the public realm of nationalism. In Sri Lanka, ethnic consciousness is formulated vis-a-vis racial 'hybridity' or 'purity' position in the Sinhala and Tamil nationalist discourses.

India's Independence movement demonstrates a paradox associated with involving women in such political campaigns. Critiques of Gandhi's non-violence agenda emphasize that, once political objectives were secured with the participation of female volunteers, the male leaders were anxious to relegate women to the private sphere. Even as women were called to participate in the nationalist movement, the symbolic configurations of women in relation to the private/public, inner/outer domain was safely entrenched in the public imagination. The tensions lie in the fact that once women have moved out of the domestic sphere, even if their engagement is limited to satyagraha or 'non-violent' resistance, it is still a passive, not an active form of intervention. Furthermore, despite transformations in South Asia's socio-political landscape, contemporary nationalism is still gendered and similarities between gender relations during imperialism and post-Independence are striking.

Gendering is highlighted by the recurrent pattern of women heads of nation states in South Asia who come to occupy the center stage through a male family connection-either through husband or father. The presence of women leaders is not necessarily related to feminist principles but the progression of dynastic-style politics in the region. Indira Gandhi's powerful, apparently 'matriarchal' position in the public arena did not, however, complicate the distinction between the domestic and public sphere which is so much a part of the ideology of the nation state. On the contrary, she made it clear that her political position was a special case, due to her being the daughter of one of modern India's forefathers, thus avoiding any association with emancipatory feminist projects. Sheikh Hasina and for that matter even Sirimao Bandarnayake took the advantage of their parents sacrifices to position themselves at the highest levels of national politics. Women leaders (especially in monarchic systems) derive their authority through succession, divine sanction, or from

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attributes of race, class or caste; gender is therefore reduced to a minor consideration because the masses are willing to accept female relatives as 'natural guardians of the dead leaders' political legacies.

Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto and Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga are examples of such leaders, whose positions as widows, daughters or wives of prominent men attracted the sympathy of the masses. In their role as 'brave and contrite women', they played upon their abject femininity so that, they shift 'from the position of the oppressor to the oppressed and wrestle political agency'. Both their political platforms exploited their gender identities, in the way that Indira Gandhi's political rhetoric was grounded in this discourse. In fact, Chandrika Bandarnaike Kumaratunga and Benazir Bhutto have, like Indira Gandhi, invoked indebtedness to their fathers, frequently reminding the public of their fathers' 'exemplary' leadership and political strategies. Benazir was in her autobiography unwilling to admit that the martyred parent even committed the 'tiniest of sins'.

Indira Gandhi was not a major political figure when Jawaharlal Nehru died in 1964. Unlike other political leaders she had a little political training or experience. The move within the congress to cast her as the 'natural' choice for leadership was not innocent since she had the capacity to secure national support and her background enabled the creation of the myth that her patriotism was incontrovertible. Soon after becoming prime minister she crushed incidents of unrest with a brutality that presages increasing state control. With its dynastic, emotional flavor the cult (progressive image) highlighted the theme of Indira Gandhi's uniqueness among her contemporaries and her special claim to patriotism by virtue of her 'Nehru blood'. This 'performance' pushed the image of mother to the forefront, employing a strategy similar to that of other women politicians in the region whose positions as widow daughters or wives of prominent men attracted the sympathies of the masses. Women leaders such as Chadrika Bandarknaike Kumarthunga in Sri Lanka, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Shiekh Hasina in Bangladesh also enact the role of victim in order to marshal support.

In Sri Lanka, for instance, soon after a bomb blast in 1999 in which President Chadrika Kumnarthunga was injured, she made an appearance on state television, playing up her role of martyr mother, thereby appealing to the emotions of the masses. One characteristic of these women leaders (and Indira Gandhi typified this phenomenon), was that a powerful, apparently 'matriarchal' position in the public arena did not, however, complicate the distinction between the domestic and public sphere which is so much a part of the ideology of the nation state. On the contrary, they made it clear that their political positions were a special case, due to their being daughter/widows of their nation's forefathers, thus avoiding any association with emancipatory feminist project.

When asked if she was a feminist, Indira Gandhi's reply was:

"Why should I be? I always felt that I could do anything I wanted. My mother was a strong feminist but she always felt that being a woman was a great disadvantage".

Prolific references to and proclamation of her 'indebtedness' to her 'nationalist father'-Nehru and Gandhi- are evidence that her identity was embedded within a patriarchal expediency of affirming her femininity in the service of national representation. It is evident that most male politicians supported the elevation of a woman to a position of power because of their own political gains.

Her assertion that, 'My being Prime Minister has nothing to do with my being a woman' was undercut by her manipulation of gendered subject-positions. The ceaseless tensions of negotiating a 'female' identity that coincide with the anticipated political and national identity amidst the constant threat of fragmentation are evident in sometimes sharp swings from one image to another in Indira Gandhi's staging of self. What is crucial in Indira Gandhi's case is that the socially-prescribed female roles complied with the demands of nationalist and within which she was placed. She developed a powerful personal style by weaving together key signifiers that would have an impact on the popular consciousness and exploited the emotional responses to a mother figure, the vast and ambivalent Hindu tradition of the mother-goddess and the concept of female energy and power (shakti). The icons from dominating Hindu and Western myths created 'identities' that were always fluid, in conflict with each other and continuity being redefined.

However, Mamta Banerjee, Mayawati of India and Chitra Lekha Yadav of Nepal, never had those opportunities to project their political career. They had to go through the constant battle to fight against patriarchal mindset, masculine political culture and insensitive political environment of the region. Coming from the middle class background without any family political connections to support their desire it had been challenging for these and several other women leaders in South Asia to attain positions in politics. Due to prevalence of "culture of silence" within political women the real picture of violence against women in politics is not being portrayed yet to the masses for understanding the suffering of the silenced women in politics. Many women freedom fighters of India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Nepal have died unanimously for the reasons undisclosed. Despite significant contribution in political movements women student politicians of the region have had the difficulty to pursue career in politics and establish themselves in decision making power positions.

Women leaders having strong will and courage like Mamta Banerjee went to the extent of challenging the men presiding officer deputy Speaker Charanjit Singh Atwal by hurling papers and later sending her resignation through an officer of the House. It was later turned down by Chatterjee. "Whenever I want to raise an issue, I am not allowed to speak. As a member of this House, I also have the right to raise issues of concern to my people.....There is no point in my being a member if I am not allowed to raise people's issues," she said, attributing motives to the Speaker.

Similarly, Chitra Lekha Yadav, current Deputy Speaker of the Interim Legislature of Nepal, was barred from the opportunity of becoming Speaker merely because of her being a woman. She was encouraged to participate in peoples' movement even while she was an acting speaker during political crisis, when all the democratic parties were banned by the king. She was informally promised to be appointed as a speaker after the successful completing of the people's movement of April 2006. Later, in the name of power balancing among political parties, a male candidate was given the position of the Speaker and she was offered a ministerial position which she refused.

As a characteristic of South Asian politics, dominant religious practices also serve the interests of small, homogenous elite groups who maintain the dynastic power structures. Religion has forcefully encroached upon the realm of the state in Pakistan where the legitimating metanarrative of the nation, the Quran, is deployed as an instrument of power by the state and politicians who work in close association with the religious leaders. In the case of West Pakistan, women are assigned that the role of 'upholding' the 'truths' of Islam and here the absence of a potent cultural or religious female icon is replaced by the motif of purdah. The purdha functions as the symbol of 'true' woman hood and denotes respectability and thereby ensures a woman's social status. With the increase of Islamisation, the enforcement of purdah is even more pronounced.

