women *in* politics

voices from the commonwealth

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Commonwealth Secretariat

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Preface

The Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development presents a vision in which the Commonwealth works towards "a world in which women and men have equal rights and opportunities in all stages of their lives to express their creativity in all fields of human endeavour, and in which women are respected and valued as equal and able partners in establishing the values of social justice, equity democracy and respect for human rights. Within such a framework of values, women and men will work in collaboration and partnership to ensure sustainable economic and social development for all nations"

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to take part in the government of her/his country. Women can represent gender concerns more effectively, because of their particular experiences and interests, and because they have greater knowledge of gender issues and perspectives. They can also bring a more constructive and less adversarial style to politics. The social, economic and political empowerment of women is therefore essential for achieving transparent, accountable and efficient government and administration.

This compilation brings together profiles of 33 women politicians from 11 Commonwealth countries, representing government, opposition and civil society. Their stories reveal the experiences of women when they enter the political arena and try to make a significant contribution to the political, economic and social agenda in their countries. The richness of experiences of women who come from countries which share a common heritage of law, education, language, government systems and administrative practices, provides a tapestry of good practices, strategies and lessons for other women. Their profiles will be a source of inspiration to women who are already involved in politics as well as those who are contemplating entering the world of politics. The message of hope from these real-life experiences is that although the path is never easy, with determination, perseverance and a commitment to democratic ideals, women can work in partnership with men to build a better world.

The Commonwealth is committed to increasing women's participation in all political and democratic processes. In 1995, Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs recommended a target of no less that 30 per cent of women in decision-making by the year 2005. The experiences of the women politicians will not only provide role models for the Commonwealth but will present the global community with insights into the political empowerment process of women in the context of the Commonwealth's fundamental values – democracy and governance, human rights, the rule of law, gender equality and sustainable development.

Eleni Stamiris
Director,
Gender and Youth Affairs Division, Commonwealth Secretariat

Introduction

There are proportionately fewer women in the world's parliaments than there were ten years ago. To have begun to redress the imbalance but then allow it to slip away is unforgivable.

'Barriers to Women's Participation in Parliament,' Report of a Task Force of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Group.

At a time when the world seems to be moving towards more democratic forms of government, and when the issue of gender equality is receiving more attention than ever before, the participation of women in national-level politics, measured in percentage terms, is actually in decline. Inter-Parliamentary Union figures suggest that female membership of National Parliaments fell from 12.1 per cent of total membership in 1985 to 11 per cent in 1995.

While the decrease may be linked with the dwindling numbers of women in the Parliaments of Eastern Europe, the overall situation seems to be one of stagnation. At the global level, women on average occupy only 6.2 per cent of ministerial-level posts, usually those in the broad area of social affairs. In 62 countries, no women Ministers are to be found at all. And when it comes to the top levels of national leadership, women seem to disappear from the scene almost completely: in late 1994, for example, a grand total of ten governments worldwide were headed by women.

Within this less than inspiring picture, how does the Commonwealth perform? One Commonwealth member, the Seychelles, relatively small in size, at one stage held the world record for women's representation in a national political assembly: under its former one-party government, 48 per cent of parliamentary seats were held by women. That figure fell to 27.3 per cent following multi-party elections in 1993. Even so, the tiny archipelago state was top of the Commonwealth league as far as the participation of women in politics is concerned However, following the National Assembly Election of March 1998, the figure had slipped down to 23.5 per cent for Seychelles with S. Africa leading with 27.8 per cent of women in the National Assembly.

Figures for 1995 revealed that on average within the Commonwealth's 53 member states women totalled just 7.2 per cent of Parliamentary Members – a proportion well below the global average. In a number of Commonwealth states, women made up less than 4 per cent of national parliaments. And a handful of member states boasted no women parliamentarians at all.

Variations within the Commonwealth are indicated in Figure 1, which sets out the representation of women in the Parliaments and Cabinets of the eleven Commonwealth states selected for this study. As far as parliament is concerned in 1996, the proportion of women members varies from 0 per cent to 25 per cent in post-apartheid, democratic South Africa and

27.3 per cent in the small island state of Seychelles. At cabinet level, the top position is held by Canada, with 26.4 per cent of ministerial posts occupied by women. In short, then, no Commonwealth country has yet attained the 30 per cent mark identified by the United Nations as the threshold of the "critical mass" essential for the empowerment of women in legislative and decision-making terms. And just three Commonwealth states – Bangladesh, Guyana and Sri Lanka – currently have women Heads of Government.

Why Gender Parity in Politics is Important?

In basic democratic terms, a government that is exclusively or predominantly made up of men cannot claim to be a government for the people by the people. As Gertrude Mongella, Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference on Women, put it, "the level of participation of women in decision-making and power sharing between men and women ... calls into question the basic principles of democracy." The point is reinforced by a resolution on women in politics passed by the Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in April 1992. This argued that "the concept of democracy will only assume true and dynamic significance when political parties and national legislation are decided upon jointly by men and women with equitable regard for the interests and aptitudes of both halves of the population."

What seems beyond dispute is that women are best placed to identify and articulate their own needs and concerns. The entry of women into parliament, no matter how slow and painful the process, has seen a significant broadening of the issues under debate. A discussion paper on Women and Parliament in Australia and New Zealand notes that issues such as abortion, domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, single parenthood, women's health and urban isolation have entered the parliamentary agenda in those two countries over the past two decades. The period has also seen the removal of structural and legal impediments to the advancement of women. New legislation has targeted sex discrimination and promoted equal employment opportunities. " These acts," the paper argues, "are testimony to significant efforts by women members and are now resulting in increases to workplace flexibility through industrial reform – the introduction of job flexibility, flexitime, career break schemes, workplace child care, parental leave and so on."

Nations that exclude women from decision-making, or rest content with low levels of participation by women, are surely depriving themselves of a rich reservoir of talent, experience and wisdom. They are also missing out on the qualitatively different approach that women seem to bring to the decision-making process. Surveys undertaken in the United States indicate that the presence of even a few women in the corridors of power results in a more participatory, less autocratic style and mode of government.

Figure 1 **The Eleven Commonwealth Case Studies: Women in Politics: *Problems, Experiences & Strategies for Action***

COUNTRY	YEAR OF ELECTION	WOMEN TOTAL UPPER HOUSE	% WOMEN IN UPPER HOUSE
AUSTRALIA	1996	23/76	30.7
CANADA	1996	24/103 Senate	23.3
BANGLADESH	1996		
DOMINICA	1995		
GUYANA	1996		
INDIA	1994	20/250 Rajya Sabha	8
MALAYSIA	1995	12/69 Dewan Negara	7.8
PAPUA NEW GUINEA	1994		
SEYCHELLES	1993		
SOUTH AFRICA	1994	6/90 Senate	17.8
UGANDA	1996		

Declarations versus Realities

The under-representation of women in political life, so striking and universal a feature of current reality, coexists with a plethora of declarations and conventions affirming commitment to gender equality in the political arena. The UN Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), for example, states that "parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political life and shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policy and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government."

Echoing these sentiments, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action calls on governments to take measures to ensure women's equal access to, and full participation in, power structures and decision-making by creating a "gender balance" in government and administration. It advocates more energetic efforts to integrate women into political parties, increase women's participation in decision-making and leadership, and enhance the role played by women in the electoral process and in political activities in general.

In the 1990 Harare Declaration, Commonwealth Heads of Government vowed to "defend and achieve the principle of equality for women so that they may exercise their full and equal rights." Three years later at their biennial gathering in Cyprus they supported the proposal that "special measures as appropriate be taken to increase women's positions at all levels

WOMEN/TOTAL LOWER HOUSE	% WOMEN LOWER HOUSE	WOMEN/TOTAL IN CABINET	% WOMEN IN CABINET
23/148 House of Reps	15.5	2/17	11.8
52/295 House of Commons	17.6	9/34	26.4
37/336 National Assembly	11	2/26	7.6
3/32 House of Assembly	9.4	2/10	20
12/72 House of Assembly	14.4	2/18	11
41/192 Dewan Rakyat	7.4		
2/25 Dean Rakyat	8		
0/109 National Parliament	0	0	0
9/33 National Assembly	27.3	3/12	25
100/400 National Assembly	25	4/25	16
46/284 National Assembly	16.1	4/53	7.5

of the political and decision-making process at the national level and in Commonwealth organisations." And in Auckland in 1995, the Heads of Government endorsed the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development, which states that "as a moral and strategic imperative", member states must work to ensure women's participation "in decision-making processes and structures including political structures at all levels, local, district, national, regional, and international, through positive and/or affirmative action."

Despite these admirable affirmations, pledges and commitments, however, women at the close of the twentieth century enjoy what can only be described as a token presence in most governments around the world. Those who have succeeded in breaching the barriers almost invariably prove to be remarkable individuals whose experiences, not to mention tenacity and determination, are not easily replicated. In this study we look at 33 such examples: women from every corner of the Commonwealth – Africa, Asia, Canada, the Caribbean, and the Pacific – who have defied the odds and propelled themselves into national or provincial politics.

Our sample, as can be seen from Figure 2, includes women politicians in a variety of roles: legislators from both upper and lower houses; former as well as serving ministers; a parliamentary Speaker; provincial level leaders; a serving vice-president; a former prime minister. In each case, we follow the subject through her early life and political initiation before tracking her progress to political heights. In the process, we seek to identify factors that provided critical support and specific strategies of action

Figure 2 **The Eleven Commonwealth Case Studies: *Women in Politics***

COUNTRY	EX PRIME MINISTER	EX DEP. PM	VICE-PRESIDENT	SPEAKER	EX STATE PREMIER
AUSTRALIA					
BANGLADESH					
CANADA					
DOMINICA	1				
GUYANA		1			
INDIA					
MALAYSIA					
PAPUA NEW GUINEA					1
SEYCHELLES					
SOUTH AFRICA				1	
UGANDA			1		

that helped the subject overcome barriers and blaze new trails.

A key assumption of this study is that there lies within the experience, and sheer grit, of these remarkable contemporary women, lessons of wider application. As Shakespeare noted for all time, some are born great while others have greatness thrust upon them. But for most of us the challenge lies in the third option he identified: that of overcoming, or pushing beyond, mundane reality to achieve greatness.

MINISTER	STATE MIN.	EX-MIN.	MP (R)	MP (O)	EX MP	SENATOR (R)	SENATOR (O)	OTHER
				1			1	1
1		1	1					
2						1		
1					1			
1			1					
				2		1		
1	2							
		1			1			
2				1				
1				1				
1					1			

Given the deep-seated historical and cultural factors weighing against them, most of the women politicians portrayed in this study would seem to fall within this third category of heroic achievers. Therein lies, we hope, the value of this study. For if greatness can be achieved, it can be both learned and facilitated. The women who make up this book can perhaps begin to tell us how.

AUSTRALIA

Once viewed as the "discovery" of European explorations in the seventeenth century, Australia, physically one of the largest nations on earth, is now recognised as the home of an ancient Aboriginal civilisation reaching back thousands of years. Its modern history has been dominated by the process of colonisation from the West in which Britain played a central role; even today, symbolic executive power in Australia remains vested in the British monarch, represented throughout the land by the Governor-General. In real political terms, however, Australia is an independent federal democracy whose constitutional features derive not only from British, but also from US political practice.

British contact with Australia dates back to the late seventeenth century but it was a century later, in 1770, that James Cook's historic voyage launched Britain's claim to the territory. The discovery of copper and gold in the mid-nineteenth century spurred colonisation and economic development and by 1860 settlers from Britain, including deportees, had formed the nuclei of what were to become Australia's six constituent states. By the end of the century there were growing calls for federation. On January 1, 1901, the Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed under a new constitution.

Federalism is central to the Australian system of government. While the central government, or Commonwealth, has control over such areas as defence, external relations, immigration and customs and excise, directly elected legislatures in the six States and two Territories handle a broad portfolio of residual powers.

At the federal level, legislative power is vested in a bicameral parliament, all of whose members are directly elected by universal adult suffrage. The lower house, or House of Representatives, comprises 148 members elected at least every three years on a constituency basis. What may have some bearing on the representation of women in parliament, however, is the mode of selection of members of the federal upper house, or Senate: each State sends a contingent of twelve representatives (two in the case of Territories) and these are elected by proportional representation through multi-member constituencies.

Since the 1920s, three political parties have dominated parliamentary elections: the Australian Labour Party, and, to the right of it, the Liberal Party and the National (or Country) Party. In the recent past, the Australian Labour Party held power from 1983 until its defeat in the 1996 general elections, when it was replaced by a Liberal-National Party coalition government headed by Liberal leader John Howard.

The past two decades have seen new parties enter the political arena, notably the Democrats and the Greens. Gender justice is under growing debate and there is also evidence of heightened sensitivity within Australia to the historical maltreatment and current plight of people of Aboriginal origin.

Women in Politics

Viewed historically, Australia emerges as a pioneer of women's political rights. White women gained the vote in the State of South Australia as early as 1894, and the 1902 Franchise Act which followed the establishment of the federal Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 gave white women the right to vote in national elections. Despite this headstart, however, Australia today is only marginally ahead of the global average with respect to women's representation in national and state parliaments.

Prior to the 1993 general elections, there were just 29 women in Australia's national parliament: 19 in the Senate (constituting 25 per cent of its membership) and 10 in the House of Representatives (7 per cent of membership). While the 1993 elections brought no change to the overall figure of 29 women national-level legislators, the general elections of 1996 saw this total rise to 44, or 19.6 per cent of total membership. In the lower house, women now constitute 15.5 per cent of members, while in the Senate the proportion of women legislators has risen to 30 per cent. However, a number of these women members occupy marginal seats and both major parties have drawn fire for their failure to select women candidates for safe seats. Two women hold cabinet rank in the Howard administration: Jocelyn Newman, Minister for Social Security and Minister assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women (profiled below); and Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

In party political terms, it has been the smaller parties that have performed most creditably in terms of the practice of gender equality. Three of the leaders the Democrats have had since the formation of the party in the late seventies have been women; one former leader is Senator Cheryl Kernot, profiled below. The 1996 elections saw a new party, the Australian Women's Party, make an unsuccessful bid for parliament in an effort to redress the imbalance between men and women in the national legislature. The party advocates achieving gender parity in parliament by having two candidates, a man and a woman, for each constituency.

Labour Party Governments of the 1970s and 1980s enacted legislation targeting sex discrimination and affirming equal employment opportunities for women. A key role was played by Senator Susan Ryan, a minister in the Bob Hawke administration generally regarded as a trail-blazer in the arena of women's rights. The party, now in opposition, has set itself the target of selecting women for at least one third of its total list of candidates by the year 2000.

SENATOR JOCELYN NEWMAN

Minister for Social Security
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women

It was while working as a lawyer and experiencing at first hand some of the difficulties faced by women in everyday life that Jocelyn Newman, one of contemporary Australia's most senior and respected women political figures, became interested in championing women's issues. She translated interest into action by becoming one of the founder members of the Women's Electoral Lobby in 1972 and by being instrumental in the establishment of the first women's refuges in Tasmania. The mid-1980s saw her launch her own political career when she successfully contested for the federal Senate. Not long after, she attained front bench status as Shadow Minister handling defence and several other portfolios.

But perhaps the greatest challenge of her life came in 1994, when she was diagnosed as suffering from breast cancer. She went public with the news and stepped down from the shadow ministry to begin her battle with the disease. Two years later, she was back in parliament, once again as Shadow Minister of Defence. Then came the 1996 General Elections, the victory of the Liberal Party-National Party coalition and the appointment of Senator Newman as Minister for Social Security in the new government headed by John Howard. She was given an additional ministerial responsibility: that of helping the Prime Minister advance and promote the status of women.

Early Life

Jocelyn Newman (née Mullett) was born in Melbourne in 1937. After her school career there she enrolled at the University of Melbourne, where she read law and edited the student newspaper. Later, while on a blind date, she met Kevin Newman, a young army officer. "It was love at first sight" is how she recalls their first encounter. The couple married in 1961, and Jocelyn Newman embarked on her new life as an army wife. "I remember our first home, in Sydney, was so small that the guests at our first dinner party had to sit in rows on the floor, but we managed."

Kevin Newman's extended military service abroad (he served in both Malaya and Vietnam and was absent from Australia for a whole year at one stage) obliged his wife to develop resourcefulness and self-reliance as she raised their two young children. Looking back, she views this as an important, formative period of her life: "It was an experience I value very highly, and one which has served me well in my career as a politician, and even more so as a minister." She practised law in Canberra, Victoria and Tasmania and also gained experience in running businesses that included retailing, farming and tourism.

Entry into Politics

In 1972, Newman gave proof of her growing involvement in public affairs when she became a founder member of the Women's Electoral Lobby. Now living in Tasmania, she became active in a range of community concerns, including child protection, women's shelters and non-government education. Around this time, too, she applied for the job of women's adviser to the newly elected Labour government headed by Gough Whitlam. "I thought I could make a contribution to women's policy in Australia by advising the government, but the job went to someone else and I poured my energies into the community."

In 1975, her husband Kevin, by now active in the Liberal Party, was elected to the Federal Parliament. For a while he served as a minister in the Fraser government, and his political career clearly interested his intelligent lawyer wife. When ill-health forced Kevin to retire from politics in 1984, Jocelyn began considering a political career of her own. "In a sense it was the timing of it all which convinced me to make a run for a Senate vacancy in 1986. I was looking for a new challenge; one part of my life was coming to an end with the children having grown up. I saw an opportunity and decided to nominate for the vacancy, even though I never really expected to have a chance of winning." But win she did, defeating close to a dozen candidates for the Senate seat.

Once in parliament, Newman quickly established herself as a woman of energy and ability. A strong believer in the value of the parliamentary committee process, she became involved in a broad spectrum of areas, including foreign affairs, education and the arts, public interest disclosures, estimates and the scrutiny of bills. But from the start her knowledge and experience as the wife of a serving soldier steered her towards a special interest in defence matters; her maiden speech in fact addressed conditions of service within Australia's armed forces.

Rise to the Top

Two years after entering Parliament, Newman was elevated to the shadow front bench, where she handled the portfolio dealing with defence personnel. Later, she was entrusted with other areas of responsibility, including the status of women, the aged, and family and health.

It was not long after she assumed the shadow health portfolio that she faced a health crisis of her own. She had long been an active campaigner on breast cancer issues, having seen her grandmother, mother and sister all battle the disease. In May 1994, while in the midst of a national campaign to raise breast cancer awareness, she learnt that she, too, was in the grip of the familiar old enemy. "I was shattered that day," she remembers. "I suppose at that stage I thought I was on the way out. Couldn't see round corners."