The systematic manipulation of Islam by the ruling classes is symptomatic of the fear of national disintegration and dismemberment. Historically, a precedent had been set for the involvement of religious organizations (particularly of Jamat-i-Islam).

In India and Sri Lanka, the attempt to instill a sense of national unity through the establishment of a quasi-religious state invariably produces a redefinition in the gender roles of the secular state.

The repertoire of Indian female identities that Indira Gandhi chose to depict are linked to and derived from the cultural topography of India. The figure of Sita, the epic heroine of the Ramayan, has been continually reproduced as the 'ideal' for Indian woman. Posturing herself as one who stood up to protect her nation

when the men were silent reinforced the image of an agent of a historical process, 'a woman of destiny'. Indira Gandhi's ambivalent and fragmented identity, her strategic maneuverings, ways of self-staging and dramatization found in the social text are foregrounded in the literature, allowing the writers to confront the underlying tensions within the cooption of religio-mythical icons for the signification of nationalist and gender identities. In her transaction between politics, goddess images, and myth, the Widow exploits and enlists Hindu discourses, confirming her status as a Hindu, rather than an Indian national leader. The Emergency was therefore called an 'act of folly', where one extreme strands of nationalist, class and dynastic ideologies are interfused and foisted upon the people .

Mayawati who belongs to the Dalit community however stood to defy the traditional practice and challenged the society by playing the tactical cards carefully to prove her leadership by successfully winning Chief Ministership of UP, India, thrice since 1995. Her education, teaching experience, long political career and drive to achieve a high portfolio in politics taught her to portray her image as Bahenji (sister) and shed her oily plaits for short bobbed hair and diamonds to compete not only with the Hindu high caste women leaders having well grounded political connections but also the well established leader such as Mulayam Singh Yadav. In an article in the New York Times, Amy Waldman wrote in 2003: "In a state where Dalits are nearly one quarter of the population, Ms. Mayawati has used caste as a mobilizer, building on a social and political revolution 50 years in the making. It is a phenomenon that has reshaped the politics of India."

Religion intersects with society and consequently impinges on the rights of women. Religious fundamentalism in whatever form provides a detailed and concrete programmes for both individuals and society. The attempt to instill a sense of 'national' unity through the establishment of a quasi-religious state invariably impacts in received notions of a male and female behavior. The constraints of a rigidly structured socio-religious programme are most often inflicted on women and they are co-opted to serve political objectives.

The purdah is defined as a 'garment of womanly honor.' It can encompass a range of meanings and is chiefly associated with Islamic societies . The purdah embraces signification of honor and shame and is directly concerned with the status of women . One way of reading the over determining status of the purdah in Pakistan in terms of compensation or substitutions or compensation for the absence of a potent goddess image (unlike the icon of Sita in India or Pattini in Sri Lanka), which has a controlling influence on female sexuality. In many situations strategic investments of ideologies are transacted through dress. It is one of the most potent forms of policing the female body.



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In Zia-ul-Haq's case the constitutional amendments enforcing 'Islamic codes' that reduced the competency and jurisdiction of civil courts sought to overturn the progressive reforms that had been legalized during Ayub Khan's and Bhutto's administrations. However, Zia's administration provoked increasing state-inspired attacks on the rights of women in the names of Islam to create 'good Muslim.' Thus during the late 1970s and 1980s, the 'women question' assumed a paramount position in political debate, cultural battles in the media and state policy. The contention was whether they could be 'good Muslims', while the mechanisms to achieve this processes entailed the institutionalization of extremely restrictive codes of behavior for women, a practice of rigid gender segregation, specific form of family and kinship and powerful ideology linking family honor to family virtue were widely disseminated.

In India and Sri Lanka, the attempt to instill a sense of national unity through the establishment of a quasi-religious state invariably produces a redefinition in the gender roles of the secular state. In Pakistan, during Zia's era, state law subscribed to the Koran's rules governing the family. Women have to bear the burnt of the Islamisation campaign because of discriminatory laws which backed by the state, encouraged men in general to intensify their control over women's lives. The determining ideology behind these ordinances included curtailing democracy. In the case of women, since a large part of the laws pertained to the family, there was deep fear among the Muslim leaders that with increasing modernization the most pronounced changes would be felt in the family structure. The reforms of the previous leaders which allowed women's access to education and other benefits were seen as threatening the stability of the family. The rehabilitation of 'tradition' would ensure that women were firmly under the control of men and therefore 'protected' from any alien form of moral 'degeneration.' The zealous protection of the family is linked to a larger, political concern: the sanctity of the Nation. The most empowering challenges to the hegemonic alliance between Pakistan's religious leaders and the state have been produced by its women's movement. Realizing that religio-cultural notions and constructions of gender inequality are neither monolithic nor universal, women agitated for a transformation of the cultural modalities and strategies of resistance were adopted by the most organized women's organization in Pakistan- the Women's Action Form (WAF).

In spite of these efforts, by them because of Zia's death in 1988 over 200 women were in prison. When Benazir Bhutto returned to Pakistan in 1996 from her self-imposed exile the women's groups saw it as heralding a change in the status. However, the recognition of the women's wing of the PPP and her appeal to women to articulate their grievances had, in effect, been token gestures. Bhutto displayed tendencies that were remarkably close to Indira Gandhi's

attitudes towards women's activism during her leadership. Bhutto rarely raised women's issue on a political platform and confined herself to making general statements against discriminatory laws. She signaled out the oppression of the workers, peasants and students under the martial law regime but overlooked the specific issue of the oppression of women.

Striking resemblances can be found in the leadership patterns and political images of South Asian women leaders such as Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto and Chandrika Kumarthunge. This is where the 'gendering' of the nation is apparent. Positioning themselves as 'daughters' of the nations, these women consciously project a traditional image and notions of martyrdom are inscribed in their political discourses. They wear their national dress-the sari or salwar kameez and veil-for every public occasion and invoke the image of mother, a conscious effort designed to appeal to the masses. They also derive their political identity from the kudos accorded to their fathers or husbands and repeatedly assert their indebtedness to these patriarchs.

Even though the dominant religious discourses- Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism-are distinct in character, they all provide a vital part of the iconography of the Nation. The multiplicity of female goddesses in Hinduism has been utilized by nationalists and politicians and religious discourses impinge upon the subjectivity of women and contribute to their effectual relegation into a position where 'they lose all marks of social difference and become emblematic of national spaces'.

A monotheistic religion like Islam which does not have a potent female image compensates for this lack by resorting to cultural symbols-symbols which inscribe dominant and progressive behavioral codes. In the case of Bangladesh, the Bengali mother image fulfilled the objective of the nationalists. In Pakistan the veil serves as a useful way of constructing a religio-national identity. Democratic values and the overt commitment to plurality of Sri Lanka's constitution and the liberal ethos of Buddhism collided with the dominant Sinhala-Buddhist hegemony and counter-revolutionary ideology of the Tamil nationalists. Prolonged and organized internal conflict threw into crisis the certitudes of the nation.