She went public with the news and decided to step down from the shadow ministry. "The decision to go public with my breast cancer was not easy, but I felt I had a duty as a public figure to talk openly about the disease, in the hope it would encourage other women to come forward for testing."

After treatment, she returned to Parliament and went straight back into the Shadow Cabinet, holding the defence portfolio. Here she remained until the 1996 General Elections and the victory of the Liberal-National Party alliance. She was invited to join the government, but not in the defence post that might have been expected. "The Prime Minister rang me and said he wanted me to be Social Security Minister. I was a little surprised, but delighted to have his confidence for such an important job and, of course, I said "yes". Her long interest in women's issues brought a second ministerial portfolio: that of assisting the Prime Minister in enhancing the status of women.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Senator Newman is a strong advocate of incentives, as opposed to affirmative action or quotas, to bring more women into public life. As she puts it, "Simply trying to work the numbers rather than dealing directly with women themselves is not a recipe for success. I have always been a strong advocate for the encouragement of women of merit into politics, rather than any 'big stick' approach."

She believes that this policy of gentle encouragement lies behind the increase in women parliamentarians on the Coalition Government benches, pointing out that Coalition women MPs (58 per cent of women parliamentarians elected in 1996) now outnumber their Labour counterparts. "Women are still well behind men in terms of representation, but the trend is there and it is encouraging today's young women to consider a political career."

On questions of strategy, she favours mainstreaming women's issues rather than debating them with a small collective of interest groups at the top, observing that, "There are so many small organisations and individuals with something to contribute who may never have had their voice heard in Canberra because of a previous emphasis on dealing only with those at the top of the pyramid."

What factors does she identify as having played an important role in her own rise to political prominence? A supportive, politically shrewd husband has clearly been a major enabling element. As she puts it: "I have been very fortunate in my political career to have a husband who knows the ropes, having been a minister himself. Kevin has always been, and continues to be, my greatest supporter. He offers wonderful advice, but at the same time gives me the space to do the job."

Newman also believes the breadth of her professional experience, including the challenge of running a number of businesses, has helped equip her for a successful political career. Here, she emphasises the importance to would-be woman legislators of active community involvements. "Contributing to the good of a local community can be very satisfying, and of course it builds upon the skills needed in dealing with people."

Among the personal qualities she identifies as essential for women contemplating a life in politics are determination, a positive outlook and a commitment to the pursuit of excellence. She emphasises, too, the importance of good communication skills, noting that "one can do an absolutely top-notch job on an issue, but if it is not properly communicated the results will not reflect the quality and effort put in."

SENATOR CHERYL KERNOT

Member of Parliament (Labour Party)
Former Leader of the Australian Democrats

Cheryl Kernot discovered a talent for public speaking at an early age. "I always wanted to sing" she recalls, "But instead I could talk. I liked doing it. I felt confident giving speeches." At secondary school she gained a reputation for her speaking skills, but it was not until she was well into her twenties that she became drawn into active politics.

She well remembers the circumstances. The occasion was a protest rally in Brisbane against the proposed introduction into the Queensland State Legislature of a draconian anti-abortion bill. When protestors gathered outside Parliament, the gates were closed in their faces to prevent them entering. An outraged Kernot telephoned her local MP and demanded that he arrange for her to watch the debate in progress. From the public gallery, she watched the abortion bill debated into the early hours of the morning. "I was struck by the absence of anybody articulating what I thought about the issue," she recalls. "I was struck by the fact that these people were about to pass a law which was going to affect my life. And I was struck by the absence of women. It was like a bolt of lightning."

Thoroughly shaken by the experience, Kernot volunteered to speak at a subsequent protest rally at Brisbane City Hall. Watching the all-male parliamentary debate on the abortion bill had made her acutely aware of the need for more female politicians. And it was obvious that the best way to make her opinions count was to get into Parliament herself.

Early Life

Cheryl Kernot was born into a working-class family in New South Wales in 1948. Her father held two jobs in order to bring home suffi-

cient income for the family of six (Cheryl had three sisters and a brother). There was a family tradition of political involvement; Cheryl's maternal grandfather had been a Labour Party organiser in the Hunter Valley coalfields. And both her parents were strong advocates of women's rights: "You can do anything you want to," they used to tell their three daughters.

Kernot performed strongly at school and later won a Commonwealth university scholarship to the University of Sydney, where she studied government. At university, she avoided taking any active role in student politics, perceiving herself as a country girl unfamiliar with big city ways. After obtaining a teaching diploma at Newcastle University, she embarked on a school teaching career in Sydney and Brisbane that would last from 1973 to 1987. She married in 1981, and her daughter, Sian, was born two years later.

Entry into Politics

Kernot, although active in her local community, had never been a member of a political party before she joined the Australian Democrats in 1979. The party had been formed two years earlier by Don Chipp, a disenchanted former Liberal Party Minister, who conceived it as a centrist force that would steer a course between the two political goliaths, the Liberal Party and the Labour Party. What especially attracted Kernot was what she saw as the Democrats' positive attitude to women, despite its lack of a formal quota system. She perceived the party as playing a pioneering role in getting women into politics: it was the first Australian political party, she has pointed out, to elect a woman leader, the first to elect a woman as national president and the first to have a woman in both leader and deputy-leader positions.

Kernot put in a decade's work for the Democrats before she won her seat in the Senate in the 1990 federal election. At different times, she held the unpaid positions of policy co-ordinator, newsletter editor, campaign director, State President and Deputy National President. In 1986, the party elected its first woman leader, Janine Haines, and Kernot derived encouragement in her rise up through the ranks from the sisterhood she found within the party.

The young politician faced her first electoral contest in 1980, when she stood for a seat in the State Parliament and garnered a creditable 12 per cent of the vote. In the 1984 Federal Election, she was listed fourth on the Democrats' Senate ticket, a position which gave her no chance of winning a seat. Finally, in 1989, she was elected to lead the Queensland Senate ticket. In the ensuing federal election of 1990, she was the only woman elected to the Senate from her state.

In the national Senate, Kernot developed her political skills further and gave clear indications of her leadership potential. In April 1993, she

was elected leader of the Australian Democrats through a nationwide ballot of party members in which she gained more than 80 per cent of the vote. In 1997, however, she made the decision to leave the Democrats and join the Labour Party.

Enabling Factors

Kernot looks back with gratitude to supportive parents who encouraged her to aim high and to high school teachers who awakened her to a wider world by kindling an interest in books and ideas. She notes her own inclination, from an early age, to be "a joiner and a do-er", a trait that got her involved in a broad range of organised activity, from media education to the promotion of multiculturalism.

She also pays tribute to the support she received from the "woman-friendly" Democrats at key stages of her political career. In 1983, she recalls by way of example, she had to give up her seat on the Democrats' Queensland Executive Committee when she and her husband went to Canada on a teaching exchange. When the couple returned, their infant daughter was just two weeks old and Kernot felt inclined to play a less active role in the party as she learned to cope with motherhood. But only a few weeks after her return, she got a call from the woman then heading the party's Queensland division, who urged her to be nominated for re-election to the executive. "When I said, 'I don't know whether I can juggle it all'," remembers Kernot, "she promised to make all the necessary flexible arrangements." Soon executive meetings were being held at Kernot's house so that she could breast-feed her baby.

Although hesitant about her return to politics at the time, Kernot is now thankful she was coaxed so quickly back into the mainstream. "That flexibility brought me back," she says. "There was no problem."

Regarding strategies for would-be women political leaders, she is clear that women with serious political aspirations should seek traditionally male-appropriated portfolios rather than be ghettoed into areas seen as "appropriate" for women. When she became the Democrats' spokesperson on Treasury and Finance, her first reaction was one of panic: "I thought, 'Oh, I'm not an economist.' But so much of it is common sense, really. I haven't found it daunting at all."

As for the personal qualities she believes women in politics should nurture, diplomacy and a sense of humour figure prominently. It is also important, she argues, that women are not easily intimidated by the bluster and self-importance of male colleagues and opponents. Developing a thick skin is a basic survival strategy: "You have to realise that these things come and go. In politics, you've got to understand that a lot of it is a game. You can't be too precious about it."

LOIS O'DONOGHUE

High profile Aboriginal woman
Former Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

When she was two years old, Lois Donoghue, together with her three sisters, was taken away from her mother and sent to a children's home. The reason: her mother was Aboriginal and her father (whom she never knew) was white. In the Australia of the 1930s (and beyond), Lois was a "half-caste" whom the state decreed it had the right to separate not only from her mother but also from her entire Aboriginal cultural inheritance.

Twenty-seven years later, while stationed at the mining town of Coober Pedy, on the edge of the Pitjanjatjara tribal lands, Lois was reunited with her mother. As a nurse-cum-welfare officer working for the South Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs, she had deliberately sought work in this remote region in the hopes of seeing her mother, Lily, again.

One day, while visiting the supermarket, she heard someone shout: "That's Lily's daughter!" In the group of people who had noticed her were her mother's sister and brother; they had spotted the family resemblance. They told Lois that her mother was at Oodnadatta, one thousand kilometres north-west of Adelaide. It took three months for Lois and her eldest sister, Eileen, to get there. Lily, who had heard they were coming, waited at the roadside every day for weeks "from first light in the morning until dark."

When the daughters at last arrived, Lily proudly introduced them around town but kept them away from the camp where she was living. "She realised we'd been brought up differently and didn't want us to see her poor conditions." Later, O'Donoghue took her mother south to meet her other children and her grandchildren.

Finding her mother brought home to O'Donoghue just what it meant to be the victim of racist policies, denied even the right to raise one's own children. "It was then that the jigsaw puzzle came together for me," she says. "It was really at that point that I resolved that promoting the Aboriginal cause was a full-time job for me. It was then that I decided that I was going to improve the conditions of my people."

Early Life

Lois O'Donoghue was born in August 1932 at the property Granite Downs at Indulkana in the outback of South Australia. Her mother, a Yunkunytjatjara woman, gave the new baby the Aboriginal name Lowitja. The baby was never to know her father, an Irish station manager.

When O'Donoghue was two, she and her two sisters were taken from their mother and placed in Colebrook, a home for children of mixed Aboriginal and European parentage. Located in the South Australian town

of Quorn in the Flinders Ranges 300 kilometres north of Adelaide, Colebrook was run by an organisation called the United Aborigines' Mission. "It was a really narrow, evangelistic type of mission," recalls O'Donoghue. "Hellfire and brimstone type of stuff. We were taken away because we were what they then called "half-castes". This experience was very common."

The Australian Federal Government recently instituted an inquiry into the practice of taking Aboriginal children away from their families, a practice that lasted for the greater part of this century.

In the home, Lowitja was renamed "Lois". She and the other children were not allowed to speak their own language or to ask questions about their parents and origins. But new children were always arriving and, in secret, they asked about their families and kept up with their Pitjantjatjara language. Lois found out that her mother's name was "Lily".

Looking back, O'Donoghue can now discern a positive side to this institutional life. "The discipline, I believe, stood me in very good stead for life. Children like us learned discipline and skills which enabled us to fight our way through the white system later in our lives." But the dominant reality of life at Colebrook was unreservedly negative; it was the absence of love, affection and any sense of the children as individuals in their own right. When asked by journalists and documentary filmmakers for a picture of herself as a child, O'Donoghue can only offer group photos. "They have to put a ring around me," she says with a wry laugh. "We weren't important as individuals."

In the home, her inclination to stand up against authority saw her labelled as a troublemaker. "I stood up for my sisters, took away the strap when they were being beaten. I used to do that because I couldn't stand it. One of my sisters was really quite badly treated."

O'Donoghue attended Quorn Primary School and later went on to a girls' technical high school, but there was no expectation that she would pursue a career. Boys in the home were expected to become stockmen, the girls domestic servants. When O'Donoghue turned sixteen, she was sent to a farming family where there were six children to look after.

But she had higher aspirations. She wanted to become a nurse.

Entry into Politics

O'Donoghue trained as a nurse at the South Coast District Hospital at Victor Harbour in South Australia from 1950-1953. She encountered her first major obstacle when she was denied entry to Royal Adelaide Hospital to further her training. "The reason I was denied entry was that I was Aboriginal. This was my take-off point. I was not prepared to accept this set-back."

Her response to the situation was instinctively political. She joined the Aboriginal Advancement League, then the only organisation involved in

Aboriginal rights. She lobbied members of the South Australian state parliament, spoke at a rally at Adelaide Town Hall, and confronted in person not only the matron of the hospital but also the State Premier.

This, it should be remembered, was 1953. It would only be in 1967 that white Australians would vote to recognise Aborigines as citizens. And their right to vote under the same conditions as other Australians would not be enacted until 1984. "In this period of my life," recalls O'Donoghue, "I realised there were principles worth fighting for. All we were doing was fighting for rights other Australians were taking for granted."

As a result of the publicity generated by the campaign, the hospital matron reversed her earlier decision and accepted O'Donoghue at the hospital in 1954. There the young nurse remained until 1961, when she accepted an invitation to join an Australian Baptist Mission team for two years in the Indian state of Assam. On her return to Australia, she joined the South Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs as a nurse-cum-welfare officer working in remote areas. Her plan was to regain contact with her mother.

Rise to the Top

After the emotional reunion with Lily, O'Donoghue stayed on in her job for a decade before moving to the Adelaide head office of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Here, and later in Canberra, she worked as a senior liaison officer. In 1975, she was the first Aboriginal to be appointed Regional Director of the new federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Two years later she left the job, frustrated by the constraints of bureaucratic functioning. But her work as a pioneer leader of her community would continue.

In 1977, O'Donoghue became founder chairperson of the National Aboriginal Conference. In 1980, she was a founder member of the Aboriginal Development Commission and served there as Commissioner from 1980-1984 and as Chairperson from November 1989 to March 1990. In South Australia, she has been on numerous committees concerned with Aboriginal rights and welfare; examples include the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement, the Aboriginal Housing Board and the Aboriginal Advancement League.

In 1990, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was set up, with O'Donoghue as Chairperson. The new body replaced the Federal Government's Department of Aboriginal Affairs as well as the Aboriginal Development Commission. As Australia's premier policy-making body in indigenous affairs, it was conceived as a decentralised organisation, combining representative, policy-making and administrative elements and was designed to allow indigenous people to determine the administration of their own affairs. Unlike other govern-

mental departments, ATSIC is run by elected representatives. O'Donoghue remained Chairperson of it until her retirement from the post in 1997.

One area of special concern to her has been the Aboriginal struggle for land rights, waged over the past thirty years. An important landmark was the Mabo Judgement of 1992, in which the High Court upheld a claim by five Torres Strait islanders that they held native title to their land. The principle of *terra nullius* – the legal fiction that Australia was unoccupied prior to European settlement – was thereby overturned. In 1993, O'Donoghue was a member of the negotiating team involved in formulating the Federal Government's Native Title legislation.

Today, O'Donoghue is a member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the Indigenous Land Corporation, the National Australia Day Council and the Order of Australia Council. She also serves on the Board of Trustees of the United Nations' Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. Her contribution to the cause of Australian Aboriginal peoples has been recognised through numerous awards, including Member, Order of Australia (AM) in 1977 and Commander of the British Empire (CBE) in 1983. In contemporary Australia, she is often mentioned as a possible future Governor-General or, if the country becomes a republic, a future President.

Perspective on Women in Politics

O'Donoghue's experience as an Aboriginal woman fighting for the rights of her people has not led her towards any strong identification with women's issues as such or with the wider women's movement. "I find all that glass ceiling stuff, feminism, something that I've never been involved in," is how she puts it. "Aboriginal women don't like feminism, as such. I know it's been difficult for the women's movement to get Aboriginal women involved, because we don't particularly want to get involved. I was asked in the early days to be on many women's committees, like the National Women's Council. But I resisted them. I wouldn't be involved because I wanted to be involved in total issues, not just women's issues."

There is an Office of Indigenous Women within ATSIC, but O'Donoghue, no enthusiast, argues that such an office tends to marginalise women and women's issues. "But Aboriginal women fought so hard to get the Office of Indigenous Women that I wouldn't really want to be the person to close it down."

In essence, O'Donoghue sees herself as "Aboriginal first and female second." She does concede, however, that Aboriginal women experience unequal treatment within their own community. "Aboriginal males are very male chauvinist, and the young women find it very difficult coming through." The fact that her own status as a woman has not held her back

she attributes in part to the fact of her involvement in the Aboriginal rights movement from the very beginning.

Enabling Factors

O'Donoghue attributes her success as a political leader to certain traits of her personality rather than to the calculated adoption of particular strategies. At the same time, she recognises the scale of the empowerment she has derived from her community. As she says, "The support of my own people has always given me strength."

Her personal life, too, has helped sustain her high-flying public activism. She first met her husband, Gordon Smart, in 1962 when Smart was married with five children. She insisted that he fulfil his responsibilities to his family and it was not until seventeen years later, when his children had grown up, that she agreed to marry him, on condition he allowed her to continue with her career. "He was a man almost ready to retire by then, because he was ten years older than me," O'Donoghue says. "I was still wanting to work and get involved. And he was very supportive." Smart died in 1991. They had no children.

O'Donoghue believes that from early in her life she has adopted various coping strategies to deal with oppression and difficulty. "Like other members of my race, I have experienced discrimination and frustration. I have developed different ways of coping. I think I've always had a fairly positive attitude, and the only times I've ever felt really angry is when I think about what happened to my mother."

From the start she was feisty and determined. At Colebrook, she resolved neither to take punishment herself nor to allow other children to be physically chastised without challenge. "I wasn't going to be beaten. I wasn't going to be downtrodden, and I indicated that in the best way I could by fighting for my sisters and others. That was the only way I could do it there. It showed through, and I was seen as a very naughty girl, a troublemaker."

Then came her resolve not to become a domestic servant. "I had no great plans. But I was going to be as good as the next person. I was going to be something in life. And I knew when I started nursing that I could be as successful as some of my non-Aboriginal friends. I worked at it; I worked very hard."

With determination came perfectionism, a commitment to all-out effort. When O'Donoghue became a nurse she made sure her uniform was whiter, her shoes were shinier than anyone else's. While her friends relaxed by going to dances, she stayed behind in the nurses' home and went to bed early, believing she could not be distracted from the job at hand. "It wasn't in a pompous way," she recalls. "It was just that I was all the time striving, because if I didn't achieve, then the effect was that I was failing my people."

Her innate cheerfulness, too, has proved a valuable resource. Over her years in public life it has helped her develop diplomatic skills and a reputation as an adept negotiator. "I don't think of myself as having negotiating skills, but I do chair very difficult meetings and always manage to get a result, get people to calm down, get people contributing. I try to confront difficult situations with logic and humour."

Lois O'Donoghue, reviewing a life of achievement, can still feel humbled when talk turns to her as a prospective head of her nation. For the little Aboriginal girl from the South Australian outback, it seems an impossible journey. "That's when I think about my lowly birth," she says. "Unless we look back, we are never able to measure how far we've come. At times I am amazed when I contemplate the changes that have occurred in my lifetime."

BANGLADESH

Bangladesh is a young country. It achieved independence in 1971 at the conclusion of a civil war within the state of Pakistan as it was, which, from 1947 to 1971, comprised an eastern and a western portion separated by a thousand miles of Indian territory.

Bangladesh draws upon an ancient civilisational past marked by a distinct language and culture. Prior to the coming of Islamic rulers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries AD, Bengal was strongly influenced both by Buddhism and by brahminical Hinduism. Separating itself from the Delhi Sultanate in 1338, it remained an independent Muslim-ruled state until conquest by the Mughals in the sixteenth century. During these centuries, the majority of the population converted to Islam.

In medieval times, the wealth of Bengal and the skill of its weavers and other artisans were legendary. With the coming of the British, systematic plunder supervised and directed by the East India Company stripped away this prosperity. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the region was periodically ravaged by famine; millions perished, most recently in the great Bengal famine of 1943.

When the British left the Indian subcontinent in 1947, eastern Bengal became East Pakistan, separated from the politically dominant West Pakistan not only by a vaste swathe of territory, but also by language and culture. Tensions, inequalities and imbalances between the two halves of the country generated a secessionist movement in the East, spearheaded by the Awami League. In elections held in 1970, the Awami League, led by the charismatic Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won a majority in the national assembly but was prevented from occupying its seats when the Pakistan government postponed convening parliament. There followed a bloody confrontation at the conclusion of which, in December 1971, East Pakistan broke away to form the new state of Bangladesh.

A new secular Constitution was introduced in 1972 and Bangladesh seemed set on a democratic course. Under the Constitution, a president, elected by popular vote for a renewable five-year term, was to head the government. He or she would form a Council of Ministers from elected members of the unicameral National Parliament. In practice, however, the new state would undergo long spells of military rule. Democratic government was finally restored following elections in 1991.

Since 1991, politics in Bangladesh have been dominated by two women leaders: Begum Khaleda Zia, leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), who served as prime minister until 1996; and Sheikh Hasina, the leader of the Awami League (AL). In 1991, the two women leaders and their parties had worked together to oust the previous government of the Jatiya Party, which had grown out of the former military regime. Subsequently, however, there had been a falling out and a sharp political rivalry between the two parties and leaders developed. After several years

of leading parliamentary and electoral boycotts and political strikes, the Awami League of Sheikh Hasina won Bangladesh's second general election after the transition (held in 1996).

Women in Politics

The two women who currently dominate the politics of Bangladesh both come with strong political pedigrees. The serving Prime Minister and Awami League leader, Sheikh Hasina, is the daughter of the nation's founder, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was assassinated in 1975. And Begum Khaleda Zia, leader of the opposition BNP, is the widow of the late General Ziaur Rahman, the country's ruler in the late seventies and early eighties (he was assassinated in 1981).

As elsewhere in South Asia, the rise to the top of women leaders from prominent political families in Bangladesh may distort external perceptions of women's actual political position and influence. In India, a woman at the top (Indira Gandhi) coexisted with underrepresentation of women at every other level of government. Parent-and-daughter duos such as the Bhuttos in Pakistan and the Bandaranaike-Kumaratunga pairing in Sri Lanka may also have drawn attention away from the difficulties faced by less privileged women seeking to enter the political arena.

This said, it should not be supposed that Bangladeshi women lacking such family credentials have failed to make a mark on politics or that Bangladesh has been insensitive to the issue of gender justice in the political arena. Affirmative action to bring women into national politics was one of the founding principles of the new state. Under the 1972 Constitution, 15 seats for women (4.8 per cent of total seats) were reserved in Parliament. In 1979, the number of seats reserved for women was increased to 30 (or 9.7 per cent of the total). But this provision lapsed in 1987, and for the next three years there were no reserved seats for women in the national parliament. This situation was ended in 1990, when a constitutional amendment restored the 30 seats reserved for women.

In the 1991 elections, 36 women contested for non-reserved seats in Parliament and eight were successful. A subsequent by-election brought in another woman legislator, bringing the total of women members from non-reserved seats to nine. Added to the thirty reserved seats, this raised women members of parliament to 10.6 per cent of total membership. The 1996 elections raised the proportion marginally to 11 per cent. Today, Bangladesh has, besides Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, one woman Cabinet Minister, Begum Motia Chowdhury, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Disaster Management Relief.

The picture from Bangladesh, then, is quite mixed. On the one hand, age-old patterns of discrimination against women – patterns that are to be found through much of South Asia – continue to work against the goal of gender justice and equality. On the other hand, the democratic asser-

tion of their rights by large numbers of Bangladeshi women has been an inspiring feature of the nation's short but chequered history. Women from all social strata came to the fore in the struggle for the restoration of democracy that preceded the 1991 elections, throwing themselves into the politics of protest with energy and commitment. The two women at the top of national politics have proved themselves leaders in their own right, demonstrating tenacity, political judgement and the ability to shield their parties from fragmentation and disarray. And across the political board, surely if slowly, there are emerging women politicians of effectiveness, resolve and sagacity.

SYEDA BEGUM SAJEDA CHOWDHURY

Member of Parliament
Former Secretary-General of the Awami League
Former Secretary, Bangladesh Mohila Awami League

There are many things a politician might remember about an election: the hard slog, perhaps, the rough moments, and with some luck, the exhilaration of victory. For veteran Bangladeshi political leader Syeda Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, the defining moment came during the 1991 elections. Having successfully contested a seat for the Awami League, then in opposition, she learnt that one of her supporters, a woman, had been killed by her husband for the way she had voted. The experience strengthened Chowdhury's resolve to open the political arena to all the country's citizens, women as well as men.

Making progress down this path has not been easy, especially in a context where religious fundamentalism has all too readily surfaced. She recalls how once during an election campaign she was barred from entering the premises of an organisation supported by a local mosque. When the leaders of the locality sought to restrict her movements, she sent them a note pointing out that Bibi Khadija, wife of Prophet Mohammed, had not only been the first woman to embrace Islam but had also, through her earnings and support, made it possible for the Prophet to preach the faith. Chowdhury's note carried the day and she was permitted to enter the organisation's premises.

Early Life

Chowdhury was born on May 8, 1935, in a village called Alokdia in Jessore district of what was then an undivided Bengal: this was pre-Partition India. Her family by tradition were Pirs, or spiritual figures. When she was eight years old, her mother died and she was raised by her paternal grandfather, grandmother and aunts. Her father, a businessman, was a member of the Indian National Congress and was socially progressive. His commitment

to gender equality found practical expression in his attitude towards his daughter, whom he encouraged in such unfeminine pursuits as tree-climbing and rowing boats.

Chowdhury's paternal grandfather was deeply religious and spoke Urdu, a language imposed on the people of present-day Bangladesh following the formation of Pakistan in 1947. But he secretly taught Bengali to his wife, and his daughter, Syeda Motahara Begum, was destined to become a reputed Bengali writer, contributing poems to various publications – an unusual practice for a Muslim woman of her time.

From early childhood, Chowdhury was exposed to the ballads and stories of undivided India's freedom fighters. She was especially inspired by her grandfather's recollections of the Swadeshi movement, an early expression of anti-colonial protest in which British-made goods were boycotted and Indian products and services were promoted in their place. Her grandfather encouraged his wife to follow Mahatma Gandhi's example by producing at home handspun cotton cloth. His support for the Swadeshi movement cost him his job in the colonial police force.

Entry into Politics

Chowdhury's marriage, in 1954, to Golam Akbar Chowdhury, a Chittagong-based businessman, served to reinforce the political awareness generated during her childhood. Her husband and his circle of friends encouraged her to join the Awami League, a party which was to play a crucial role in Bangladesh's struggle for independence and nationhood.

Then Baddrunessa Ahmed, a family friend, educationist and well-known woman leader of the Awami League, introduced Chowdhury to the leader of the party, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He advised her to become a member of the party's Women's Committee, and she became involved in various economic and health programmes aimed at uplifting women.

Subsequently, Chowdhury accompanied her husband on a tour of what was then West Pakistan. This visit brought home to her the great disparitites between the two provinces, more particularly the relative deprivation of the East.

Meanwhile, her own political profile was growing. In 1964, she led a protest against an attack on two senior Awami League leaders by hired hoodlums of an opposition group. A year later, when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman visited Chittagong, she mobilised 500 women for a meeting at which she made her first public speech. At Rahman's request, the up-and-coming woman leader in 1966 moved to Dhaka along with her family in order to become more actively involved in politics. Soon after, Rahman was arrested. Chowdhury gave asylum in her home to a large number of fellow party workers threatened with arrest and also led processions against Rahman's imprisonment. Her activism boosted party morale and helped

raise the status and profile of the Awami League in what were difficult times.

Recognising the valuable contribution women could make, the party encouraged women leaders who had completed the School Certificate Examination to pursue higher studies. Chowdhury eagerly took up this opportunity, enrolling for a Bachelor's degree at Eden Girls' College, an affiliate of the University of Dhaka, in 1966 at the age of 31.

Rise to the Top

In February 1969, Chowdhury led a procession to celebrate the release of Sheikh Mujib from jail. With his encouragement, she went on to form a Women's Wing of the Awami League and became its Secretary. This position gave her the opportunity repeatedly to tour the country, during which she encouraged women to become actively involved in politics.

As civil war loomed, Chowdhury began to make her presence felt in the Bangladesh independence movement. In July 1971, the Awami League declared the formation of an independent state, and Chowdhury joined party fighters at Mujib Nagar, taking charge of training camps for women. Those she trained remember her as a highly effective motivator who emphasised the importance of self reliance.

Following independence, the new government of Bangladesh faced the mammoth task of reconstructing a war-devastated economy. Rehabilitating tens of thousands of women and children uprooted and traumatised by the bloodshed was a particular priority. In view of her experience, drive and efficiency, Chowdhury was charged with this responsibility. As Director of the Rehabilitation Centre for Destitute Women she once again travelled widely in the country, thereby gaining firsthand knowledge of the situation and needs of women.

When the 1972 Constitution reserved fifteen parliamentary seats for women, Chowdhury was nominated by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to occupy one of them. In 1973, Rahman, in a controversial move, imposed a system of one-party rule known by the acronym BAKSAL. The Awami League was dissolved, and Chowdhury became the chief of Baksal's Women's Front. The new system was not destined to last. Just two years later, it was abolished in the aftermath of Sheikh Mujib's assassination. For the moment, however, no one was prepared to raise the possibility of resurrecting the Awami League.

At Chowdhury's initiative, supported by a few other Awami League stalwarts, moves were made to bring the party back into being. In 1976 Chowdhury became general secretary of the revived Awami League, a post she would continue to hold for the next eleven years. Although 30 parliamentary seats were reserved for women in the 1979 elections, Chowdhury preferred to contest a non-reserved seat, one of seventeen women to do so – none successfully on this occasion. This failure she

attributes in part to lawlessness at polling booths, arguing that had the electoral machinery proved more effective and had security been guaranteed, "more women would have been encouraged to participate in the election, thereby boosting support for women candidates." Her luck turned for the better in the 1991 elections, in which she was among eight women who won in non-reserved seats. She was returned to Parliament again in the 1996 elections.

Enabling Factors

A number of supportive, enabling elements seem to have come together to help elevate Chowdhury to her prominent position in the politics of Bangladesh. One has been a family which, with its scholarly traditions and track record of support for anti-colonial struggle, provided a positive context for the nurturing of political awareness. There was the presence of a father whose socially enlightened views and commitment in practice to gender equality enabled his daughter to look beyond old models of "appropriate" female behaviour. When Chowdhury married, her husband proved supportive of her political aspirations. Throughout her political career, she has been able to count on her family's support – a resource by no means available to every woman aspiring for political office.

Chowdhury's political career has also been facilitated by her party's stand on the position of women. The constitution of the Awami League commits the party to respect for fundamental human rights and to recognition of equality across boundaries of gender, religion, race and ethnic group. The party defines gender equity in terms of social and political rights, commitment to meeting basic needs, and equal distribution of resources to ensure that women are not left behind in the development process.

Affirmative action has also played a role in Chowdhury's political rise, helping her into Parliament in the first instance. Interestingly, however, she disfavours any extension of seat reservation beyond its initial, first-stage deployment. The system, she believes, lends itself to nepotism and abuse; moreover, "women who enter Parliament through this route are not accountable for their actions."

On the question of the importance of female role models, Chowdhury emphasises the need for women political leaders to take on an inspirational quality, citing by way of example Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Indira Gandhi and Margaret Thatcher. These leaders, she believes, rose to the top on the basis of their own moral and personal qualities; as she puts it, "in the political arena a woman leader should keep her unique personality and characteristics intact."

But what Chowdhury sees as the most potent factor in her political ascent is her longstanding involvement in development-related activities, especially those aimed at the empowerment of women. As we saw at the

start of this story, she has never forgotten the incident of the woman killed by her husband for daring to cast her vote for a fellow woman. This human tragedy, together with others she has encountered in her long political career, has driven Chowdhury to devote great energy to creating awareness among women and encouraging them to be independent and self-reliant. It has sensitised her to the challenge posed by social conservatism, religious fundamentalism, and old ways of thinking. It has impressed on her the need for a deep-going reorientation in the outlook of the electorate. Above all, it has emphasised the need for sustained, patient, hard, committed work. A woman political leader, says Chowdhury, must be in for the long haul.

JAHAN ARA BEGUM

Former Minister of State for Cultural Affairs
Vice-President, Executive Committee of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party

Jahan Ara Begum, a Professor and Senator at the University of Dhaka, has long experience of combining academic excellence with political activism. Involved in politics since her student days, she is today a leading member of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the main opposition force within the country. Personally close to the BNP leader, Begum Khaleda Zia, she played a central role in Begum Zia's political education and grooming for party and public office after the assassination of General Ziaur Rahman in 1981. And her experience includes time in governmental office: from 1991 to 1996, she served as Minister of State for Cultural Affairs in the BNP administration headed by Begum Zia.

Life and Entry into Politics

Jahan Ara Begum was born on February 11, 1942, into an educated family with a comparatively liberal outlook. Her father was an officer in the service of the British and her mother was the principal of a government college.

Too young to be aware of the closing years of colonial rule, Jahan Ara came of age politically in the 1950s, a period of growing political fervour in the then East Pakistan. The year 1952 had seen the launch of the Language Movement, an expression of organised revolt against the imposition of Urdu as the official language of Pakistan. Thousands of East Bengali students participated in this movement, which is now recognised as the opening phase of the Bangladesh independence struggle.

It was in this context that Jahan Ara first became politically active. In 1959, she became a student at Eden Girls' College in Dhaka; while she was there, she was elected cultural secretary of the Students' Union. Moving on to study at the Home Economics Girls' College, she was vice-president of the Students' Union from 1961 to 1963. During this period,

she was arrested for two days for participating in a student protest. She was also involved in the setting up of the Young Women's Association, and acted as its Chairperson from 1961 to 1971.

In 1962, Jahan Ara married Ahmed Murtafa, an engineer by profession who encouraged her political involvement. He would be killed during the Bangladeshi war of independence. During the bloodshed, the couple made it a point to provide refuge to those involved in the independence struggle, supplying them with money, medicine and other essentials.

After the birth of Bangladesh (and the loss of her husband), Jahan Ara resumed her academic career by studying for a master's degree. She continued to be actively involved in programmes aimed at advancing the status of women. Then, in 1978, she took her political interests a stage further by joining the Jatiyotabadi Gonotantrik Dal, a party better known by its acronym, JAGODAL. This was formed under the patronage of the then ruler of the country, President Ziaur Rahman; its convenor was Justice Sattar, who would become president after Ziaur Rahman's assassination in 1981. Jahan Ara went on to become a member of the party's executive committee.

Rise to the Top

Following the formation of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Jahan Ara became President of its women's wing, Vice-President of its Executive Committee and, in 1985, joint secretary of its National Standing Committee. She is credited with having played a key role in the grooming of Begum Khaleda Zia, widow of the assassinated President Ziaur Rahman, for the position of party leader. She emphasised that while Begum Khaleda would be entering politics on the basis of kinship, she would have to pass the test of competent political leadership.

In the General Elections of 1991, that followed the restoration of democracy, Jahan Ara was nominated to occupy one of the seats reserved for women in the National Parliament. Following the victory of the BNP, she was appointed State Minister for Cultural Affairs and remained in the post until the defeat of the BNP in the 1996 elections.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Jahan Ara attributes her successful political career to a range of factors. Among them, the support she has received from her family ranks high; she is particularly appreciative of the encouragement she got from her late husband. She also highlights the impact of belonging to a party which is openly committed to women's advancement and is prepared to help women cadres overcome financial constraints.

Although Jahan Ara came to Parliament through the reserved seat route, she is by no means an advocate of this as a strategy for getting more women into politics. "Women who come into Parliament this way," she

argues, "are severely restricted in what they can do by their political parties. For another thing, the system gives the impression that women are not fit to contest for the general seats." Instead, she believes political parties should fix quotas for women candidates, who would then contest elections along with men.

What she does believe is important for women aspiring to political office, is to be immersed in grass roots activity. She has made it a point to keep in close touch with her electoral constituency, Rajbari district, and the various development projects taking shape there. Another vehicle that has helped her keep in touch with her constituents, especially women, is the Association of Women's Rights Implementation, which she helped to establish. Such practical activities, she says, are the most effective way not only of keeping a finger on the grass roots pulse but also of marginalising fundamentalists.

Jahan Ara also stresses the importance of linking the political empowerment of women with their economic status and demands. In her own career, she has worked closely with trade unions, and is currently secretary of the Jatiyotabadi Sramik Dal, the workers' front of the BNP. She is in this way directly involved in the challenge of sensitising a male-dominated organisation to the need for gender parity and gender justice.