It is seen that women leaders who have derived their authority through male family- connection reduce gender as minor consideration. Leaders with positions as widows, daughters or wives of prominent men have attracted the sympathy of the masses. They tend to fall back upon their relatives to create space in political leadership. This discourages women from lower strata and with no political family-background from participating in decision-making processes. There are only few examples like Mamata Banerjee or Mayawati leaders who could manage to reach to a height to challenge the society.

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The intersection of religion, politics, masculinity and femininity and the linkages with violence and repression are closely and uneasily interwoven. Violence, repression and shame characterize the lives of the women. Even in their experiences from a vital composite of the political narrative, female experiences are often subsumed or elided by a religion-patriarchal dominance. Religious fundamentalism in whatever form provides a detailed and concrete programme for both individuals and society. Yet the constraints of a rigidly structured programme are most often inflicted on women. Forced to carry the mantle of 'tradition' during periods of change, women frequently become the markers of cultural and political objectives. For example veiling or unveiling of women at different points in a country's evolution signifies the political and cultural projects of ascending groups. Moreover, sometimes-even woman politicians are seen to highlight their role of mother and women and they continue the legacy of sacrifice and martyrdom such as 'Satyagraha'. This type of activities exacerbates the exploitation of the underclass woman. Men politicians tend to support these actions of women with the hope of sharing power with the women.

This power relationship determines the making and unmaking of women in political power. Therefore, in South Asia women having political linkage and manipulating/maneuvering political environment could achieve power in politics. However, women politicians working at local level without any back up political support and masculine attitude are deprived of power sharing positions.

### 15. ENVISIONING A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR WOMEN POLITICIANS

Formation of constitutional and legal instruments does not eliminate gender discrimination, more so in politics. While stating the fact that states and political parties have an obligation to respect, protect, promote and fulfill all human rights, including the right of girls and women to be free from discrimination, it becomes pertinent to all actors to demand its speedy and effective implementation at local, national and international levels. Most of the states are limited to ratification of international instruments and are forgetting its implementation and enforcement at country and local levels. Civic organizations and associations consider demanding international, national and local leadership accountability to end all forms of gender discrimination in politics and effective implementation of commitments at local and national levels in each country.

At a specific level such a role necessitates creation of local and national organizations for prevention, monitoring and controlling the various forms of violence against women in politics. Civil society organizations can establish surveillance mechanisms to report on VAWIP to government bodies at local and national levels. Women commissions empowered with authority to assess

and evaluate and take necessary actions on violence against female politicians can be established at district levels. District level media monitors that can investigate, monitor and report on violence against female politicians. It can be more effective. Mechanisms that can evaluate government and political parties' policies and identify practices that are effective in preventing and addressing violence against female politicians are important. Such mechanisms can be strengthened to assess political parties' and government policies, particularly those addressing economic independence of women and ensuring equal opportunity and liberty of women to get involved in politics (property rights, job opportunities, mobility and safety, etc).

Political power is used to create strong networks of men and to maintain their own interests. Exercise of political power can become positive values when fear of losing them is minimized. Pressure needs to be exerted to parties and government to widen political power sharing base by having members representing diversity of gender, class, caste, ethnicity, age, language, religion and ideology. Political parties can have diversity criteria for selection and training of female candidates. Preparatory committees can be established in political parties to address not just female political leadership (for this perpetuates dominant group representation) having diversity representation but also development of leadership qualities. This requires political commitment in manifestoes with number and types of female leadership specified within stipulated timeframe.

The question of female political empowerment is not linked with diversity in politics. This gives a very narrow glimpse of female suppression in politics. The concept of exercise of power 'over' needs to be redefined and abilities to share power, prestige and wealth needs to be broadened to include not just homogenization of dominant class of elite women but the diversity of the society across female political empowerment. Diversity factor is important in understanding the nature of violence in politics and overcoming violence against women politicians. Therefore, policy makers, practitioners, activists and academicians need to widen and deepen diversity discourse on restraints and violence faced by female politicians and make inclusive and empowering structures and forums for exercise of their voice and influence the policy decisions.

The location of power in politics within gender or any socio economic boundaries is a high factor that perpetuates fear of losing power over feminist politics. Governments and political parties, including those headed by women fear challenging existing power relations because it requires not only political and social will of men and women across all divisions of society and government, but creativity in imagining what this new concept of power sharing can be. They need to explore and encourage creativity in power sharing.

## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Government and all political parties are resistant to any fundamental changes that will imbalance male monopoly of power exercise or create structures that can enhance meaningful participation of women in politics. Political parties and government agencies need to craft gender equity mechanisms within their organizations. Government, non-government, corporate bodies and political party organizations can also allocate study grants for female politicians to start and develop career in politics. Such grants should apply diversity criteria and undertake evaluation of diversity access and utilization of such opportunities.

Violence that is sexual or psychological in nature and those that occur in government and political organizations is omitted from public discourse and usually met with resistance or denial. There are no legal institutions that can deal with such issues at state and political party level. Considering the specific culture and institutional context within which women struggle to transform, all organizations can create safe space and effective redress mechanisms for sexual harassment that occurs at public level. The government can set up legal institutions to deal with sexual harassment at work place. It is imperative that international bodies, UN and rights organizations concentrate on aspects and mechanisms for preventing sexual harassment at work places.

All formal and informal, state and non-state, local and international organizations need to punish violators and stop impunity. Governments need to punish deliberate abuse of women's right to participate and represent in governance, and exercise self-agency. Civil society organizations can oblige Election Commissions and political parties to prevent all direct and indirect forms of violence and its practices during electoral processes. They can monitor election violence against female candidates and create pressure to hold perpetrators accountable. Perpetrators are not just individuals but institutions that ignore and reinforce violence at all stages of work and profession in politics.

It is imperative to open up discourse on sexual harassment in seemingly unlikely frontiers. Intense discourse on sexual harassment or discrimination that takes place in highly masculine work places such as security forces, judiciary, religious and political institutions are missing. Open discussion concerning what constitutes sexual harassment, its manifestation, and types of institutional measures for anti sexual harassment, including the conditions that are likely to prevent or reinforce sexual abuse of female politicians is pertinent across all countries in the region must be encouraged.

State and society can work to neutralize negative values. Patriarchal values entitle men to greater power, prestige and wealth, and are deeply embedded in our social and political institutions and perpetuate sex-based inequality. So these

values are derived from and are inherent to society. The manner they are exercised depends upon how institutions scrutinize and sanction abusers. Female politicians are expected to possess and display a range of qualities such as – courage, commitment, and worthiness of trust, respect, freedom and rights. Politics will benefit positively if such qualities are not gendered but humanized. Political parties, election commissions and government agencies should respect differences but apply positive values consistently across the board.

Activists and citizen groups can pressurize political parties to build female critical mass in politics. Political parties can do more than they are willing at present. Civil society pressure can tackle their lack of commitment to share power and give space to women in decision-making bodies of political organizations. They can name and shame and isolate political parties that double cross public and female voters and candidates. In this way, empowerment of the female constituency and female critical mass in politics can be enhanced.

Power, prestige and wealth are derived from the society. Various state and civil institutions need to acquire feeds backs to define their meaning, use and limitations. It is important to delearn concepts and create new meanings by the state and society. Overcoming female oppression necessitates an openness to transform the very assumptions of what connotes power, prestige and wealth, its source, users and norms of its exercise. It needs to go back to the very basics of meaning creation.

Fear in politics is a consequence of violence. No one benefits from creation of fear in politics. Underdevelopment, poverty, bad governance and participation are related to female suppression and a consequence of fear. When half of a nation's population live in fear, and speculation of a possible violence occurring to a female, human rights, positive peace and sustainable development of a nation will not be possible for males either. Hence elimination of fear from politics by society, state and its institution delivering law and security to people is very important. Social and political reform institutions need to educate and collaborate (and not just protest) with powerful state and political institutions that are traditionally male dominated to overcome isolation and lack of socialization with female population at work.

Political parties need to work as change agents to transform oppressive and violent cultures through awareness creations on violence against women in politics. They can organize social forums on violence and encourage open discussions, listen to victims or support research to understand how women suffer violence in politics.

## SILENCED VOICES OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

Political party organizations can support women's solidarity on burning social issues, initiate to unite them among different parties to lobby for common cause of women in politics. Women politicians can create party alliances so that the issue is dealt with more forcefully taking support of each other.

Female politicians can form association to take initiatives for formulation of sexual harassment policies and create separate mechanisms to address harassment issues. They can demand punishment of perpetrators at party level. For e.g. ban tickets and membership to abusers or support victims or complainants to access grievance mechanisms whether through party leadership or file a case. They can also provide counseling mechanisms to the victims within party organizations and constituencies. Pressure groups can oblige all members of political parties to prevent and mitigate this problem. Direct and transparent communication channels with leadership in decision-making can help to minimize harassment of grassroots female political activists by men in the middle.

Civil society can start a project such as "*Put a Woman in the House of Parliament*". Citizen groups can give political parties this obligatory agenda - put a woman in the house of parliament. They can campaign to name and shame those who avoid this agenda. UN Democracy Fund supported this project implemented through network of NGOs in Trinidad and Tobago for the advancement of women.

Formal electoral and party organizations can introduce affirmative actions, e.g. having adequate quotas or seats at different layers for diversity of women candidacy from parties, respecting voting procedures that safeguard privacy and fairness, following code of conduct to prevent violence that female candidates may face during nominations and elections, providing political skills training e.g. using women's political campaign workbook.

Media can be used positively to counter violence against women in politics, and all kinds of election violence. Writers and reporters can be encouraged for write-ups and stories to bring consciousness and awareness in society.

Civil society organizations, research and academia and media across South Asia can work in collaboration to open up discourse on sexual harassment in seemingly unlikely frontiers. Funds should be allocated to initiate further research, open discussions, discourses and dialogues on sexual harassment, its manifestation, and institutional measures to prevent sexual abuse against female politicians. Legal institutions including international agencies and UN organizations have to be strengthened to deal with sexual harassment against women in politics. International agencies and UN organizations need to address aspect of sexual harassment in political spheres more enthusiastically.



Strategies have to be brought about to build 50 percent female critical mass in politics and to empower female constituencies, to tackle lack of commitment of political parties' to share power and give space to women in decision making bodies of political organizations and also to name and shame and isolate members that use VAWIP.

International development agencies, academic institutions, media and non-government actors across South Asia can create organizations for prevention, monitoring and reporting of VAWIP. Regional oversight or independent organizations can research, disseminate or monitor and report on the South Asian public about the surveillance mechanisms and its performance at country levels. Women commissions and their extent of authority should be strengthened to assess and evaluate and take necessary actions on violence against female politicians at country levels. It is important to consider on how country level media monitors investigate, monitor and report on violence against female politicians.

State mechanisms and political parties should be compelled to act to end all forms of discrimination and to advance gender equality and human rights. States and political parties have an obligation to respect, protect, promote and fulfill all human rights, including the right of girls and women to be free from discrimination. Enhance leadership qualities to end all forms of violence against women and support advocacy particularly at local and national levels in each country.

Government and all political parties are resistant to any fundamental changes that will imbalance male monopoly of power exercise or create structures that can enhance meaningful participation of women in politics. Data systems for prevention, monitoring and control of various forms of violence against women in politics should be developed at local and national levels. Mechanisms that assess and evaluate policies and practices most effectively in preventing and addressing violence against female politicians should be established.

Politics is the highest arena where power, prestige and wealth are solely entitled to men and used to create strong networks of men and maintain their own interests. Power, prestige and wealth in politics can become positive values when fear of losing them is minimized by expanding its basis for sharing.

The location of power, prestige and wealth in politics within gender or any socially constructed boundaries is a high factor that perpetuates fear of losing power over feminist politics. Governments and political parties, including those headed by women fear challenging existing power relations because it requires not only political and social will of men and women across all divisions of society and government, but creativity in imagining what this new concept of power sharing can be.



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Violence that is sexual or psychological in nature and those that occur in the public domain is omitted from public discourse and usually met with resistance or denial. There are no legal institutions that can deal with such issues. Violated women are constantly at risk of humiliation, indifference and disbelief, ridicule, isolation, job loss or even further harassment, if they speak out against sexual violence. Considering the specific culture and institutional context within which women struggle to transform, create safe space and effective mechanisms when violated women can access redress measures.

Punish deliberate violations of the right of women to participate and represent in governance, and self-agency of women are inherent political rights. Prevent all direct and indirect forms of violence and its practices to eliminate severe consequences upon women politicians' well being, female marginalization from politics, and enjoyment of political rights and equality by women. Perpetrators are individuals and institutions that reinforce violence and should be brought into the book.

Intense discourse on sexual harassment or discrimination that takes place in highly masculine work places and political institutions seems to be missing. Debate should open on the invisibility of violence against female politicians in a highly visible work domain. Cultural silence on domestic violence reverberates to manifest against female politicians in the public spheres. Open discussion of what constitutes sexual harassment, types of institutional measures for anti sexual harassment, including the conditions that are likely to prevent or reinforce sexual abuse of female politicians is pertinent across all countries in the region.

The question of diversity in politics has not become the subject of discussion and is not linked with female political empowerment. This gives a very narrow glimpse of female suppression in politics. Discussions shedding light on how concept of power, prestige and wealth, needs to be redefined, its source broadened to include not just homogenization of women but to introduce the diversity of other equally important categories of ethnicity, language, religion, age, caste and class. Diversity factor is important in understanding the nature of violence in politics and overcoming violence against women politicians.

Patriarchal values entitle men to greater power, prestige and wealth, and are deeply embedded in our social and political institutions and perpetuate sex-based inequality. Power, prestige and wealth are derived from and inherent to society. The manner they are exercised depends upon how institutions scrutinize and sanction abusers. Female politicians are expected to possess and display a range of qualities such as – courage, commitment, and worthiness of trust, respect, freedom and rights. Politics will benefit positively if such qualities are not gendered but humanized. Males are not exempt from such expectations.

Political parties can do more than they are willing at present. Building civil society capacity to take actions for their lack of commitment to share power and give space to women in leading decision-making bodies is vital. Naming and shaming and isolation of political parties will make it possible.

**Box 16. Specific Recommendations for Political Parties**

Politicians ought to work as change agents to transform oppressive and violent cultures through awareness raising on violence against women in politics. Social forums must exercise open discussions on the issues of violence and coping mechanisms discussed openly. Everyone, in such discussions should listen to victims/survivors or support research initiatives to understand how women suffer violence in politics.