MOTIA CHOWDHURY

Member of Parliament (Awami League)
Minister of Agriculture, Food, and Disaster Management and Relief

Motia Chowdhury, a veteran of Bangladeshi politics and currently a minister in the Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina, keenly remembers the reception which once greeted her at a public meeting in Noakhali, a conservative part of the country. In the middle of her speech, a male party colleague pointed out a small group of men sitting in the audience, with their backs firmly turned to her. After the meeting, she learnt that the men were Islamic fundamentalists who refused to countenance a woman making a public appearance. Yet at the same time they were deeply curious to hear her speech. The solution, as they saw it, was to sit face backwards!

But what really impressed Motia Chowdhury was the fact that they had come to her meeting at all. Times, it seemed, had begun to change.

For Chowdhury, whose spirited political career has earned her the sobriquet "Daughter of Fire", the story offered vindication of her basic view on women in politics: that women must get on with the job of challenging stereotypes and breaking down barriers – irrespective of whether men react by facing them or turning their backs.

Early Life and Entry into Politics

Chowdhury was born on June 30, 1942, in the district of Pirojpur, southern Bangladesh. She was only a five-year-old at the time of Partition, but distinctly remembers the 1952 Language Movement in what was then East Pakistan. Her family, especially her parents, taught her to speak out against injustice in all its forms.

As a student at Eden Girls' College in Dhaka, Chowdhury involved herself in student politics, becoming Vice-President of the Students' Union in 1963. This was despite the fact that University Ordinances introduced in 1962 had placed a ban on students taking part in politics, threatening those who did so with the rescinding of their degrees. Chowdhury in fact strengthened her resolve to remain politically active: she was conscious of living under a martial law regime (that of General Ayub Khan) that had brought economic disintegration, political confusion and an increasingly repressive atmosphere. In her view, martial law was an extension of colonial rule and had to be resisted; as she puts it, "the political situation of the former East Pakistan led one to fight against injustices, for the removal of darkness."

Chowdhury also recalls how, during her days of student political activism, she would come back from meetings with her male colleagues at night – in defiance of the prevailing norms. As a result of her political activities, Chowdhury was arrested in July 1964 under the Security Act and was detained until September of the following year. While some women political prisoners signed bonds for their release Chowdhury refused to do so. While in jail, she was elected General Secretary of Dhaka University Central Students' Union and later became its President. After her release in 1965 she obtained a Master's degree.

Rise to the Top

In 1967, Chowdhury, whose fearlessness and commitment to justice had already won her the title "Daughter of Fire", joined the East Pakistan Awami Party and became a member of its working committee. Between 1970 and 1971, she was an active participant in the Bangladesh independence struggle, campaigning, lobbying and nursing the wounded. In the process she undertook extensive travel within the country, including remote border areas, and gained experience of interacting with a broad range of people, listening to their problems and inspiring them to action.

In 1971 Chowdhury became organising secretary of the Awami League. Two years later, the party was dissolved by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and was replaced by the one–party system known as BAKSAL. Chowdhury became a member of the central committee of the new organisation, which proved to be short-lived. By 1979, she was back in the reconstituted Awami League, where she won the post of agricultural secretary.

Under the regimes of Ziaur Rahman and Ershad, Chowdhury was

arrested several times. Her longest period in detention was two years.

Chowdhury's first bid to enter Parliament, in the 1989 Elections held under a caretaker administration, was not successful. With the full restoration of democratic politics in Bangladesh in the early 1990s, she tried again, and in the 1991 elections she was one of the few women to win a non-reserved seat. Following the victory of the Awami League in the 1996 elections, she was given a major portfolio in a subject area not traditionally linked with women: that of Agriculture and Food, with the additional responsibility of Disaster Management and Relief.

Motia Chowdhury's public career has been noteworthy for its ability to combine political activism with philosophical contemplation. This woman leader has made it a point to read as widely as possible in such areas as political thought, political biography and international affairs. She has also contributed publications of her own, including a book titled *Deaal Deea Ghera (Closed by Walls)*, published in 1970.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Drawing on her own experience, Chowdhury stresses the importance for a prospective woman politician of making a wise choice of life partner, of selecting a husband who is in tune with her ideological perspective and who is ready to support her work. She also emphasises the need for women to align with political parties that have a firm, unambiguous programmatic commitment to gender justice and women's equality.

While she supports the principle of reserving seats in parliament for women, she believes that this practice should be time-bound, since the current system of patronage "has a tendency to make women parliamentarians politically dependent."

She is a strong believer in the power of education to raise awareness and transform popular perceptions. To a certain degree, this is already making its impact felt in Bangladesh where, she says, "Women are receiving much greater exposure as they deliver speeches at public meetings and work side by side with their male counterparts." However, much remains to be done within the formal educational systems, where stereotypical notions of the "fair sex" are still given credence.

But the best way of demolishing stereotypes, affirms Bangladesh's "Daughter of Fire", is for women simply to go ahead and dare to be different – just as she, in her student days, defied "propriety" by travelling with male comrades late at night. "I was never ostracised or teased," she remembers. "I simply got on and did what I had to do."

CANADA

Like Australia, Canada is a "new" country superimposed on ancient foundations: for centuries it has been home to native Indian populations and its contact with Europe dates back to the Norse explorations of the eleventh century AD. In the modern period, its history was dominated by rivalry between two colonial powers – the French and the British – for control of its land and abundant natural resources. Formal resolution of this conflict came in 1763, with the expulsion of the French from continental North America at the end of the Seven Years' War. But there was left behind in Canada a substantial French-speaking population that would continue to exert influence on national life, politics and culture.

Confederation took place earlier than in Australia: the Dominion of Canada came into existence in 1867 under the British North America Act. This remained the country's constitutional foundation until 1931, when Britain recognised the position of its Dominions and created equality of status among them. With the Constitution Act of 1982, British North America was patriated to Canada, thereby transferring control over the Constitution and severing the legal ties between the two countries. However, the British monarch continues to serve as Canada's symbolic executive, appointing a representative, the Governor-General, on the advice of the Canadian Prime Minister.

In formal political terms, Canada is a parliamentary democracy organised on a federal basis and comprising ten provinces and two territories. Supreme political authority rests with a bicameral parliament; the 301 members of the lower chamber, the House of Commons, are elected to five-year terms by universal adult suffrage, while the 104 members of the Senate are appointed by the Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister. The federal system allows for a substantial devolution of powers to the provinces, which enjoy control over such areas as education, property laws and natural resources. Responsibility for key portfolios such as health and social welfare is divided between the federal and provincial governments.

Up to the 1990s, three political parties dominated Canadian politics at the federal level: the Liberal Party; the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party; and the New Democratic Party. For much of the eighties, the Progressive Conservative administration of Brian Mulroney held sway. But in 1993, not long before scheduled elections, Mulroney retired and was replaced by Kim Campbell, a Vancouver-based woman lawyer who had served as Minister of Justice and then Minister of Defence in the Mulroney government. In June, Campbell was sworn in as Canada's nineteenth Prime Minister, the first woman to hold the post.

In general elections held later that year, the Progressive Conservative Party was routed by its old antagonist, the Liberals, and Liberal Party leader Jean Chrétien formed a new government. There was also the strong elec-

toral performance of two new political parties at the national level with regional support: the Bloc Québecois, based in Québec, and the Reform Party, with support in Western Canada.

The General Elections of June 1997, which saw the Liberal Party hold on to office although with a reduced majority, confirmed the increasingly regionalised character of Canadian politics, with both the Reform Party and the Bloc Québecois performing strongly in their traditional strongholds – but not outside them.

Women In Politics

Most Canadian women gained the right to vote in Federal Elections in 1918 and the right to stand as candidates in 1919. The first woman to hold federal legislative office was Agnes Macphail, elected to the House of Commons in 1921. Membership of the Senate was not opened to women until 1929. Cairine Wilson, representing Ontario, was appointed as Canada's first woman Senator in 1930.

Prior to the 1997 elections, 53 women (17.9 per cent of the total membership) served as Members of Parliament in Canada's House of Commons. Women's representation in the Senate stood at 24 out of 104 seats, or 22.2 per cent. In general, women have made more substantial gains at the provincial/territorial level where female representation is as high as 25.3 per cent. Currently, there are 61 women in the House of Commons out of a total of 301 – representing 20.26 per cent; and 32 women out of a total of 104 in the Senate – representing 30 per cent. There are 4 women in the Cabinet; prominent among them are Sheila Copps, Minister for Heritage, Lucienne Robillard, Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, Jane Stewart, Minister for National Revenue and Diane Marleau, Minister for International Cooperation and Francophonie.

Research on women's participation in Canadian politics has identified a number of factors contributing to under-representation. These include the nature of the political and electoral system; the status of women in society; media depictions of female politicians; political party attitudes and policies; the availability of financial, human and other resources; and the constraints imposed by family responsibilities.

SHEILA FINESTONE

Member of Parliament (Liberal Party)
Former Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women

In the early 1970s, Sheila Finestone was a volunteer Vice-President of a Montreal-based housing corporation which was pioneering the building of private-sector social housing for the elderly. For the 137 units then available, the project received some 1,800 applicants. Of these, no fewer than

1,200 were women. This stark reality drove Finestone to investigate the housing needs and general impoverishment of elderly women. Helped by a team of women researchers, she learnt that the inadequate nature of women's pensions was responsible for many of the financial difficulties faced by this vulnerable section of society.

It was at this point that Finestone's commitment to pension reform for women began. In fact, the issue of pensions so motivated her that she decided to join a political party so that she could participate in policy development. Some twenty years later she would find herself at the hub of national government, developing policy for all aspects of women's well-being as Secretary of State for the Status of Women.

Early Life and Entry into Politics

Finestone's life has been shaped in a fundamental way by her family's long-standing involvement in community work, of which she has memories reaching back into her early childhood. After gaining a science degree at McGill University in Montreal, she completed one year of medical school, resuming her postgraduate career later, when she took courses in retirement planning and other areas relating to the elderly.After marriage and while coping with the demands of four small children, she embarked on what she describes as a "full-time career" in the voluntary sector. Although not in paid employment, she faced many of the same challenges as women working outside the home, juggling the competing demands of her career and family.

When Finestone resolved to become politically active in order to advance the rights of elderly women, she joined the Liberal Party and simultaneously involved herself in the Fédération des Femmes du Québec (FFQ), an umbrella organisation of, at that time, 85 women's groups in Québec. She saw the FFQ as another vehicle for progress on pension reform and issues relating to women's health. By 1977, she was president of the FFQ, a position which gave her considerable visibility both in Québec and in the wider Canadian women's movement. It also gave her valuable leadership experience.

In the late 1970s, Finestone was appointed Director of Youth Protection for the province of Québec. This enabled her to develop her contacts with ethnic minority groups and helped sensitise her to their problems and unequal treatment. In the process she became committed not just to gender equality, but also to the cause of ethno-cultural equality and justice.

As a member of the Voice of Women, a Canadian women's peace organisation, Finestone actively involved herself in the "No" campaign at the time of the 1980 referendum on whether Québec should seek to negotiate a "sovereignty association" involving a monetary and customs union from the Canadian Federation. Following this, she was approached to become political attaché to Claude Ryan, a Liberal Party politician who

was then leader of the opposition in the Québec legislature. She accepted, and was thereby in a position to help write the provincial Liberal Party's social policy platform on women's issues.

In the process she learnt much about the intricacies of drawing up public policy; she developed an awareness of how to sell policies and party platforms to the electorate; and she also gathered campaign experience by participating in a series of provincial by-elections. In addition, her post helped her build an extensive network of contacts throughout the province. Her insider's understanding of the working of the political system developed further when she became political attaché to Ryan's successor, Robert Bourassa.

Rise to the Top

In 1984, Finestone was approached by her Liberal Party constituency to seek nomination for the approaching federal elections. She declined, but party workers contacted her family and enlisted her parents, husband and children to help change her mind. Their persuasive efforts worked and she won the nomination. Her family then became her chief campaign staff, fielding phone calls, putting up posters and even helping to write her speeches. The result was an impressive victory: in an election which saw the return of the Conservatives with the largest majority in Canadian history, Finestone, the novice candidate, managed to hold the Mount Royal seat for the Liberals. She won the seat again in 1988 and in 1993.

In parliament, Finestone served as Opposition Critic for Communications and Culture and also looked after the party portfolio on youth affairs. She served on the seven-member Parliamentary Committee on Equality Rights which in 1985 recommended changes in federal government practice in such areas as maternity benefits, pensions, marital status, equality within employment and gay and lesbian rights.

Following the Liberal Party election victory of 1993, she was made Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and the Status of Women, a post she held until 1996.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Looking back on her own political career, Finestone attributes her success to the support she has received from her family and to the experience she gathered while working for many years in the voluntary sector. Her immediate family, she says, has been "the greatest source of support" in her political life, while her work in the community – with its deliberate crossing of religious, ethnic and other boundaries – has helped give her the high public profile and degree of credibility essential for successful campaigning.

She also gives credit to Liberal Party initiatives to encourage women candidates, even if mechanisms such as quotas have not yet yielded

substantial results. When Jean Chrétien, the leader of the Liberal Party, set a quota of 25 per cent women candidates in the 1993 federal elections, she set off on a journey across the country to encourage women to stand as Liberal candidates – and to persuade local party organisations to accept them. This proved quite a challenge. As she recalls, "It was not an easy job to find constituency associations prepared to open up and consider women candidates. Where you had competent women prepared to run, you didn't have an association prepared to accept them." Male prejudice persisted, despite the party's formal commitment to gender equality.

Finestone identifies funding as a crucial dimension of the effort to get more women into politics. In the case of the Liberal Party, she argues that the creation of special funds to help defray the expenses of women candidates has been crucial in drawing in women who lack access to fund-raising networks.

As one who has been active in the Canadian women's movement over many years, she emphasises the importance of non-governmental organisations in the struggle for women's equality. "As the organised voice of the women's movement has become stronger and more effective," she says, "there is far more pressure being put on all legislators." Lobbying by a wide array of women's groups, together with research generated by governmental bodies such as Status of Women in Canada, has forced all legislators to consider women in their policy decisions.

Throughout her political life, Finestone has made it a point to maintain alliances across party lines – a strategy she sees as potentially very useful for other women entering the political arena. She remembers that during the 1980 referendum campaign in Québec, some of her closest colleagues within the Fédération des Femmes du Québec taught her that it was possible to maintain relationships with people despite profound ideological differences. This lesson, she says, "served me well in subsequent campaigns." She would always eschew extreme partisan behaviour.

During her years in parliamentary opposition, for example, she found herself spending "more time in the offices of government members than with my own caucus colleagues." Developing links with members of other parties enhanced her effectiveness in parliamentary committees. Her ability to negotiate with government members in ways that "allowed the government to save face" meant that she could achieve changes to government bills despite her opposition status. During those years she sought to develop the strongest arguments possible to support her policy positions. "If I had a good, sound argument, I found that most ministers were quite reasonable."

When she herself became a minister, she found high office intrinsically isolating, and sought to overcome this by going out of her way to keep in touch with party colleagues and fellow parliamentarians. She also ensured

that she was not going to be the only member working on issues of women's equality within the government ranks. As she puts it, "I did not want to be the only voice. My job was to intervene in twenty-four ministries, soliciting the support, energy and creative vitality of the other women. Having them raise the issues in caucus was a very effective tool for change and ensured that gender analysis was done."

The emphasis placed by Finestone on co-operation, conciliation and partnership has brought with it a positive attitude to male involvement in women's issues. In fact, she sees the involvement of men as pivotal to the process of change and has designed strategies to ensure that male colleagues form an integral part of her equality agenda. Her goal has been to avoid being the only spokesperson on "women's issues".

For women contemplating a political career, Finestone has some very clear advice. The first point is the need for women politicians to surround themselves with competent staff: "I'm committed to hiring the strongest people I can find who are prepared to argue with me. It's absolutely necessary to have good, strong, competent staff who may even be smarter than you, and to be open to what they have to say."

Secondly, she emphasises the need to acknowledge party discipline and function as part of a team. Advising women to eschew the path of "rugged individualism", she urges them to defend their party's platform and philosophy, and to press for change firmly within party ranks.

Her final word of advice hinges on the word "honesty". In dealing with her constituents and public, Finestone argues, the woman politician must at all times strive to be open and straightforward. Only then can voters gain the measure of the kind of politician they are electing.

ETHEL BLONDIN-ANDREW

Member of Parliament (Liberal Party)
Secretary of State for Training and Youth
First Aboriginal Woman MP in the House of Commons

In 1988, Ethel Blondin-Andrew, an Aboriginal woman from Canada's Northwest Territories, approached her local Liberal Party to offer herself as a candidate for the approaching federal elections. When asked whether she "knew any Liberals' she shot back, "I know people who could be Liberals." With little help from the party, she won the nomination and went on to take the seat, becoming the first Aboriginal woman in Canada to enter the lower house of parliament. Five years later, following the Liberal victory in the 1993 federal elections, she scored another first by entering the Cabinet: again, the first Canadian Aboriginal woman to do so. Today, she is Canada's Secretary of State for Training and Youth.

Early Life

Like Lois O'Donoghue in Australia, Blondin-Andrew has had to battle prejudice, discrimination and institutionalised disadvantage in her journey to political eminence. Unlike O'Donoghue, however, she was not separated at an early age from her Aboriginal culture and roots. Her formative years were spent in a traditional Aboriginal family setting and she learned her native language and cultural traditions. Her ties with her community were therefore robust; in later life such ties would become a potent, political resource.

As in Australia, the Church sought to influence, and Westernise, Canada's Aboriginal peoples. Blondin-Andrew attended a residential school in Inuvik in the Northwest Territories, part of a system of church-controlled educational institutions into which Aboriginal children were channelled. She remembers the school curriculum as being strongly oriented towards Europe and the United States, with little focus on Canada and none at all on her Aboriginal heritage.

During this period, she fell ill with tuberculosis and was confined to a sanatorium for fourteen months, where she continued her education through a tutor. She must have done well in her studies, because a local priest, realising her potential, suggested that she try for entry to Grandon College, a special leadership school. She duly won a place.

Looking back on her life at Grandon College, Blondin-Andrew describes it as "the beginning of shaping what I do and where and what I am today." The school's goals included spiritual and physical development, academic achievement and leadership training. It equipped her with skills, confidence and motivation that would prove invaluable in her political career.