Institutions involved in women's issues have to support women's solidarity on burning social issues, initiate to unite them among different parties to lobby for common cause of women in politics. Party alliances have to be created so that the issue is dealt with more forcefully. Separate mechanisms and policies will play significant role to address sexual harassment issues. Oblige all members of political parties to prevent and mitigate this problem.

Affirmative actions must be introduced to enhance effective participation of women in politics e.g. having adequate quotas or seats for women candidacy from parties, respecting voting procedures that safeguard privacy and fairness, following code of conducts to prevent violence that female candidates may face during nominations and elections. Actions as per the legal provisions needs to be ensured so that the perpetrators at party level are brought to the book. For e.g. ban tickets and membership to female abusers, etc. Victims or complainants get access to grievance mechanisms whether through party leadership or to file a case. Counseling services and mechanisms needs to be ensured to the victims within party organizations and constituencies. Counter violence against women in politics the partnership with media, and all kinds of election violence. Feature articles and stories should be encouraged to bring consciousness and awareness in the society. Party organizations should use information technology in women friendly (harassment free) manner. This can help to minimize harassment of grassroots female political activists by enhancing leadership qualities in decision-making.

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) must be implemented practically and effectively. It should not be just limited to words. Recognition and protection to women's right to control their

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bodies and their sexuality should be ensured. Security to women's rights to inheritance, property, housing and social security, among the range of economic and social rights must be ensured. Men and boys should be encouraged to speak out strongly against violence against women and to stop protecting perpetrators or condoning their violence. Women providing leadership on ending violence against women at all levels, and especially in grassroots women's organizations, must be recognized and allowed to carry out their work unhindered. Responsibility for the systematic collection and analysis of data has to be ensured by the concerned institutions. This may include supporting and facilitating the work of NGOs, academics and others engaged in such activities. The data also should be disaggregated, not only by sex, but also by other factors such as race, age and disability, as appropriate.

Training should be provided to the national statistical offices and other bodies involved in the collection of data on violence against women. Adequate funding should be provided adequate services and access to justice and redress to victims/survivors.

The physical setbacks related to geographical landscape must be overcome by the construction of infrastructures like roadways, railways and cable cars etc. Assess of women to budget allocations at national and local levels and resources should be ensured to eliminate discrimination and violence against women. Women subjected to violence need access to shelters, medical, psychological and other supports, legal aid and other services.

It is imperative to ensure that all human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected, protected and fulfilled. Women should know their rights and they must be empowered to demand and exercise the rights. Education to men and women, boys and girls about women's human rights and their responsibility to respect the rights of others should be provided. Women should have access to justice and equal protection of the law so that perpetrators of violence against women do not enjoy impunity and brought into the book.



UNFOLDING THE REALITY

# ANNEXURE

## Annex I

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### LIST OF REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY, COUNTRY STUDIES AND VAWIP CONFERENCE PAPERS

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## ANNEX II

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### CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW)

#### ARTICLE 1

For the purposes of the present Convention, the term “discrimination against women” shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

#### ARTICLE 2

States Parties condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women and, to this end, undertake:

- a) To embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation if not yet incorporated therein and to ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the practical realization of this principle;
- b) To adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women;
- c) To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure through competent national tribunals and other public institutions the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination;
- d) To refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation;
- e) To take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise
- f) To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women;
- g) To repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women.



**ARTICLE 3**

States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

**ARTICLE 4**

1. Adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women shall not be considered discrimination as defined in the present Convention, but shall in no way entail as a consequence the maintenance of unequal or separate standards; these measures shall be discontinued when the objectives of equality of opportunity and treatment have been achieved.
2. Adoption by States Parties of special measures, including those measures contained in the present Convention, aimed at protecting maternity shall not be considered discriminatory.

**ARTICLE 5**

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures:

- a) To modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women;
- b) To ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases.

**ARTICLE 6**

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.

**ARTICLE 7**

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election

- to all publicly elected bodies;
- b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
- c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

#### **ARTICLE 8**

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

#### **ARTICLE 9**

1. States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their nationality. They shall ensure in particular that neither marriage to an alien nor change of nationality by the husband during marriage shall automatically change the nationality of the wife, render her stateless or force upon her the nationality of the husband.
2. States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.

#### **ARTICLE 10**

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

- a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in preschool, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;
- b) Access to the same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard and school premises and equipment of the same quality;
- c) The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods;

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- d) The same opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants;
- e) The same opportunities for access to programmes of continuing education, including adult and functional literacy programmes, particularly those aimed at reducing, at the earliest possible time, any gap in education existing between men and women;
- f) The reduction of female student drop-out rates and the organization of programmes for girls and women who have left school prematurely;
- g) The same opportunities to participate actively in sports and physical education;
- h) Access to specific educational information to help to ensure the health and well-being of families, including information and advice on family planning.

### ARTICLE 11

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular:
  - a) The right to work as an inalienable right of all human beings;
  - b) The right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment;
  - c) The right to free choice of profession and employment, the right to promotion, job security and all benefits and conditions of service and the right to receive vocational training and retraining, including apprenticeships, advanced vocational training and recurrent training;
  - d) The right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work;
  - e) The right to social security, particularly in cases of retirement, unemployment, sickness, invalidity and old age and other incapacity to work, as well as the right to paid leave;
  - f) The right to protection of health and to safety in working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction.
2. In order to prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity and to ensure their effective right to work, States Parties shall take appropriate measures:
  - a) To prohibit, subject to the imposition of sanctions, dismissal on the grounds of pregnancy or of maternity leave and discrimination in dismissals on the basis of marital status;

- b) To introduce maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefits without loss of former employment, seniority or social allowances;
  - c) To encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities.
  - d) To provide special protection to women during pregnancy in types of work proved to be harmful to them.
3. Protective legislation relating to matters covered in this article shall be reviewed periodically in the light of scientific and technological knowledge and shall be revised, repealed or extended as necessary.

#### **ARTICLE 12**

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.
2. Notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph 1 of this article, States Parties shall ensure to women appropriate services in connection with pregnancy, confinement and the post-natal period, granting free services where necessary, as well as adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation.

#### **ARTICLE 13**

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular:

- a) The right to family benefits;
- b) The right to bank loans, mortgages and other forms of financial credit;
- c) The right to participate in recreational activities, sports and all aspects of cultural life.

#### **ARTICLE 14**

1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination

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against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:

- a) To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;
- b) To have access to adequate health-care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning;
- c) To benefit directly from social security programmes;
- d) To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;
- e) To organize self-help groups and cooperatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment;
- f) To participate in all community activities;
- g) To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;
- h) To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

### ARTICLE 15

1. States Parties shall accord to women equality with men before the law.
2. States Parties shall accord to women, in civil matters, a legal capacity identical to that of men and the same opportunities to exercise that capacity. In particular, they shall give women equal rights to conclude contracts and to administer property and shall treat them equally in all stages of procedure in courts and tribunals.
3. States Parties agree that all contracts and all other private instruments of any kind with a legal effect which is directed at restricting the legal capacity of women shall be deemed null and void.
4. States Parties shall accord to men and women the same rights with regard to the law relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile.

### ARTICLE 16

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

- a) The same right to enter into marriage;
  - b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;
  - c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;
  - d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
  - e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights;
  - f) The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
  - g) The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation;
  - h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.
2. The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.

#### ARTICLE 17

1. For the purpose of considering the progress made in the implementation of the present Convention, there shall be established a Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (hereinafter referred to as the Committee) consisting, at the time of entry into force of the Convention, of eighteen and, after ratification of or accession to the Convention by the thirty fifth State Party, of twenty-three experts of high moral standing and competence in the field covered by the Convention. The experts shall be elected by States Parties from among their nationals and shall serve in their personal capacity, consideration being given to equitable geographical distribution and to the representation of the different forms of civilization as well as the principal legal systems.
2. The members of the Committee shall be elected by secret ballot from a list of persons nominated by States Parties. Each State Party may nominate one person from among its own nationals.
3. The initial election shall be held six months after the date of the entry into

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force of the present Convention. At least three months before the date of each election the Secretary-General of the United Nations shall address a letter to the States Parties inviting them to submit their nominations within two months. The Secretary-General shall prepare a list in alphabetical order of all persons thus nominated, indicating the States Parties which have nominated them, and shall submit it to the States Parties.

4. Elections of the members of the Committee shall be held at a meeting of States Parties convened by the Secretary-General at United Nations Headquarters. At that meeting, for which two thirds of the States Parties shall constitute a quorum, the persons elected to the Committee shall be those nominees who obtain the largest number of votes and an absolute majority of the votes of the representatives of States Parties present and voting.
5. The members of the Committee shall be elected for a term of four years. However, the terms of nine of the members elected at the first election shall expire at the end of two years; immediately after the first election the names of these nine members shall be chosen by lot by the Chairman of the Committee.
6. The election of the five additional members of the Committee shall be held in accordance with the provisions of paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 of this article, following the thirty-fifth ratification or accession. The terms of two of the additional members elected on this occasion shall expire at the end of two years, the names of these two members having been chosen by lot by the Chairman of the Committee.
7. For the filling of casual vacancies, the State Party whose expert has ceased to function as a member of the Committee shall appoint another expert from among its nationals, subject to the approval of the Committee.
8. The members of the Committee shall, with the approval of the General Assembly, receive emoluments from United Nations resources on such terms and conditions as the Assembly may decide, having regard to the importance of the Committee's responsibilities.
9. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall provide the necessary staff and facilities for the effective performance of the functions of the Committee under the present Convention.

### ARTICLE 18

1. States Parties undertake to submit to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for consideration by the Committee, a report on the legislative, judicial, administrative or other measures which they have adopted to give effect to the provisions of the present Convention and on the progress made in this respect:

- a) Within one year after the entry into force for the State concerned;
  - b) Thereafter at least every four years and further whenever the Committee so requests.
2. Reports may indicate factors and difficulties affecting the degree of fulfillment of obligations under the present Convention.

#### **ARTICLE 19**

1. The Committee shall adopt its own rules of procedure.
2. The Committee shall elect its officers for a term of two years.

#### **ARTICLE 20**

1. The Committee shall normally meet for a period of not more than two weeks annually in order to consider the reports submitted in accordance with article 18 of the present Convention.
2. The meetings of the Committee shall normally be held at United Nations Headquarters or at any other convenient place as determined by the Committee.

#### **ARTICLE 21**

1. The Committee shall, through the Economic and Social Council, report annually to the General Assembly of the United Nations on its activities and may make suggestions and general recommendations based on the examination of reports and information received from the States Parties. Such suggestions and general recommendations shall be included in the report of the Committee together with comments, if any, from States Parties.
2. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall transmit the reports of the Committee to the Commission on the Status of Women for its information.

#### **ARTICLE 22**

The specialized agencies shall be entitled to be represented at the consideration of the implementation of such provisions of the present Convention as fall within the scope of their activities. The Committee may invite the specialized agencies to submit reports on the implementation of the Convention in areas falling within the scope of their activities.

#### **ARTICLE 23**

Nothing in the present Convention shall affect any provisions that are more conducive to the achievement of equality between men and women which may be contained:



- a) In the legislation of a State Party; or
- b) In any other international convention, treaty or agreement in force for that State.

**ARTICLE 24**

State Parties undertake to adopt all necessary measures at the national level aimed at achieving the full realization of the rights recognized in the present Convention.

**ARTICLE 25**

1. The present Convention shall be open for signature by all States.
2. The Secretary-General of the United Nations is designated as the depositary of the present Convention.
3. The present Convention is subject to ratification. Instruments of ratification shall be deposited with the Secretary-General of the United Nations.
4. The present Convention shall be open to accession by all States. Accession shall be effected by the deposit of an instrument of accession with the Secretary General of the United Nations.

**ARTICLE 26**

1. A request for the revision of the present Convention may be made at any time by any State Party by means of a notification in writing addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.
2. The General Assembly of the United Nations shall decide upon the steps, if any, to be taken in respect of such a request.

**ARTICLE 27**

1. The present Convention shall enter into force on the thirtieth day after the date of deposit with the Secretary-General of the United Nations of the twentieth instrument of ratification or accession.
2. For each State ratifying the present Convention or acceding to it after the deposit of the twentieth instrument of ratification or accession, the Convention shall enter into force on the thirtieth day after the date of the deposit of its own instrument of ratification or accession.

**ARTICLE 28**

1. The Secretary-General of the United Nations shall receive and circulate to all States the text of reservations made by States at the time of ratification or accession.

2. A reservation incompatible with the object and purpose of the present Convention shall not be permitted.
3. Reservations may be withdrawn at any time by notification to this effect addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who shall then inform all States thereof. Such notification shall take effect on the date on which it is received.

#### ARTICLE 29

1. Any dispute between two or more States Parties concerning the interpretation or application of the present Convention which is not settled by negotiation shall, at the request of one of them, be submitted to arbitration. If within six months from the date of the request for arbitration the parties are unable to agree on the organization of the arbitration, any one of those parties may refer the dispute to the International Court of Justice by request in conformity with the Statute of the Court.
2. Each State Party may at the time of signature or ratification of the present Convention or accession thereto declare that it does not consider itself bound by paragraph 1 of this article. The other States Parties shall not be bound by that paragraph with respect to any State Party which has made such a reservation.
3. Any State Party which has made a reservation in accordance with paragraph 2 of this article may at any time withdraw that reservation by notification to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

At the UN World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 in Vienna women demanded for a UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and for creation of the post of UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. the UN General Assembly passed the United Nation Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women within six months and the United Nations Human Rights Commission created the post of UN Special Rapporteur within a year. Coomaraswamy notes that it was “a success story of international mobilization around a specific human rights issue, leading to the articulation of international norms and standards and the formulation of international programmes and policies” (p 2-3).

## ANNEX III

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### DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (DEVAW) (EXTRACTS)

Given below is an extract of Articles from the Resolution 48/104 adopted by UN General Assembly in 20 December 1993.