She went on to obtain a Bachelor's degree in education from the University of Alberta, specialising in linguistics and literacy training. This she achieved under difficult personal circumstances. As the unmarried mother of two small children, she soon realised that there were no support mechanisms for someone in her situation. She recalls that apart from the encouragement she received from her mother, "it was all discouragement," with strong pressure applied to her to put her children up for adoption. This she refused to do. Nor would she give up on her education, despite having to juggle part-time jobs in order to support herself and her children.

In 1982 her educational training led her into the area of curriculum development. Two years later, she applied for an Executive Director position in the field of training and development in the Indigenous Development Participation Programme, run by Canada's Public Service. She was unsuccessful, but did manage to get the post of National Manager of the programme. Within two years she had risen to executive director level. Here, she deepened her knowledge of the workings of government, the bureaucracy and the corporate sector, developed a broad network of contacts, and travelled widely within the country.

Entry into Politics

In 1986, Blondin-Andrew became the Assistant Deputy Minister of Culture for the Northwest Territories. Her interest in language training led to her involvement in the Assembly of First Nations Aboriginal Language Foundation and the North American Language Institute. During her career in government service, she experienced constraints as a civil servant operating in a context where there were very strict injunctions against participating in partisan politics. But the experience also allowed her to cultivate close ties with a variety of Aboriginal organisations.

She also found herself being repeatedly approached to run for election to the Territoral Council of the Northwest Territories. She resisted the calls, believing the territorial level represented too narrow a forum. Instead, by the mid-1980s she began to feel the time was right to try for a seat in federal government. This led to her difficult – but ultimately successful – bid for the Northwest Territories of the Western Arctic in the 1988 elections.

Rise to the Top

Once arrived at the House of Commons, Blondin-Andrew was soon convinced that the Liberals were likely to win the next elections. She determined to use her term in opposition to focus her goals clearly, develop expertise in particular areas and generally "produce something tangible."

One area to which she devoted much effort was constitutional reform. She participated in the constitutional negotiations that dominated the Canadian political agenda in the late 1980s and early 1990s, serving on a number of high-profile committees. Later, she involved herself in the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, working particularly closely with the sub-committee dealing with electoral reform in relation to Aboriginal peoples.

She also became the Opposition Critic (or spokesperson) on Aboriginal Affairs, and through her work on parliamentary committees produced a number of reports in this area. So impressive was her parliamentary record that when the Liberals became the governing party in 1993 she was appointed to the Cabinet.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Blondin-Andrew looks back with gratitude to the support she received from her mother, especially in the difficult period when she was raising a young family. But perhaps the most powerful and sustained supportive factor in her political career has been her ethnic community and the "magical" links built over the years with tribal elders and other Aboriginal leaders. For her, it remains a priority to return regularly to what she calls her "real life" – the world of her family, community, land and culture.

Although not a direct recipient of electoral affirmative action, she supports such initiatives as a means to bring more women into politics. She believes that the decision of the Liberal leader (and current Canadian Prime Minister), Jean Chrétien, to have women candidates constitute at least 25 per cent of the total party ticket in 1993 has had very positive consequences for the Liberal Party as far as the recruitment of women is concerned. She identifies this type of commitment as a potentially useful means of increasing the political participation of various minority populations.

Looking back at her own political career, Blondin-Andrew identifies a series of strategies that helped her overcome obstacles. First, as a self-declared "outsider" to party politics, she projected herself as a "low maintenance" candidate who was able to function with low levels of party caretaking. Women, she believes, stand a greater chance of political selection if they show themselves to be resourceful, no-fuss candidates. Secondly, she put to good use her considerable experience in the civil service and her insider's knowledge of the workings of government. A third strategy was to immerse herself in parliamentary committee work, thereby building up readiness for ministerial office.

For women entering politics, she concedes, funding continues to pose a major challenge. In her own case, she financed her electoral campaign and subsequent move to Ottawa by liquidating a personal pension. Although she has no regrets about using her own funds to establish herself in political office, she notes that, financially speaking, "every campaign continues to be a struggle."

While she describes herself as "absolutely committed" to greater participation by women in politics, Blondin-Andrew stresses the difficulties women are likely to encounter. Where conflict and competition are such entrenched features of public life, women need to be very cautious in the game of building alliances within their own party caucus, she suggests. In her own case, she has not found help particularly forthcoming from the Liberal government's Women's Caucus. Instead, she has worked to protect her independence and autonomy.

SENATOR THERESE LAVOIE-ROUX

Member of the Canadian Senate (Progressive Conservative Party)
Former Member of the Québec Legislative Assembly
Former Cabinet Minister in Québec

Thérèse Lavoie-Roux never planned to have a political career. She was part of the generation where women were virtually excluded from the political process and were barely visible in paid employment. But what she did do – and it proved a turning point in her life – was to get involved in a Montreal school board.

Until 1969, women were ineligible to sit as members of Montreal's Roman Catholic School Board. Its members were appointed by the government and the Catholic Church. Then the law changed, and the Archbishop of Montreal selected Lavoie-Roux to serve as the board's first woman member. She was immediately elected Vice-Chair, and the following year became Chairperson, a post she would hold for the next seven years.

In 1976, the social worker without political ambition was elected to Québec's legislative assembly as a Liberal Party member. She served there until 1989, spending the years 1985-1989 as a member of the provincial cabinet. Then, in 1990, she was appointed to the national Senate by the then Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney of the Progressive Conservatives. A long journey, indeed, from the Montreal school board.

Early Life and Entry into Politics

Lavoie-Roux graduated from the University of Montreal in 1949 and went on to complete a Master's degree in social work from the same institution. Following her graduation, she practised as a social worker, tackling a broad range of areas; her work brought her into contact with adults suffering from psychiatric disorders and with emotionally disturbed children. She also served in a voluntary capacity on a number of bodies, including the Home Care Services for the Mentally Disabled.

Then came her membership of the Montreal Roman Catholic School Board and her speedy elevation to the chair. At this time, the youngest of her four children was only five years old, and it was while arranging child-care and nursery school instruction for her young daughter that Lavoie-Roux began to consider how school boards could better meet the needs of working parents. It was at her initiative that a meals programme was introduced into the Montreal Catholic schools system, aimed at reducing the burden on working parents.

Entry into Politics

Until the mid-1970s, women by and large remained excluded from Québec provincial politics. In fact, only two women, Claire Kirkland Casgrain and Lise Bacon, had ever sat in the legislative assembly. In 1976, the provincial Premier, Robert Bourassa of the Liberal Party, personally invited Lavoie-Roux to run for provincial election and promised her a cabinet post. Although the Liberal government fell in the election, Lavoie-Roux won her seat. In 1976, she was the only woman on the opposition benches and one of only five women in the whole assembly. She was appointed Opposition Critic on the Status of Women.

With the return of the Liberals to power in Québec in 1985, Lavoie-Roux assumed charge of the Health and Social Services portfolio, taking on the additional responsibility of Family Policy in 1988. Two years later came her elevation to the Federal Senate at the initiative of Prime

Minister Brian Mulroney. In the Senate, she has served as chairperson of the Internal Economy Committee.

Enabling Factors

Lavoie-Roux identifies the "tremendous" support offered by her husband as the most important source of support to her political career. Early on, she acknowledges, her husband asumed the roles of both mother and father to their young family. For her part, she devoted all her free time outside politics to being with her family; as she puts it, "family and work, work and family" was all that her busy schedule would allow. By keeping a clear focus on these two priorities, she believes she was able to balance her public and private responsibilities.

A further important supportive factor was the commitment of the Québec Liberal Party to increasing the participation of women in politics. At a practical level, the party gave her financial support that enabled her to defray campaign expenses. Without such intervention, she argues, it would be virtually impossible for women from other than affluent backgrounds to undertake election campaigning.

Strategies for Aspiring Women Politicians

Lavoie-Roux believes passionately that education is central to women acquiring the skills and the confidence to assume public office. What is also needed, she suggests, is a perfectionist outlook that drives a woman on to "work as hard as possible." In her own career, she has found that the best way to win respect is to demonstrate her capabilities. "You need to beat the men in the game not by taking them on, but by being as good as them, or better."

This perspective also shapes her view of the way women should interact with men in the political arena. Reflecting on her own career, she argues that adopting an aggressive or militant approach to her male counterparts would have proved counterproductive. Instead she made a point of staying calm, drawing on the negotiating skills she had acquired during her years in educational administration.

She identifies patience and a willingness to "work behind the scenes" as the strong points of her own years in politics. She also stresses the need for women politicians to be visible at every level of party and government, including caucuses and committees. Women, she says, need to get themselves noticed.

DOMINICA

Dominica is an island republic of the Lesser Antilles in the Caribbean, located between the French islands of Guadeloupe to the north and Martinique to the south. It covers 290 square miles and its population stands at 73,000.

Long inhabited by Amerindian Carib tribespeople, Dominica was sighted by Columbus in 1493 but, with its steep cliffs and mountainous terrain, was one of the last Caribbean islands to be explored by Europeans. It eventually fell to British control in 1783. In 1967, Dominica, along with other islands, became a self-governing state within the West Indies Associated States, retaining control of its internal affairs while Britain remained responsible for its external relations and defence. This situation ended in 1978, when the island achieved complete independence as the Commonwealth of Dominica.

The political structure of Dominica derives from the British system of government, with a parliamentary system reaching back to 1898, when crown colony government was introduced. Executive authority is vested in the President, who is elected by the legislature for not more than two five-year terms. In practice, the President functions as a constitutional head of state who acts on the advice of the Prime Minister, the effective head of government. Elections must be held at least once every five years to the national parliament, a single chamber comprising 21 elected members and nine senators, five of whom are nominated by the government and four by the main opposition party.

Multiparty politics has been a reality in Dominica since 1951, when universal adult suffrage replaced property qualifications for voting. There are three main players: the centre-left United Workers' Party, currently in power; the right-wing Dominica Freedom Party, which held office from 1980 to 1995; and the Dominica Labour Party, which was defeated in the 1980 elections. In the nation's most recent elections, held in June 1995, the United Workers' Party won eleven out of the 21 seats in the assembly and formed a government headed by Prime Minister Edison James.

Women in Politics

Dominica is distinguished for having had the first woman Prime Minister in the Caribbean and one of the world's longest serving elected women leaders. From 1980 to 1995, its Prime Minister was Dame Mary Eugenia Charles, who remained in office until 1995 despite surrendering the leadership of the Dominica Freedom Party in 1993. Her life is profiled in this chapter.

Today, women comprise three out of Parliament's 30 members (10% of total membership). Two women serve in Edison James' Cabinet: Doreen Paul, Minister for Health and Social Security, and Gertrude Roberts (also profiled below), who handles the Community Development and Women's

Affairs portfolios. There is also a woman parliamentary secretary, Vernice Bellony, who attends cabinet meetings.

DAME MARY EUGENIA CHARLES

Former Prime Minister of Dominica (1980-1995)
Lawyer and Businesswoman

Eugenia Charles has often been there first. In the late 1950s, when she returned home after studying and practising law in Britain, she was the first female Dominican national to be called to the island's Bar. In 1969, she was selected as the first leader of the newly founded Dominica Freedom Party. She went on to lead the party to victory in the 1980 elections, thereby becoming the first woman Prime Minister in the Caribbean. She would remain at the national helm until her retirement in 1995.

Early Life

Mary Eugenia Charles was born on May 15, 1919, into a family with a tradition of political involvement; her father, J B Charles, was active in the adult suffrage movement. The youngest child of four, she was exposed to political discussions and debates as far back as she can remember. She attended a convent-run high school, where she gained a basic understanding and appreciation of community life. At school she was academically successful and when she matriculated from St Joseph Convent High School in Grenada, she gained a place at the University of Toronto to read law.

She continued her law studies at the London School of Economics and at London's Inner Temple, where she trained as a barrister. She was called to the Bar in London in 1947. Her early professional life was spent developing a successful law practice and pursuing business interests.

When Charles returned to live in Dominica in the 1950s, she combined professional legal practice with business pursuits. One arena of activity was the Dominican Cooperative Bank, which had been established by her father as an attempt to extend access to credit to the poor. Charles, a Director of the Bank, was instrumental in instituting Dominica's first student loan scheme. Its first beneficiary was a female lawyer whose rise in the legal profession culminated in her being appointed a judge.

Charles served as the legal counsel and advisor to a number of institutions in Dominica, including banks, insurance agencies and trade unions. Her work involved travel to remote corners of the island, and she adapted to whatever form of transportation was available – valuable preparation for her subsequent political career.

Entry into Politics

It was not until the late 1960s that Charles became politically active. This was prompted by events in 1967 which culminated in the government of the day proposing legislation which Charles saw as draconian and as undermining freedom of expression. She became involved in an advocacy group, the Freedom Fighters, which mobilised island-wide opposition to the bill but was not successful in blocking it.

In October 1968, the Freedom Fighters merged with the newly formed National Democratic Movement of Dominica to become the Dominica Freedom Party. When the new party held it's first convention in June 1969, Charles was chosen as its leader. She entered parliament and served for the next ten years in the opposition, gaining valuable experience and developing her political skills. She led her party to victory in the 1980 elections, and served as Prime Minister for the next fifteen years, her years in office ending only with her retirement in 1995.

In office, Charles proved a determined leader who provoked mixed reactions. Her period as national leader saw two attempted coups in Dominica and considerable opposition to her programmes of economic austerity and to measures such as her scheme of granting Dominican citizenship to foreigners in return for a minimum payment in hard currency. Her support for the US invasion of Grenada in 1983 also generated controversy.

At the same time, her gifts as an effective political leader and her status as a role model for other women have won recognition. In 1993, she was given a knighthood by Queen Elizabeth; she has also been awarded a number of honorary degrees and has won the plaudits of several governments.

Enabling Factors

In analysing her journey to the top, Charles pays tribute to her parents and the strong family environment they provided. She emphasises the importance of her childhood exposure to political idealism, national commitment and strongly expressed religious beliefs.

She also believes her professional training as a lawyer contributed in a major way to her success in politics. Besides sharpening her intellect and debating skills, her career as a lawyer gave her the financial independence essential for aspirants to high political office.

The personal qualities that Charles believes she has brought to leadership include perseverance, single-mindedness and the determination to sweep obstacles aside. Early on, she developed the toughness that allowed her to withstand the negative, sometimes abusive reactions that women in politics often have to contend with. The challenge of top leadership, she says, is to develop " the ability to weigh all options, examine criticisms, and make decisions – in the process impressing people with the consistency, honesty and, above all, the transparency of one's intentions."

Regarding strategies for aspiring women politicians, Charles does not favour special gender-based treatment: women, she argues, should get to the top through their own merit and hard work. At the same time, she believes that women are better suited than men to "look after the details" and by that token will make their impact felt on political life.

GERTRUDE ROBERTS

Member of Parliament (United Workers Party)
Minister of Community Development and Women's Affairs

Gertrude Roberts' life has been strongly influenced by Plato's dictum that if a nation wants to make an impact on the culture of its people, it must make education its top priority. A teacher by profession, she is also a bridge-builder, both metaphorically and literally. Across Dominica, she is remembered for the "Pickaxe Brigade" she was instrumental in forming in the aftermath of Hurricane David back in 1979. One of the brigade's achievements was the speedy construction of a bridge to link a village with relief efforts. Roberts the lifelong educator was also able to persuade one community to meet the cost of renting a building to house students until the government was able to rebuild the local school, destroyed in the devastation.

Early Life and Teaching Career

Gertrude Roberts was born in the village of Delices in 1930. She began her teaching career when aged only fifteen and obtained her national Teacher's Certificate in 1952. She continued her training, completing an advanced course at the Leeward Islands Teacher's Training College in 1959. In 1966, she gained a Certificate in Educational Studies from the Institute of Education at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne in Britain.

Today, she looks back on an impressively long and varied career in education. She has taught, and served as principal, at schools across Dominica. Her experience includes exposure to adult education in Britain, participation in refresher courses in Barbados, and the organisation of a series of seminars and workshops on educational themes and gender-related issues.

Among her most cherished memories of her teaching career are the achievements of students who were under her tutelage and the trophies won by schools of which she was principal at the time. When Dominica instituted a "School of the Year" award in 1972, her school not only captured the first award but also went on to win it for three consecutive years.

As a school head, she was also ready to take initiatives. In 1969, she offered pupils who had failed to graduate from primary school, the opportunity of returning to school to work towards their school leaving

certificate – an unprecedented step at the time. She made it a point to focus on the all-round development of young people and to stress the links between school and community; in the schools where she taught, she formed community development groups (known as 4-H clubs and 3-F clubs) and promoted better health and nutrition.

Consequently, Roberts organised women's groups around the theme of food for family fitness. Located in Dominica's Eastern District, these efforts sought to involve men and to stress the role of the school as the hub of the community's educational and social development activities. She went on to become the first programme coordinator of Dominica's National Council of Women. Here, she says, she became sensitised for the first time to the problems encountered by women throughout the island nation. In effect, her perspective opened out from the community to the national level.

Entry into Politics

For Gertrude Roberts, getting involved in politics was a natural progression from her work in education and community development. In 1993, she became a founder member of the United Workers' Party, a new centre-left formation that sought to provide an alternative to the ruling Dominica Freedom Party. She raised a number of concerns, including the crisis in the banana industry (the island's economic mainstay); growing unemployment, particularly among young people; social problems such as the increasing use of drugs by the young; and the need for greater integration of women into the development process.

Roberts was given responsibility for developing and coordinating the women's wing of the United Workers' Party. At this she proved highly effective, building an organisation which was to play a crucial role in mobilising voters. When the party won the 1995 general elections, she was appointed Minister for Community Development and Women's Affairs.

Enabling Factors

Roberts believes the exceptionally close ties to the community she has built up over her long career provide the foundation of her success in politics. Through these relationships she was able to build a firm base and a ramified network of contacts.

Her work in the community also enhanced her self-esteem and built up her confidence. So much so that when her husband died and she was left with six children to raise, she was able to cope and to combine caring for the family with her teaching and community commitments.

Roberts has a quiet, humble and committed approach to work and exudes a sense of calm which belies her strength and persistence. She believes that women aspiring to political careers must prove themselves through the thoroughness and excellence of their work; her dictum is that whatever your chosen field, "you should give it your all." At the same time,

she believes that women cannot advance in the absence of structural change, that "economic empowerment is the key to greater involvement by women in politics."