#### ARTICLE 1

For the purposes of this Declaration, the term “violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

#### ARTICLE 2

Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

- a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence, and violence related to exploitation;
- b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;
- c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetuated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

#### ARTICLE 3

Women are entitled to the equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field. These rights include, inter alia:

- a) The right to life;
- b) The right to equality;
- c) The right to liberty and security of person;
- d) The right to equal protection under the law;
- e) The right to be free from all forms of discrimination;

- f) The right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health;
- g) The right to just and favorable conditions of work;
- h) The right not to be subjected to torture, or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

#### ARTICLE 4

States should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition, or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination. States should pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating violence against women and, to this end, should:

- a) Consider, where they have not yet done so, ratifying or acceding to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women or withdrawing reservations to that Convention;
- b) Refrain from engaging in violence against women;
- c) Exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons;
- d) Develop penal, civil, labour and administrative sanctions in domestic legislation to punish and redress the wrongs caused to women who are subjected to violence: women who are subjected to violence should be provided with access to the mechanisms of justice and, as provided for by national legislation, to just and effective remedies to the harm they have suffered; States should also inform women of their rights in seeking redress through mechanisms;
- e) Consider the possibility of developing national plans of action to promote the protection of women against any form of violence, or to include provisions for that purpose in plans already existing, taking into account, as appropriate, such cooperation as can be provided by non-governmental organizations, particularly those concerned with the issue of violence against women;
- f) Develop, in a comprehensive way, preventative approaches and all those measures of legal, political, administrative and cultural nature that promote the protection of women against any form of violence, and ensure that the re victimization of women does not occur because of laws insensitive to gender considerations, enforcement practices or other interventions;
- g) Work to ensure, to the maximum extent feasible in the light of their available resources and, where needed, within the framework of international cooperation, that women subjected to violence and, where appropriate, their children have specialized assistance, such as rehabilitation, assistance in child care and maintenance, treatment, counseling, and

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- health and social services, facilities and programmes, as well as support structures, and should take all other appropriate measures to promote their safety and physical and psychological rehabilitation;
- h) Include in government budgets adequate resources for their activities related to the elimination of violence against women;
  - i) Take measures to ensure that law enforcement officers and public officials responsible for implementing policies to prevent, investigate and punish violence against women receive training to sensitize them to the needs of women;
  - j) Adopt all appropriate measures, especially in the field of education, to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women to eliminate prejudices, customary practices and all other practices based on the idea of inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes and on stereotyped roles for men and women;
  - k) Promote research, collect data and compile statistics, especially concerning domestic violence, relating to the prevalence of different forms of violence against women and encourage research on the causes, nature, seriousness and consequences of violence against women and on the effectiveness of measures implemented to prevent and redress violence against women; those statistics and findings of the research will be made public;
  - l) Adopt measures directed towards the elimination of violence against women who are especially vulnerable to violence;
  - m) Include, in submitting reports as required under relevant human rights instruments of the United Nations, information pertaining to violence against women and measures taken to implement the present Declaration;
  - n) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines to assist in the implementation of the principles set forth in the present Declaration;
  - o) Recognize the important role of the women's movement and non-governmental organizations world wide in raising awareness and alleviating the problem of violence against women;
  - p) Facilitate and enhance the work of the women's movement and non-governmental organizations and cooperate with them at local, national and regional levels;
  - q) Encourage intergovernmental regional organizations of which they are members to include the elimination of violence against women in their programmes, as appropriate.

### ARTICLE 5

The organs and specialized agencies of the United Nations system should, within their respective fields of competence, contribute to the recognition and realization of the rights and the principles set forth in the present Declaration and, to this end, should, inter alia:

- a) Foster international and regional cooperation with a view to defining regional strategies for combating violence, exchanging experiences and financing programmes relating to the elimination of violence against women;
- b) Promote meetings and seminars with the aim of creating and raising awareness among all persons of the issue of the elimination of violence against women;
- c) Foster coordination and exchange within the United Nations system between human rights treaty bodies to address the issue of violence against women effectively;
- d) Include in analyses prepared by organizations and bodies of the United Nations system of social trends and problems, such as the periodic reports on the world social situation, examination of trends in violence against women;
- e) Encourage coordination between organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to incorporate the issue of violence against women into ongoing programmes, especially with reference to groups of women particularly vulnerable to violence;
- f) Promote the formulation of guidelines or manuals relating to violence against women, taking into account the measures referred to in the present Declaration;
- g) Consider the issue of the elimination of violence against women, as appropriate, in fulfilling their mandates with respect to the implementation of human rights instruments;
- h) Cooperate with non-governmental organizations in addressing the issue of violence against women.

### ARTICLE 6

Nothing in the present Declaration shall affect any provision that is more conducive to the elimination of violence against women that may be contained in the legislation of a State or in any international convention, treaty or other instrument in force in a State.

## ANNEX IV

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### **RESOLUTION 1325 (2000) ADOPTED BY THE SECURITY COUNCIL AT ITS 4213TH MEETING, ON 31 OCTOBER 2000.**

The Security Council,

Recalling its resolutions 1261 (1999) of 25 August 1999, 1265 (1999) of 17 September 1999, 1296 (2000) of 19 April 2000 and 1314 (2000) of 11 August 2000, as well as relevant statements of its President, and recalling also the statement of its President to the press on the occasion of the United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace (International Women's Day) of 8 March 2000 (SC/6816),

Recalling also the commitments of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/52/231) as well as those contained in the outcome document of the twenty-third Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century" (A/S-23/10/Rev.1), in particular those concerning women and armed conflict,

Bearing in mind the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and the primary responsibility of the Security Council under the Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security,

Expressing concern that civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements, and recognizing the consequent impact this has on durable peace and reconciliation,

Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution,

Reaffirming also the need to implement fully international humanitarian and human rights law that protects the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts,

Emphasizing the need for all parties to ensure that mine clearance and mine awareness programmes take into account the special needs of women and girls,

Recognizing the urgent need to mainstream a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, and in this regard noting the Windhoek Declaration and the Namibia Plan of Action on Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in Multidimensional Peace Support Operations (S/2000/693),

Recognizing also the importance of the recommendation contained in the statement of its President to the press of 8 March 2000 for specialized training for all peacekeeping personnel on the protection, special needs and human rights of women and children in conflict situations,

Recognizing that an understanding of the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, effective institutional arrangements to guarantee their protection and full participation in the peace process can significantly contribute to the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security,

Noting the need to consolidate data on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls,

1. Urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict;
2. Encourages the Secretary-General to implement his strategic plan of action (A/49/587) calling for an increase in the participation of women at decisionmaking levels in conflict resolution and peace processes;
3. Urges the Secretary-General to appoint more women as special representatives and envoys to pursue good offices on his behalf, and in this regard calls on Member States to provide candidates to the Secretary-General, for inclusion in a regularly updated centralized roster;
4. Further urges the Secretary-General to seek to expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel;
5. Expresses its willingness to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations, and urges the Secretary-General to ensure that, where appropriate, field operations include a gender component;
6. Requests the Secretary-General to provide to Member States training guidelines and materials on the protection, rights and the particular needs of women, as well as on the importance of involving women in all peacekeeping and peacebuilding measures, invites Member States to incorporate these elements as well as HIV/AIDS awareness training into their national training programmes for military and civilian police personnel in preparation for deployment, and further requests the Secretary-General to ensure that civilian personnel of peacekeeping operations receive similar training;



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7. Urges Member States to increase their voluntary financial, technical and logistical support for gender-sensitive training efforts, including those undertaken by relevant funds and programmes, inter alia, the United Nations Fund for Women and United Nations Children's Fund, and by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other relevant bodies;
8. Calls on all actors involved, when negotiating and implementing peace agreements, to adopt a gender perspective, including, inter alia: (a) The special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction; (b) Measures that support local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and that involve women in all of the implementation mechanisms of the peace agreements; (c) Measures that ensure the protection of and respect for human rights of women and girls, particularly as they relate to the constitution, the electoral system, the police and the judiciary;
9. Calls upon all parties to armed conflict to respect fully international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls, especially as civilians, in particular the obligations applicable to them under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols thereto of 1977, the Refugee Convention of 1951 and the Protocol thereto of 1967, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979 and the Optional Protocol thereto of 1999 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 and the two Optional Protocols thereto of 25 May 2000, and to bear in mind the relevant provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;
10. Calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict;
11. Emphasizes the responsibility of all States to put an end to impunity and to prosecute those responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes including those relating to sexual and other violence against women and girls, and in this regard stresses the need to exclude these crimes, where feasible from amnesty provisions;
12. Calls upon all parties to armed conflict to respect the civilian and humanitarian character of refugee camps and settlements, and to take into account the particular needs of women and girls, including in their design, and recalls its resolutions 1208 (1998) of 19 November 1998 and 1296 (2000) of 19 April 2000;

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13. Encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependants;
14. Reaffirms its readiness, whenever measures are adopted under Article 41 of the Charter of the United Nations, to give consideration to their potential impact on the civilian population, bearing in mind the special needs of women and girls, in order to consider appropriate humanitarian exemptions;
15. Expresses its willingness to ensure that Security Council missions take into account gender considerations and the rights of women, including through consultation with local and international women's groups;
16. Invites the Secretary-General to carry out a study on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls, the role of women in peace-building and the gender dimensions of peace processes and conflict resolution, and further invites him to submit a report to the Security Council on the results of this study and to make this available to all Member States of the United Nations;
17. Requests the Secretary-General, where appropriate, to include in his reporting to the Security Council progress on gender mainstreaming throughout peacekeeping missions and all other aspects relating to women and girls;
18. Decides to remain actively seized of the matter.

## ANNEX V

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### METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

#### 1. STUDY DESIGN

This report outlines female politicians as specific groups within the political discipline, having roles in decision-making, and exercising or aiming to exercise some sort of power as people's representatives or members of political organizations. This means women politicians working in the political parties and/ or running for or holding positions in parliamentary and local bodies. The purpose of limiting to these groups and bodies is to concentrate on the highly visible work domain and identify the invisibility of violence against female politicians in the practiced processes of running for parliamentary bodies and local government institutions. In short, explore and understand how power, prestige and wealth in politics reinforce violence against female politicians.

There is no doubt that violence against women is institutionalized in most societies and in many different ways. Study of major institutions of our society such as the family, work and politics reflect that there is a structure that values certain order or dominance of one over the other. Such values acquired culturally have entitled men to greater power, prestige and wealth. This report explores the basic assumption our societies make to maintain this order - one of male dominance and female subordination - in order to understand what perpetuates violence against those women who seek positions in one of the highest positions of society - government - and what its consequences are.

This report aims to open analysis to violence against women that occurs within the public domain of political organizations both at national and sub national levels, taking into account the fact that the effects of domestic violence upon the female politician reverberate in the political and public sphere. It studies what forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence including threats and coercion and deprivations of liberty are known to occur to female politicians in situations of preparing and fulfilling their duties and why. Apart from physical violence such as rape and murder, it could be violence related to discrimination, exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in formal and informal political institutions. It might be perpetrated or condoned collectively by institutions, including the state, political party organizations, society, and family or by individual politicians. The scope of inquiry includes:

- a) Understanding the types of violent actions and their interrelatedness rather than merely categorizing whether a particular violence or its attempt causes physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering. A differentiated understanding of the types of victims by age, area of origin, ethnicity,

education, class, political heritage, patronage, etc helps to identify vulnerable groups and understanding the nature or seriousness of violence against female politicians. This report will shed light on diversity issues in politics however there is lack of adequate information on the extent of violence due diversity issues. Research and debate need to be made open to this.

- b) Understanding the structure, culture and level of organization that violence against women politicians occurs or originates from. It could be institutionalized at the private or domestic level of the politician, at the broader societal level or in the public domain. This also helps to understand what factors cause violence against the identified groups of women and the types of perpetrators. It could be individuals, groups and communities operating within institutional structures such as the social, economic, political and state structures. There is a stark scarcity of information regarding the nature and forms of violence against female politicians. However, some identified cases help to understand the issues surrounding the nature (structure and forms) of violence that deters women from entering politics or from exercising political power.
- c) Understanding the aims or consequences of violence against female politicians. This will provide stones to step upon and combat VAWIP.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Desk study of international and South Asian literature and primary research undertaken by various organizations and authors contributed in compilation and analysis of information for this report. SAP International based in Kathmandu and five national partners based in respective countries conducted primary studies on violence against women in politics (VAWIP). SAP national partners include SAP Bangladesh, SAP Nepal, SAP Pakistan and SAP Sri Lanka. Youth for Action (YPA) conducted country study in India. Each partner contributed a separate report on VAWIP country study, which informed this report. The country studies were the primary source of information. Country studies excluded Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives and their inclusion would have benefited this report.

SAP International's collection of a wider range of information on the issue of violence against women in politics in South Asia, gender issues and its network of partners including Afghanistan contributed to the richness and diversity of information presented in this report. Other important sources included a regional issue paper and country papers presented in the Regional Conference held in Kathmandu on September 18 - 20, 2007, web based materials, electronic discussion portals and networks. The participation of delegates from Afghanistan and two paper presentations contributed much to inclusion of information on Afghanistan in this report.

It is essential to note that prior to knowledge creation, much in depth and wide ranging literature is yet to be produced on this issue, and SAP International's initiative comes as a 'breaking new ground' in an arena where the issue of violence against women has traditionally received much focus on the private or domestic spheres or in contexts of conflict, war or disaster. Thus this report uses individual case studies of key female politicians in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan. Information for individual cases were derived through semi structured interviews or use of structured questionnaires and documented by national partners. Even though country studies and case studies were mandated in Sri Lanka information was not available while writing this report. Nevertheless, individual case studies contribute in adding to the background where individual cases in various socio economic and political context of South Asia provide a fuller picture of violence against women. This is highlighted with the gravity of the issue in the current context of gender equality and women's rights to participate in governance without fear of violence. This report provides a comprehensive and de-simplified definition of violence against women and its reverberations for gender equality and political participation. This became possible due to the comprehensive literature review provided by each country study and the range of information supplied regarding political representation of women in each country studied.

Each country studies and other international literature elsewhere on the topic contribute in deriving a sense of urgency of attention required to learn and exchange more in depth on the issue and the need to create pressure for institutional commitments to address gender discrimination at a complex, higher and deeper level. The assimilation of wide range of information derived from international literature, primary research and individual case studies of female politicians in the region, and their consolidated analysis help to place violence against women in politics within a larger and complex conceptual frame.

It is also important to caution that this research concentrates on a few areas and individuals and does not reflect the overall general situation of countries or the region of South Asia. Its limited coverage and resources make it difficult to generalize at this level and do not attempt to do so. Much analysis is limited to available knowledge.