JOSEPHINE DUBLIN

Member of Parliament (Dominica Labour Party)
Former Shadow Minister for Women's Affairs

Josephine Dublin describes herself as a child of the 1960s. Growing up in the decade which saw the emergence of the civil rights movement in the United States, the rise of black consciousness and, throughout the world, the gathering wave of protest against the Vietnam War, she was politically aware from an early age.

Identification with the plight of the oppressed would never leave her. In later life, she would actively involve herself in the trade union movement in Dominica, taking up the cudgels on behalf of agricultural workers and low-paid women labourers. That led, in turn, to membership of the Dominica Labour Party, entry into national politics and a stint in parliament when she acted as Shadow Minister for Women's Affairs. In 1995, she represented her country and region at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women at Beijing. Today, Dublin is a much respected national women's leader who combines boldness and a willingness to speak out, with sharp analytical skills and a detailed knowledge of committee and organisational work.

Early Life

Like many other children growing up in the Dominica of the 1960s, Dublin belonged to what was in effect a single-parent family: her father had emigrated to Britain, leaving behind a wife and eight children. In her family environment, Dublin learnt the value of discipline, independence and the importance of a strong sense of belonging. She also came to admire her mother greatly, absorbing from her lessons which would shape her life.

Dublin attended primary and secondary school, in the process gaining a taste for education which would prove lifelong. Later in her life, she would study management skills for rural development at the University of Reading in Britain; gender and development at the University of the West Indies; research methods with the Caribbean Association of Feminist Research and Action; and the role of trade unions in development at the University of Lazaro Pena in Cuba.

During her childhood, Dublin had access to a wide range of literature at home and also observed the involvement of her older siblings in advocacy groups. From an early age she exhibited a high level of awareness of both local and international politics.

Entry into Politics

Dublin's route to active politics was through Dominica's trade union movement. She became General Secretary of the National Workers' Union, a new organisation that challenged the island's two older, established trade unions. She played a central role in building up the membership and was particularly active on behalf of workers in agriculture, domestic labour and factory-based garment production.

As a female trade unionist, she often experienced obstacles from the male-dominated trade union hierarchy. This led her to place growing emphasis on the special needs of women workers and on the issue of sexual harassment at the work place. She focussed on the importance of establishing women's wings within all the main trade union organisations, and took every opportunity she could to highlight the plight of women.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Dublin's trade union work led her to become a political activist, organising and coordinating the women's arm of the Dominica Labour Party and also becoming the party's International Secretary. As Shadow Minister for Women's Affairs, she spoke out on behalf of women industrial and agricultural workers and women in the domestic service sector. During her stint in parliament, from 1988-1990, she raised issues relating to women's property rights and ownership of land and emphasised the need for women's empowerment. She also called for better pay for domestic workers and improved working conditions for those employed in the garment sector.

During her long political and trade union career, Dublin has gained rich experience of lobbying, organising conferences, and communicating with a larger public through news releases and press conferences. She has built networks with women's groups and other non-government organisations. She has represented the women of Dominica and the Caribbean region at international fora such as the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995. Today, her primary focus remains exploited women, whether in the agricultural sector or in Dominica's Export Processing Zones. She has also targeted violence against women and children: one of her achievements has been the successful lobbying of the family court system to revise sexual offences laws to help curb domestic violence.

Enabling Factors

Dublin attributes much of her success as a political leader to the support she was given as a child by her mother and to the closeness of her family environment. When in later life she herself became a single parent, she found she had the necessary insights and coping mechanisms. She also rates as important her involvement in the women's movement from the

1980s; here she learnt new skills, gained confidence, and developed her political awareness.

GUYANA

Guyana, located on the northeastern coast of South America and bordered by Suriname, Brazil and Venezuela, gained its independence from Britain in 1966. Prior to European conquest and settlement, it was home to Amerindian tribes about which little is known except that their name for the land, *guiana* ("land of waters"), has given the country its present name.

First occupied by the Dutch, Guyana passed to British control during the Napoleonic wars and its original three colonies united as British Guiana in 1831. Slave labour on its sugar plantations had been officially outlawed in 1807, but survived well into the 1830s. From the 1840s onwards, indentured labourers from India (known as East Indians in Guyana) and China were imported to take up the slack in the plantation workforce that resulted from the end of slavery. Today, roughly half of Guyana's population is of East Indian origin; there is a large black (Afro-Guyanese) minority and there are also smaller groups of Chinese, Amerindians, Portuguese and people of mixed race.

In 1928, British Guiana was declared a crown colony. A quarter of a century later, in 1953, it was granted a constitution providing for parliamentary home rule, universal adult suffrage and an elected legislature. Political parties emerged, in particular the People's Progressive Party (PPP), made up predominantly of East Indians, and the largely black People's National Congress (PNC). Elections held in 1953, 1957 and 1961 resulted in victories for the PPP, with Cheddi Jagan as its leader. But the party lost the 1964 elections, and a coalition led by the PNC took the country into independence as Guyana in 1966. The PNC leader, Forbes Burnham, became Prime Minister.

In 1970, Guyana became a Republic within the Commonwealth. For the next ten years, Burnham and his party dominated the country's political life and there seemed to be a trend towards one-party rule. Following a three-year boycott of parliament by the PPP, Burnham in 1980 promulgated a new Constitution which provided for an executive presidency and later held elections which most parties boycotted. The outcome, a fresh victory for the PNC, was challenged not only by Jagan and the PPP but also by international observers.

Burnham died in 1985 and was succeeded as PNC leader by Hugh Desmond Hoyte. Eventually, in 1992, general elections were held which ended the 28-year rule of the PNC. Jagan, who had chosen the Afro-Guyanese Sam Hinds as his running mate, became President, an office he held until his death in March 1997. Hinds then took over as President, while Jagan's widow, Janet Rosenberg Jagan, was persuaded to become Prime Minister. New presidential and parliamentary elections were held in December 1997, with Janet Jagan heading a racially balanced three-person ticket for the PPP/Civic.

In the elections, Janet Jagan was elected President and the PPP/Civic won 29 seats in the National Assembly to the PNC's total of 22 seats; two more seats went to minor parties. However, this result was contested by the opposition and there were protests in the capital, Georgetown. In mid-January 1998, Janet Jagan and PNC leader Desmond Hoyte signed an accord on reforms to pave the way for fresh elections within three years. They also agreed that the results of the December 1997 elections would be independently audited.

An independent audit was carried out by a CARICOM appointed Team, as part of a Menu of Measures agreed on in the "Herdmanston Accord" brokered by a three-person CARICOM MISSION. The Team declared the election results valid although some shortcomings were identified. This led to violent demonstrations by opposition supporters which only ended when President Jagan and the Opposition Leader, Desmond Hoyte signed the St Lucia Statement reaffirming their commitment to the "Herdmanston Accord" a major aspect of which is constitutional reform. A Special Select Committee has been nominated to determine the terms of reference and the composition of the Constitutional Reform Committee which is expected to report in July of 1999.

Today, Guyana is a Parliamentary Republic with an elected unicameral legislature comprising 65 seats. Fifty-three of these are allocated directly to party lists on the basis of proportional representation; ten represent the country's ten Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs), set up under the 1980 Constitution; and two are chosen by the National Congress of Local Democratic Organs. Elections to RDCs were held simultaneously with national elections in 1980, 1985 and 1992, while elections to a lower tier of local government, District Neighbourhood Councils, were held for the first time in 1994.

In addition to Guyana's major political parties, the PPP/Civic and the PNC, there are smaller parties such as the Working People's Alliance and the United Force. Trade unions and non-government organisations (NGOs) also play an active role in society. NGOs, especially those concerned with environmental and development issues, have multiplied in recent years.

Women in Politics

Political involvement and activism by Guyanese women date back to the days of the independence movement. Women have acted as major mobilisers of support for political parties and have held positions of prominence – although not in proportion to their numbers. As of early 1997, 14 out of 72 seats (19.44 per cent) in the national assembly were occupied by women. In 1985, the percentage of women members was significantly higher, at 22.2 per cent.

Following his 1992 electoral victory, Cheddi Jagan included two women in his 16-member cabinet: Gail Teixeira, Senior Minister of Health, and Indranie Chandarpal, who served as Minister of Labour, Human Services and Social Security and had responsibility for Women's Affairs. In the Cabinet of eighteen members appointed by Janet Jagan after she was elected President in December 1997, the two women were again included: Indranie Chandarpal as Minister of Human Services and Social Security, and Gail Teixeira as Minister of Youth, Sport and Culture.

JANET ROSENBERG JAGAN

President of Guyana

Janet Rosenberg Jagan, wife of the late Cheddi Jagan, often describes her long and varied political career as a series of accidents. And perhaps none is greater than the fact that today Guyana, 90 per cent of whose people are of Indian or African origin, is ruled by this white Jewish grandmother of US origin – chosen as the nation's President in elections held in December 1997.

When Cheddi Jagan died of a heart attack in a Washington hospital in March 1997 and was succeeded by Sam Hinds as President of Guyana, Janet was persuaded by the People's Progressive Party (PPP/Civic), the party she had helped to found back in 1950, to step in as Prime Minister. Initially, she was not inclined to take matters further and stand as a presidential candidate in upcoming national elections: "tussled with the party for months, trying to encourage them to leave me out," she recalls. But in the end she conceded that the Jagan name still possessed "a certain magic" and that her more than 50 years in Guyana counted for something quite special.

There followed, in December 1997, a lively election campaign which saw the 77-year-old grandmother active at the hustings, swaying to loudspeaker music and draped with garlands. "Janet Jagan is an honest woman who does good for all classes and races of people," Abdool Sattaur, a 61-year-old porter told an American journalist reporting the campaign. "That she is Jewish does not bother me in the slightest. What matters is that she has suffered with Cheddi and with us ever since British times."

Early Life

Janet Rosenberg Jagan was born into a middle-class family on Chicago's South Side in 1920. She studied science at university and in 1941 began training as a nurse at Cook County Hospital with a view to helping the war effort. It was while she was a student nurse that, in December 1942, she met Cheddi Jagan, the eldest of eleven children of a Guyanese family of sugar cane workers originally from Uttar Pradesh in India. Jagan, who

was studying dentistry at Northwestern University, dazzled Janet as "a brilliant intellectual and an ardent reader." Within a year they had married and returned to Guyana to begin medical and political careers.

Entry into Politics

Janet Jagan, like her husband, was drawn into politics through trade union activism. On the couple's return to Guyana, Cheddi Jagan began practising dentistry, with his medically-trained wife working as his assistant. The articulate doctor found himself receiving a growing number of requests from workers for help in labour disputes. Janet accompanied him on visits to the sites of discord, gaining insight into their struggles. As Cheddi immersed himself in trade union activity, Janet started working in what subsequently became the Clerical and Commercial Workers Union.

Trade union involvement widened the Jagans' field of operation. They met two individuals, H. J. M. Hubbard and Ashton Chase, who were similarly engaged – Hubbard as general secretary of the Trades Union Council, and Chase as assistant secretary to the British Guiana Labour Union. There followed a period of informal discussion. "We decided that what Guyana needed was a political party," recalls Janet. "There was nobody who could organise the people to fight for their rights." The four formed the Political Affairs Committee (PAC), the forerunner of the PPP.

The group worked with trade unions around the country. When police shot dead five striking sugar workers in 1948, the Jagans led a 25-kilometre funeral march into the capital, Georgetown. Janet, actively involved in raising material aid for the strikers, recalls driving about the country collecting bags of rice and other food items.

Within the PAC, Janet was made responsible for bringing out a regular information bulletin. This initiation into what was to prove a long career as a writer and journalist was at the time quite painful. "Nobody else was willing to do it," she remembers. "They threw it into my lap, a little cyclostyled paper, a mimeograph. I've eventually become a journalist but it took time; I couldn't write anything in the beginning."

In the late 1940s Janet, together with Winifred Gaskin, was instrumental in the formation of the Women's Political and Economic Organisation. Fifty years later, the political veteran offered the following perspective on the group: "I wouldn't say that it was one hundred per cent a women's rights group, but it was the beginning of it. We raised the question of universal suffrage, of women being able to serve on juries. We also focussed on a housing project that was being built by the City Council: the houses were poorly constructed, so we made a big noise, we had a big meeting at the City Hall." The organisation enabled its leaders to acquire valuable political experience.

The Founding of the PPP

In 1950, the Jagans together founded the PPP and Janet became its first general secretary, a post she held for two decades. The same year, Janet and Cheddi stood for election to the Georgetown City Council and won; the only other successful PPP candidate was Forbes Burnham, who would later part company with the party.

The early 1950s saw Janet help form the Women's Progressive Organisation, the women's wing of the PPP. A central aim was to improve the knowledge, skills and competence of women while building their political awareness. "We used to have seminars in the countryside. Many of the women had never heard of birth control. We used to talk to them about their rights as women, about how they needed to study, about their essential need for education. We did a lot of propaganda work in the early days, saying 'send your girls to school'."

In the 1953 national elections, Cheddi became leader of the legislative assembly set up under the limited self-government newly allowed to the colony. Three women – Janet Jagan, Jessie Burnham and Jane Philips-Gray – won seats. Janet, who was subsequently appointed Deputy Speaker of the House, recalls a "very colourful" entry into parliament by the majority PPP contingent: "We marched to parliament, the men in white pants and red shirts, the women in white outfits with red blouses, red purses, red shoes and red hats. The three of us women were the first to enter parliament and it was a grand occasion."

After five months, the Winston Churchill government in Britain, antipathetic to the anti-colonialism and avowedly leftist politics of the Jagans and the PPP, suspended the constitution, ordered the elected PPP government deposed and had both the Jagans jailed. They spent five months in prison and two more years under house arrest.

"We were strong believers in socialism and the socialist countries", Janet Jagan says of the couple's radical philosophy, "but we weren't fanatical about it. The international friendships we developed during that period were important, but our main interest was Guyana and what was best for right here."

Revival of the constitution brought Cheddi Jagan back to office in the 1957 elections. Janet, also re-elected to parliament, was appointed Minister of Labour, Health and Housing, a post she held for the next four years. During this period, her awareness of the problems faced by women intensified and she developed a strong commitment to improving housing and the health system.

Janet Jagan did not contest the 1961 elections. She was, however, nominated to the State Council (Upper House) in 1963 and served as Minister of Home Affairs from 1963-1964. This was a time of growing tension within the country. At the height of the Cold War, the Kennedy administration, alarmed that Guyana could become "another Cuba", launched

a covert CIA destabilization programme that helped to foment strikes and riots. Britain, still Guyana's colonial ruler, for its part promoted the PPP's main rival, the People's National Congress (PNC), backed mainly by urban Afro-Guyanese. There were race riots, arson, looting and murder. Prior to Guyana's independence in 1966, Britain imposed electoral changes that would keep the PPP in the political wilderness for 28 years, from 1964 to 1992.

During the Cold War, Janet Jagan lost her American citizenship and even had difficulty getting a visa to visit her relatives in the United States. She opted to become a citizen of newly independent Guyana – a decision which would dampen opposition attempts in the 1997 presidential elections to make an issue of her US origins.

Perspective of Women in Politics

After the PPP's electoral defeat in 1964, Janet Jagan continued to play a central role in the party's affairs. She continued as General Secretary until 1970, when she became International Secretary, remaining in the post until 1984. That year saw her become the PPP's Executive Secretary. A member of the Central Executive Committee of the PPP from the party's inception, she has been regarded as a central player and as a decision-maker in her own right, quite independent of her marital status.

She is also Guyana's longest serving Member of Parliament. Elected again to the National Assembly in 1973 in elections widely regarded as rigged, she supported the PPP's boycott of parliament and did not take up her seat until her re-election under fresh elections in 1976. She was returned to parliament in 1980 and 1985. In the 1992 elections, she was again voted back into the national assembly, but declined the offer of a ministerial position in the new PPP government. This was the situation until March 1997, when the death of Cheddi Jagan propelled her into the premiership and confronted her with the question of whether to run for the presidency. She took up the challenge to run for the presidency in the 1997 General Elections of December 1997 and subsequently became the first woman Guyanese President.

Alongside her political career, Janet Jagan has established herself as an accomplished writer and journalist. She began editing the *Mirror* newspaper in 1973 and for a number of years served as President of the Union of Guyanese Journalists. She has also been closely associated with the publication of *Women Unite*, the newspaper of the women's wing of the PPP. Her books include histories of the PPP and of the Guyanese freedom movement, besides several titles for children.

Enabling Factors

What elements of her life does Janet Jagan identify as crucial to her in many ways remarkable story? A major factor has been the close and equal

relationship she built with a husband who was also a political comrade, with a philosophy and outlook akin to her own. When she married Cheddi Jagan, she also acquired a supportive extended family that helped her adjust to life in a new country and to the challenge of raising two children while remaining active outside the home.

As for the personal qualities that proved beneficial to her political career, Janet singles out, firstly, her capacity for self-organisation: "I've always been an orderly person. I plan ahead. Women have to be prepared if they want to fulfil an aspect of life other than motherhood and homekeeping. They have to be prepared for long hours and they have to be able to live through these things. Some of them fail because they aren't prepared to take all the blows and the pressures that come with this life."

A second quality Janet Jagan believes is essential for women in politics is the ability to dare to learn from experience. Recalling how she suddenly found herself elevated to General Secretary of the fledgling PPP back in 1950, she recreates the situation thus: "I still don't know why I was made General Secretary – I didn't know what a general secretary was. I'm not a politician who had any preparation for what I did. Different events moved me from one state to another; all along the rough way I had to learn."

She is also a strong advocate of grass roots activism as the entry point into a life in politics. In her case, it was her work with the Guyanese labour movement – an experience which enabled her to get close to the working people of her adoptive land, to identify with their aspirations and struggles, and to share their visions of the future.

VIOLA BURNHAM

Former Vice-President and Deputy Prime Minister of Guyana

At different times of her life a journalist, primary school teacher, teacher of Latin and guidance counsellor, Viola Burnham hardly expected to become involved in the highest levels of Guyanese politics. Then, in 1967, came her marriage to Forbes Burnham, Prime Minister and leader of the People's National Congress (PNC). Not long afterwards, a group of women from the PNC's Women's Auxillary asked her to use her influence to prevent a female candidate from being bypassed in favour of a male candidate. They also made it clear that she was expected, as the wife of the Prime Minister, to act as Vice-Chair of the party's women's wing.

Viola Burnham's response was gently to distance herself from this expectation while emphasising her desire to be of use: "I told them, 'I've never been in a position where I was just a titular head. I admit that I have not been in politics at your level – I don't know much about party organisation and I don't really know what you really want me to do. But why don't you let me help with some specific things'."

By 1968, Mrs Burnham had agreed to become Vice-Chair of the women's wing and her public life took on a new dimension. The culmination of her career in politics came in 1985 when, after the death of Forbes Burnham, she was appointed Vice-President and Deputy Prime Minister of Guyana. For her, there was a strong element of inevitability to this turn of events; as she once put it to an interviewer, "I don't see how the wife of a head of government can avoid involvement in politics to a certain extent."

Early Life

Viola Burnham was born in Guyana in 1930; her father was a schoolteacher. In 1942, she won a scholarship to the prestigious Bishop's High School, setting herself on course for a high-flying academic career that eventually took her to the University of London, where she obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Latin. On her return to Guyana, she worked as a newspaper reporter and then as a primary schoolteacher. She then moved on to teach Latin at her Alma Mater, gaining experience not only of , but also of administration and organising of extra-curricular activities.

In the early 1960s, she became secretary of the Bishop's High School branch of the Civil Service Association. This was a period of gathering political tension as Guyana pushed towards independence, and new industrial legislation was being mooted to curb strikes and unrest. At this stage, however, Viola Burnham's interest in politics remained largely latent. She continued to pursue her academic interests, completing a Master of Science programme at the University of Chicago, where she majored in guidance counselling and psychotherapy. Back in Guyana, she involved herself in prisoners' rehabilitation and became Founder Secretary of the Guyana Mental Health Association. She was also a co-founder of the Guyana Mental Health Centre, a halfway house for patients seeking to move from institutional care to life in the community.

When Guyana gained its independence in 1966, Mrs Burnham remained quietly on the sidelines, "I attended political meetings, but I was never actively involved. At independence, I was involved in the celebrations at the university. Friends and colleagues would have heard my views, more particularly on occasions like this. I did have serious talks, but these were one-to-one with my tutors, professors and others who would ask me about the situation in my country, and they would have known how I felt about world affairs and my country's progress, or lack of it."

Entry into Politics

The turning point for Viola Burnham's interaction with politics came in 1967 when she married Forbes Burnham, the newly independent Guyana's

first Prime Minister. The following year, she agreed to become Vice-Chairperson of the Women's Auxillary of the PNC. In her new post, she involved herself in the revision of the organisation's constitution to reflect greater autonomy vis-à-vis the parent body and to assume more responsibility for women's development. She also worked with women throughout the country, exploring their economic and social problems, organising non-formal training courses and helping to shape legislation aimed at facilitating women's employment.

In 1976, Mrs Burnham was elected chair of the Women's Auxillary, by this time renamed the Women's Revolutionary Socialist Movement (WRSM). She had special responsibility for women's economic projects, and pioneered the establishment of a range of projects, including catering cooperatives, a textile design and production enterprise and a tableware factory. In line with the governmental policy of import substitution, she promoted new food habits and initiated an appropriate technology programmes in food processing and appliance production.

Her active role within the WRSM opened the door to her participation in regional and international organisations. In 1970, she was a founder member and first Vice-President of the Caribbean Women's Association, a grouping of non-governmental organisations that helped bring Caribbean women together and link them up with women from the wider Latin American region. She also served as chair of the Guyana National Commission for the International Year of the Child and as patron of the Guyana Commission for Children's Welfare – roles that saw her present papers at international gatherings in Mexico and Bulgaria. She led the Guyanese delegations to the first three United Nations World Conferences on Women.

Rise to the Top

Through her work with the the WRSM, Viola Burnham in 1976 joined the Central Executive Committee of the PNC, and sat on the committee as an elected member from 1983. Two years later, Forbes Burnham died and she was appointed Vice-President and Deputy Prime Minister with responsibility for Social Development, including Women's Affairs and Culture. Later that year she was elected to the National Assembly and was given the education portfolio as an additional responsibilty.

In her ministerial position, she negotiated and then administered the Social Impact Amelioration Programme, a component of the Structural Adjustment Strategy pursued by the PNC government of the late 1980s. She also represented the government abroad, for example at meetings of CARICOM Ministers of Education and of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs. Never relinquishing her work with women, she helped prepare legislation on equality and on pregnancy termination.

Viola Burnham ended her political career following the defeat of the PNC in the 1992 general elections. Since then she has involved herself in commercial farming and projects relating to crafts and design.

Enabling Factors

Like Janet Jagan, Viola Burnham seems to have derived considerable support from her politician husband. "He recognised the strength of women," she told one interviewer. "Even if he didn't always believe that they were ready for leadership, he knew that they had a major part to play in influencing others and winning support for the party."

She could also rely on the support of her two children – for whom, in the early years, she had often had to act as both mother and father. Raising them essentially alone had posed a challenge: "I tried not to take their father's place, but the questions they might have had for him, I would try to answer and deal with. I think it made it harder for me in a way because I was trying to fill in for him and still do what I wanted." The positive outcome of this double parenting role was Viola's confidence, during her subsequent political career, that she could discuss anything and everything with her children.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Although an "unofficial" quota for women has operated within the PNC, Mrs Burnham is against idea of a fixed percentage since to her it smacks of tokenism. She believes the best route for getting women into politics is to ensure that they hold office within a political party, thereby gaining access to both formal and informal training. She recalls that when the WRSM raised this idea within the PNC, the party responded positively by requesting a list of eligible women. While it proved difficult to locate such women in sufficient numbers at the beginning, the women who were selected formed a caucus that proceeded to lobby for the increased representation of women.

At a practical level, Viola Burnham, recalling how unschooled she felt on the several occasions on which she was required to act as national President, argues for the compilation of a procedures manual. This, she believes, would help women politicians acquire knowledge of protocol and of negotiating procedures. She also recommends that women who lack exposure to the political process receive training on how to function within the system.

Among the qualities Mrs Burnham believes women in politics need to cultivate are professionalism, throroughness and the ability to communicate effectively. As a minister, she made it a point to know her subject area thoroughly, so that she felt confident to talk to anyone and to make decisions that could be defended. "I was also a communicator," she says. "Even though sometimes I felt I knew as much as anybody

else", I said: "Look, I only want to understand what you are talking about. Just give me all the facts. I think that is what I have tried to learn and to develop, skills of communicating and talking to people at the level at which they understand. You have to understand the person you're talking to so well that you communicate with them in those terms and in that medium."

Finally, Viola Burnham affirms, women in politics must be decisive. While there is a need to consult, "the acid test of leadership is to be able to take decisions."

URMIA JOHNSON

Activist of the PNC and its Women's Wing
Former Minister of Co-operatives
Former Minister of National Development
Former Minister of Regional Development
Former Minister Responsible for Women's Affairs

Entering national-level politics was not something that Urmia Johnson, a schoolteacher and graduate in English, had ever foreseen for herself. What she did possess from an early age, however, was an interest in politics married to a strong commitment to community work.

From that her career in politics seemed to flow quite naturally. In 1974, aged 30, she found herself one of three women in Guyana's first Developers Course, a government-organised initiative to prepare a cadre of leaders to work in different aspects of national development. Her performance in the course brought her to the attention of leaders who soon sought to give her more responsibility within the political system. She joined the Central Executive Committee of the PNC, subsequently becoming the party's Assistant General Secretary. Soon she was chief party field organiser and Chairperson of the committee overseeing party assets. And by 1981, Johnson was in parliament and about to assume a broad range of ministerial posts.

"At some point in time," she says, "you recognise that you're involved in politics at a certain level. You can't always stay in the background, you have to accept public office like being in parliament. I think that was really what motivated me to go on."

Early Life

Urmia Johnson was born in December 1944, the third child in a family of five children. She spent her formative years in Berbice county, where she performed well at school and was active in her local church. At the age of eighteen, she began work as a teacher in a secondary school; some of her students were her exact contemporaries. Her ten years in this first job gave

her experience not only of teaching but also of organising extra-curricular activities.

Johnson made it a point to persist with her own education. In 1975, she obtained the Trained Teacher's Certificate through participation in an in-service teacher training programme. She enrolled in the University of Guyana, completing a Diploma in Public Administration in 1979. She went on to obtain a Bachelor's degree in English literature, again from the University of Guyana. Later still, she completed a course on gender and development at the University of the West Indies.

Entry into Politics

Johnson recalls that she was about 25 years old when she first became drawn into politics. At that time, she was based in New Amsterdam, the second largest town in Guyana, and was involved in the local branch of the Young Women's Christian Association; a community-based organisation for children set up by the Education Ministry; various youth groups; and town council-sponsored community development committees.

Guyana had only recently achieved independence, and she was attracted by the PNC, the ruling party. She quickly rose up through the ranks of the party's youth wing, becoming national Assistant Secretary within a year of joining the organisation. By 1972, she was a Regional Secretary of the PNC, a post she held until 1975 when she was appointed a Regional Supervisor. By then, her leadership and organisational gifts had gained wider recognition through her participation in the government-sponsored Developers Course. In 1977, she was elected to the Central Executive of the PNC, and has been re-elected at every biennial party congress since then.

In 1973, Johnson joined the Women's Auxillary of the PNC. Her interest in women's issues grew after she assumed responsibility for organising a march to mark the beginning of International Women's Year in 1975. A year later, she became National Secretary of the women's wing, now renamed the Women's Revolutionary Socialist Movement (WRSM); she would remain in this post until 1980. She was a founder member of the Conference on the Affairs and the Status of Women in Guyana (CASWIG), an umbrella organisation, and served on its executive committee for a number of years.

Meanwhile, Johnson's ascent within the PNC mainstream continued. In 1979, she became Assistant General Secretary of the PNC, a position she held for fifteen years. This involved her serving as Director of the Biennial Party Congresses and enabled her to maintain regular contact with cadres at the grass roots; in effect, she became the party's chief organiser for outreach and field activities. Later, as Chairperson of the PNC's Finance and Assets Sub-Committee, she had responsibility for managing party assets.

Other valuable experience was gained through her work for an appropriate technology project funded by UNICEF. From 1979 to 1980, Johnson served as coordinator of UNICEF's women's projects in Guyana and helped organise appropriate technology workshops.

Rise to the Top

Urmia Johnson entered a new phase of her political career in 1981, when she became a Member of Parliament and a Minister in the Forbes Burnham government. Looking back, she recalls her thought processes at the time: "You recognise that you could play a positive role through the parliamentary process in having some legal changes implemented for women. You realise that if you were there, you could play a more active role in ensuring that this was done. That was another motivating factor, after which you became educated in the whole process of parliament and what it involves."

Her first ministerial portfolio was Cooperatives, and she started on what she would come to regard as among the most rewarding periods of her life. Enjoying relative autonomy of action, she was able to initiate policy in the fields of crafts promotion and community development and to attempt a thorough overhaul and restructuring of the cooperative movement.

For Johnson it is a matter of some regret that she was subsequently shifted to other ministries: first to National Development; and later to Regional Development. In 1982, she was given the additional portfolio of Minister Responsible for Women's Affairs. This remained with her as she moved from ministry to ministry until later when responsibility for women's affairs was transferred to the Ministry of Social Development and Culture.

Her stint in the Ministry of Regional Development proved a major challenge. The job involved her working with Guyana's ten Regional Development Councils and roughly 60 local authorities but without complete ministerial freedom to make her own decisions, since she was subordinate to a senior minister. While her senior colleague gave her considerable autonomy, decisions made by others (influenced, on occasion, by the Permanent Secretary), could take precedence over hers. "You never have full authority," she says of the experience. "You never really have power commensurate with your designation."

In her capacity as Minister Responsible for Women's Affairs, Johnson ensured that the Women's Bureau, set up to deal specifically with women's issues and concerns, was properly staffed, thereby enabling it to draw up projects and develop a relationship with non-governmental women's organisations. She concedes, however, that the work of the bureau was limited by the fact that it was seen as an agent of the PNC. But she also feels that the tendency for the bureau to be identified with the ruling party has diminished as women in Guyana have made greater efforts to work across political lines.

Serving as Minister Responsible for Women's Affairs also enabled Johnson to represent her country at a number of international gatherings, including three United Nations World Conferences on Women, regional conferences of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), meetings of CARICOM (the English-speaking Caribbean), and Commonwealth conferences of ministers handling women's issues.

After the defeat of the PNC in the 1992 elections, Johnson returned to her former academic and educational pursuits, becoming a lecturer in English at the University of Guyana. She retained her involvement in politics, however; in 1994, she was elected Chair of the National Congress of Women – the WRSM under a new name.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Looking back at her political career, Johnson singles out the women's wing of her party as crucial not only to her own political fortunes, but also to a more generalised empowerment of Guyanese women.

From her own point of view, Johnson concedes, her close association with the WRSM proved to be a strategic move. The WRSM was an influential organisation within the PNC party system. Through advocacy, it was able to raise the profile of women, bringing to light the significant contribution women had been making – and could make – at all levels of national life.

One consequence was increased participation by women in both party and national decision-making. An increase in the number of women in Parliament was based on a conscious party decision. An informal quota system was in operation, and this strengthened the role of the WRSM. As Johnson puts it, "The WRSM was like a pressure group in the party to ensure that you had adequate representation in terms of sex. We were always consulted; we were charged with proposing potential candidates; the party actually tried to find a woman to replace a woman."

While she says the PNC has not organised special programmes to improve the effectiveness of women politicians, she believes the party congress has acted as a training ground for potential women leaders. Built into the programme is an educational component which addresses such topics as debt structural adjustment, foreign policy and development issues. Additionally, the WRSM has organised events, particularly on special days such as International Women's Day, when women are involved in the major issues of the day.

Her active role in the WRSM helped Johnson develop organisational skills and gain exposure to political work at a variety of levels, including the regional and international. In turn, recognition of her capabilities as a facilitator, communicator and leader led to her rapid upward mobility

within the parent body, the PNC.

For aspiring women politicians, argues Johnson, it is essential to build a firm base of community involvement and grass roots activism. Her own experience, which spans trade unions, youth groups, women's organisations and community groups, has enabled her to relate to people, analyse situations and contibute through diverse channels. "One has to get out there with the people," she argues. "As a politician, one has to meet people in their own environment, to make an on-the-spot assessment of their needs."

This element of empathy, she suggests, is particularly strong when it comes to working with women: "Once you get into a community where you meet women predominantly, you always have to work with them to help them overcome some difficulty. I can't do as much work as I would like, because once I get into a community and I meet women with problems, I can't leave them. I have to work with them to make an intervention."

What qualities other than this capacity for empathy and dogged hard work do women need to bring to their political careers? One, emphasises Johnson, is a concern for professionalism and thoroughness. While serving as a minister, she often found herself functioning essentially as a technician or clerk in order to get things done. She made it a point to carry out tasks herself, for example preparing her own project documents.

A second quality Johnson believes women in politics must cultivate is assertiveness. Reviewing her own record, she identifies situations which she now believes she should have handled with greater confidence. Humility and her self-perception of her place in the hierarchy of the party and government led her to be unassuming when forthrightness would have served her purpose better.

Women, she is clear, should confront, not bow to, the institutional discrimination they face in politics. "If you can't deal with it at the individual level," she says, "you deal with it at the level where you have all the Executive Committee. The power of the party doesn't reside in one person. It resides in the Executive Committee. You can use that as a clearing-house for dealing with a problem objectively."

And no woman, argues this political veteran, can survive in politics without credibility. "Even now I am supposed to be one of the most credible politicians in Guyana. Many areas still ask me to visit them because they feel I can genuinely help solve their problems."

INDIA

India, the second most populous nation on earth and the world's largest parliamentary democracy, is a complex society that defies easy characterisation. It now has close to one billion people; its geographical variety embraces torrid plains and icy Himalayan heights; its history, reaching back deep into antiquity, has bequeathed a kaleidoscopic ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity.

In formal political terms, India is a republic with a semi-federal structure and a parliamentary system of government. Its constitution, promulgated in 1950, three years after the nation achieved independence from British rule, draws upon British governmental practice, but also incorporates features from France, the United States and the erstwhile Soviet Union.

The constitution established the semi-federal character of the polity by setting out a clear division of powers between the Union, or central government, and India's 25 states and seven union territories. It also laid down clear principles for the conduct of public affairs, among them a commitment to secularism and a pledge to work for equality in the face of caste hierarchy and other inegalitarian survivals from the past. The age-old practice of "untouchability", involving the ostracism, maltreatment and physical segregation of people at the lowest level of the social hierarchy, was specifically banned, and the constitution pledged special help, including affirmative action, for historically disadvantaged castes, tribes and other "socially and educationally backward classes." While women were not specifically identified as falling in this category, the spirit of the Indian Constitution is strongly egalitarian and geared to the redressal of traditional patterns of oppression.

The Constitution also sets out the institutions of democratic government, including a bicameral legislature comprising a lower house, the Lok Sabha, and an upper chamber, the Rajya Sabha. Today, the Lok Sabha has 545 members directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise, but with a certain number of seats reserved for candidates from historically oppressed sections. Most of the 245 members of the Rajya Sabha are indirectly elected by state assemblies.

Supreme executive authority in India rests with the President, indirectly elected by the members of both Houses of Parliament and of the State Assemblies. Real executive power, however, is exercised by the Prime Minister and his or her cabinet, traditionally representing the largest political party represented in the lower house but, increasingly of late, selected by coalitions of parties functioning in a hung parliament.

The politics of the early decades of independent India were dominated by the Indian National Congress, the political party which developed out of the movement which, led by Mahatma Gandhi, had played a central role in India's anti-colonial struggle. From the Congress

came India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, who governed the country from 1947 till his death in 1964. His daughter, Indira Gandhi (no relation to the Mahatma), ruled as Prime Minister from 1966-1977 and again from 1980 till her assassination in 1984. Her son, Rajiv Gandhi, then took over, winning a landslide victory in the 1984 elections and serving as Prime Minister till his defeat in the general elections of 1989. This dynastic element in the politics of independent India has attracted controversy.

Two basic trends can be discerned in the development of Indian politics since the 1960s. One has been a growing concentration of power at the centre, with a consequent weakening of state-level decision making and the rise of regional assertiveness and, in the case of Punjab, Assam and Kashmir, armed separatism. This centralising tendency was particularly associated with Indira Gandhi's premiership.

The second, related trend has been the long-term decline of the Congress Party. From its pre-eminence in the 1950s it has shrunk dramatically in national electoral terms; in the 1996 general elections, for example, it won only 136 seats in the 545-seat Lok Sabha, yielding the position of largest party to the Hindu fundamentalist Bharatiya Janata Party, and its share of the national vote fell to an all-time low of 28 per cent. Today, Indian politics are undergoing a churning process in which no party can apparently gain a clear parliamentary majority; coalition politics seem set to continue for the foreseeable future.

As Congress has declined, other political parties have jostled to fill the vacuum. At the national level, major parties include the Janata Dal, the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Communist Party of India, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Important regional players include the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in the southern state of Tamil Nadu and the Telugu Desam Party (Naidu) in Andhra Pradesh. As of late 1997, India was ruled by a coalition, the National Front, which unites the Janata Dal with an assortment of regional and other smaller parties. At times, this alliance has won the external support of Congress in its bid to keep out of power the Bharatiya Janata Party, whose Hindu fundamentalist, anti-Muslim agenda is seen as a direct threat to India's secular identity.

Women in Politics

Although home to Indira Gandhi, one of the world's most determined, resilient and long-serving women leaders, and despite constitutional guarantees of equality, India has not succeeded in involving significant numbers of women in politics in a leadership capacity. Presently, only 44 women or 7.97 per cent of total membership of 552 in the Lok Sabha. At the level of the Rajya Sabha, there are only 18 women representing 7.20 per cent of the total membership of 250. In 1995, there

were only 57 women in the combined chambers of parliament, or 7.49 per cent of total membership. And while a number of women have held ministerial office – among them Margaret Alva and Sushma Swaraj, profiled below – Indian cabinets have, by and large, contained very few women. For example, the cabinet of Congress leader and Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1994 had only one woman out of a total of 34 members.

India's semi-federal structure and many-tiered system of local government have enabled growing numbers of women to enter politics at the sub-national level. There have been women Chief Ministers in a few states, and some state governments, for example the Left Front alliance that has held power in West Bengal since 1977, have taken specific steps to encourage women's participation in politics. Following amendments to the constitution in 1992, one third of seats in panchayats, or local councils, have been reserved for women.

Measures taken in the light of the UN decade for women, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, and growing pressure from within the country to increase the political participation of women, are beginning to have an impact. New departments on women's affairs have been set up within the Ministry of Human Resources Development and an autonomous National Commission for Women has been established. In addition, women's commissions and women's corporations have been set up in most states, and women's cells have been introduced to the Planning Commission and to Ministries such as Rural Development and Labour.

In September 1996, the then Prime Minister, HD Deve Gowda, tabled a bill in the Lok Sabha to amend the Constitution to ensure that women have an exclusive claim to one third of parliamentary constituencies in general elections. Soon after taking over as Prime Minister in 1997, Inder Kumar Gujral brought four women into his Cabinet. He also pledged that his government would press ahead with legislation providing for quotas for women in national and state legislatures.

An important factor behind such developments has been the growing strength of the women's movement in India. Amendments in the criminal law relating to rape and dowry deaths, the establishment of the national commission on women, the introduction of a minimum quota for women in anti-poverty programmes, and the one third quota for women in local and national politics have come about as the result of pressure from women's organisations. Demands for equality and gender justice are now supported to a greater or lesser extent in the manifestos of all major parties and in the development planning boards of the government. The challenge for the women's movement is to build on this foundation.

MARGARET ALVA

Congress (I) Member of India's Upper House (Rajya Sabha)
Prominent activist of the Congress (I) Party
Former Union Minister of State (various portfolios)

Margaret Alva had an unusual initiation into politics: it was her husband, together with her father-in-law, at the time himself a member of parliament, who persuaded her to leave her law practice and become a politician. Thus began a colourful and varied career in parliament and in and out of ministerial office. Today, Alva – outspoken and assertive – is regarded as one of India's most seasoned and experienced woman political figures.

Early Life and Entry into Politics

Margaret Alva was born in Mangalore, a port city located in the south Indian state of Karnataka. Her family was one of Christians, a minority community in India constituting roughly 3 per cent of the population. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree at Mount Carmel College in Bangalore, the Karnataka state capital. She then read for a law degree at the Government Law College in the same city, emerging with an impressive list of awards.

From the start, Alva combined the practice of law with involvement in welfare organisations. She was active in the Indian arm of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), later serving as its President, and founded a non-governmental organisation, Karuna, early in her career as a lawyer.

Alva, who by this time was married to a fellow law graduate, in 1969 joined the Congress Party, the successor to the Indian National Congress of Freedom Movement days and in the late 1960s still the dominant force in Indian politics. She was encouraged to do so by her husband and by his father, who was a Congress Party Member of Parliament.

The year 1969 was a crucial one in the history of Congress. It was marked by a major split that saw Indira Gandhi seize the initiative from the party's old guard and essentially refloat the party as the Congress (Indira), or Congress (I). It was within the Karnataka state unit of the Congress (I) that Alva embarked on her political career.

Rise to the Top

Five years after joining the Congress (I), Alva was elected to the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of India's national parliament in Delhi. From 1975 to 1976, she served on the executive of the Congress Parliamentary Party. This was the period of the Emergency, the controversial suspension of democratic politics and civil liberties in India, from June 1975 to March 1977, by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi.

First elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1974, Alva was re-elected in indirect six-yearly elections held in 1980, 1986 and 1992. She developed considerable parliamentary expertise, serving on the Business Advisory Committee, the Committee on Rules, and other committees of the house.

By the mid-1980s, Alva had embarked on her ministerial career. From 1984 to 1985, she served as Union Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs. In 1985, after the assassination of Indira Gandhi and the landslide electoral victory of Rajiv Gandhi, she was appointed Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs, Sports, Women and Child Development within the Ministry of Human Resource Development. The same year, she attended the Third United Nations World Conference on Women in Nairobi, and on her return to India was instrumental in setting up women's cells within the Planning Commission and a number of ministries.

Part of her responsibility as Minister of State was to ensure that the Department of Women and Child Development monitored the implementation of the Rajiv Gandhi Government's 28-point programme for the welfare of women and children, and to report to the Prime Minister on this. She also initiated work on the preparation of a national perspective plan for women. This called for the setting up of a national development corporation for women; this idea is yet to be implemented at the national level, although some several state-level development corporations for women have been established.

Within the Congress (I), Alva took the initiative in proposing that 30 per cent of seats be reserved for women in local elections. This became part of the party's manifesto. She also actively campaigned for the selection of women candidates for party posts.

Later in her career, Alva was appointed Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions and Parliamentary Affairs. In this capacity she worked to ensure that as many women as possible filled vacancies in institutions such as the Union Public Service Commission and the judiciary as well as in ministries at the centre and in the states.

Alva's political career has also had an international dimension. She has served on a number of international bodies and committees. She chaired the Group of Experts Meeting held in Vienna by the Women's Division of the United Nations to assess the impact of the UN Decade for Women on the issue of women and decision-making. In 1991, she participated in the expert group meeting on violence against women.

When ESCAP organised a conference on women's participation in politics in Seoul in November 1992, Alva was elected Chairperson. In 1994, she was invited to join a panel of eminent persons set up by ESCAP to draw up a Plan for Human Resource Development in the Asian region; the panel met in Bangkok in November of that year. She is currently a member of the group set up by the UN Fund for Population Activities

(UNFPA) to plan follow-up action to the World Population Conference held in Cairo in 1994.

Enabling Factors

Strong support from her family, including a high degree of encouragement from her husband and her father-in-law, has played a key role in Alva's high profile political career. As she says, "I never had to face any family constraints on my political activities." Financial security – her husband owns a flourishing export business – has also underwritten her work in an important way.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Alva emphasises the value to women politicians of having supportive male colleagues within the party: "I've always had their full confidence when I've discussed key issues. Within my party, I've never been discriminated against on the grounds of sex."

A strong advocate of affirmative action for women, she argues that reservation of electoral seats and jobs for women should remain in place for at least the next 25 years. This, she believes, will enable Indian women to achieve equality and participate more fully in nation building.

Also important, she says, is the support that up-and-coming women politicians should receive from veterans like herself. Having served on election campaign committees of her party at both the national and state level, she has made it a point to launch campaigns for other women candidates.

On the issue of funding, Alva highlights the need for political parties to give financial support to women candidates, a practice she says her party has adopted.

Women in politics, says Alva, need to foster very close ties with their constituents. They should attempt to garner the support of male colleagues. And – citing her own experience she says they should avoid retricting themselves to so-called "women's issues": "As far as possible, women should keep their interests broad. I've spoken out on constitutional amendments, the budget, defence – all manner of pertinent issues."

SUSHMA SWARAJ

Spokesperson of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)
Member of Parliament
Former Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting
Former Minister in the State of Haryana

Sushma Swaraj, the official spokesperson of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a rising force in Indian politics since the mid-1980s, is proud of the fact that she has not "inherited" her position of prominence by virtue of

family connections. She views herself as a self-made politician who has essentially built on her gifts of oratory and public speaking, her academic aptitude and her organisational skills. For women politicians, she says, "nothing succeeds better than success. When women show they can bring in the votes, the sky is the limit."

Early Life and Entry into Politics

Sushma Swaraj was born in 1953 into a middle-class family. She was adopted by her maternal grand-uncle, who had no children, and was raised mainly by her maternal grandparents. The atmosphere at home was liberal, and she was encouraged to engage in any activity that helped develop her personality. At school, she excelled in debating and public speaking and took a special interest in the arts: poetry, drama, classical music, the fine arts, and literature, both English and Hindi. She went on to take a Bachelor of Arts degree and then a Law degree.

Within Swaraj's family there was a tradition of support for parties of the Hindu Right. However, as a student she was influenced by the ideas of Indian socialism, a reformist tradition lying outside the much stronger Communist movement. She was particularly influenced by the man who was to become her husband: Swaraj Kaushal, a strong supporter of the ideology of social democracy and an advocate in India's Supreme Court.

Sushma and Kaushal were both active in the Movement for Democracy led by Jaya Prakash Narayan (popularly known as JP) in the early 1970s. This movement of protest against the Congress (I) government was one of the principal targets of Indira Gandhi's Emergency, declared in June 1975. From then till the lifting of the Emergency in March 1977, Sushma provided free legal services to detained activists of the JP movement. It was during the Emergency, too, that Sushma and Kaushal got married; the ceremony was a simple one, without the payment of any dowry.

In 1977, when the Emergency was lifted and elections were announced, Sushma campaigned for the Janata Party and ran as a candidate for the Haryana state legislature from her home constituency, Ambala Cantonment. Her candidature was supported by her husband. During the campaign, her reputation as an anti-Emergency activist won her solid support, particularly among women and younger voters, and she duly won the seat.

Rise to the Top

Aged just 25, Sushma Swaraj found herself appointed a Cabinet Minister in the new Janata Party government of Haryana state. This made her the youngest ever Cabinet-level Minister in the Indian legislature, whether at the state or national level – a record she still holds. She was given the

Labour portfolio, a challenging one in the aftermath of the emergency when trade unions were poised to make major demands. She proved adept at handling the situation and gained in popularity during her tenure.

Later on, however, differences developed between her and the Haryana Chief Minister over the imposition in the state of Section 144 of the Indian Penal Code. She saw this move to restrict trade union activities as anti-democratic, and resigned as Labour Minister. But the then Prime Minister, Moraji Desai, intervened, and on his instuctions she was reinstated by the Chief Minister.

In 1980, which saw the fall of the Janata Party government, the revival of the Congress (I) and the return of Indira Gandhi to the premiership of India, Swaraj was made President of the Haryana state unit of the Janata Party. She contested the state assembly elections from Karnal but lost.

Four years later, Swaraj parted company with the Janata Party when she decided to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the latest political incarnation of India's Hindu right. She explains that the Janata Party "had begun to revolve round individuals rather than ideology." The same year, 1984, she stood for parliament on the BJP ticket but lost. Electoral success had to wait until 1987, when she was again elected to the Haryana state assembly from Ambala Cantonment and was appointed Minister of Education in the Haryana state government.

In the general elections of 1989, Swaraj made another unsuccessful bid to enter the Indian National Parliament. The following year, she was elected to the Rajya Sabha, the Upper House of Parliament, and was appointed BJP spokesperson there. She at last took a seat in the Lok Sabha, the Lower House, following the1996 general elections. These failed to give any party a clear majority.

For a brief period in 1996, the BJP ruled the country as it tried to find the necessary support in the Lok Sabha. During this period of about three weeks, Sushma Swaraj held office within the cabinet as Minister of Information and Broadcasting. In the event, the BJP was unable to sustain itself in government and Swaraj returned to the opposition benches. Since then she has acted as the party's official spokesperson, one of few women to have reached high rank in a party widely regarded as traditionalist in its attitudes and as equivocal on women's emancipation and equality.

Enabling Factors

While Swaraj essentially sees herself as a self-made politician, she acknowledges the importance to her career of a husband who has supported her politically, emotionally and in practical, financial terms. Although himself a political leader, Swaraj Kaushal entered into an arrangement with his wife by which he would work as a lawyer in order to underwrite her political career. The arrangement still stands.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Sushma Swaraj's views, in line with those of her party, tend to play down, or even discount, the existence of institutionalised barriers to women seeking a career in politics. She attributes her own failure, in 1984 and 1989, to win a national parliamentary seat, not to prejudice against women, but rather to the overall political situation and the standing of her party at those times.

Initially, Swaraj was against affirmative action for women in the political sphere. However, in a situation where the idea of reserving for women 30 per cent of seats in the national and state legislatures has gained wide acceptance among Indian political parties, the BJP has shifted its position. Swaraj now says she supports the 30 per cent quota for women in all political bodies, although she argues that it is too soon to think in terms of a 50 per cent quota.

Other than recommending that women politicians make a special effort to enlist the support of women voters, she does not really differentiate between female and male political players, arguing that both need to gain the support of the media, develop lobbying and negotiating skills, and in general "prove their worth". However, she believes that women entering politics must make a special effort to avoid marginalisation or confinement to women's issues. In her own case, she says, she has always made it a point to intervene actively in "hard issues", for example, in parliamentary debates on India's Terrorist Activities Detention Act (TADA) and on local government.

In general, says Swaraj, women in politics can only advance if they have the support of the larger women's movement. Pressure from outside parliament is crucial to women politicians seeking to bring about change – especially when there are so few of them.

PROMILA DANDAVATE

Secretary General of the Janata Dal
Former Member of Parliament
Founder Member of the Mohila Dakshta Samiti
(Organisation of Democratic Socialist Women)

Promila Dandavate's upbringing was hardly conducive to a life in politics. Her parents expected that, like millions of other middle-class Indian girls, she would marry a well-to-do man and settle down to a conventional life. But somewhere and somehow, the young Promila developed a fascination for politics – and a determination to express in practical terms her socialist ideals and commitment to justice and equality.

Today, she is respected throughout India for her integrity as a long-serving parliamentarian and for her work in the women's movement, in

particular her role in campaigns against *sati* (the tradition whereby Indian widows have been pressurised into burning themselves to death on their husbands' funeral pyres) and against the payment of the marriage dowry.

Early Life and Entry into Politics

Promila Dandavate was born in Mumbai (Bombay). She studied at Sophia School and in 1951 enrolled at the prestigious JJ School of Art – the crucible of much innovative artistic work. Here she gained a teacher's Diploma in Art. In 1961, she graduated from SNDT University, Mumbai, with a Master's degree in psychology. From 1961 to 1962, she was a Fellow at the JJ School of Art.

As a student, she actively pursued her interest in politics by involving herself with the Rashtra Seva Dal, a youth group which carried out constructive work in rural areas. She drew much of her inspiration from heroes of the Indian freedom movement and was particularly influenced by socialists such as S M Joshi and M S Gore.

Promila's marriage to Madhu Dandavate, a fellow socialist destined for national cabinet office, served to enhance and strengthen her political interests. By 1968, she stood for election to the Mumbai city council, convinced that entry into politics was the only way to bring about change. She was unsuccessful in this first electoral bid but subsequently was elected to the Lok Sabha, the lower house of India's National Parliament, as a representative of Janata Dal. She again served as a Member of Parliament from 1980 to 1984.

In parliament, Dandavate introduced a number of private member's bills aimed at enhancing the status of women. These included the Dowry Prohibition Act Amendment Bill as well as bills relating to the Registration of Marriages Act and the Representation of the People's Act. She also moved the resolution to establish a national commission for women.

Dandavate proved an articulate critic of the National Commission for Women subsequently set up by the Congress(I) administration led by Rajiv Gandhi. Like many other women activists in India, she saw it as having been reduced to a watchdog body lacking adequate statutory powers. She embarked on a campaign for a national commission for women enjoying full statutory powers, mobilising women in her constituency, organising signature campaigns and public meetings, and making it a point to get the commission included in the manifesto of the Janata Dal as an election pledge.

As an activist within the Janata Dal, Dandavate has worked actively to push women's concerns higher up the party's agenda. By 1980, she points out, the party manifesto included a special section on women. She was instrumental in including in the manifesto special programmes for women in such areas as employment, combating the criminalisation of society and eliminating dowry. She has also helped sensitise the party to the issue of violence against women.

Dandvate was in the forefront of a campaign to change the law on rape so as to ensure the punishment of offenders. Once again, she demonstrated her skills as an organiser and mobiliser.

As an MP, she moved a private member's Bill to amend the Representation of the People's Act. Under this Act, candidates for public office face disqualification if they transgress India's small family norm by having more than two children. Dandavate, along with women's organisations, have seen this as discriminating against women – who often have no say in how many children they bear. Dandavate's perspective on population policy emphasises the need to link family planning with improving the social and economic status of women; women, she says, "must be empowered to exercise their reproductive rights."

As a member of the Steering Committee of the National Perspective Plan for Women, she worked hard to ensure that issues were discussed openly and comprehensively. She also advocated that non-government organisations draw up an alternative perspective plan to include discussion of all women's concerns.

Dandavate was a founder member of the Mahila Dakshata Samiti, the all-India Organisation of Democratic Socialist Women. This has campaigned for the rights of women, opposing discrimination in all its forms and exposing atrocities against women such as bride-burning and *sati*. It has also been in the forefront of campaigns against dowry and other social practices recognised as detrimental to women.

Dandavate remains as the Secretary General of the Janata Dal.

Enabling Factors

Dandavate identifies her immediate family – her husband, son, daughter-in-law and grandchild – as extremely supportive of her life in politics. Her marriage to Madhu Dandavate, a kindred spirit politically as well as in emotional terms, has also been of central importance; it was Madhu, she says, who gave her "exposure to, and greater awareness of, political life."

Perspective on Women in Politics

Dandavate is a strong advocate of affirmative action to bring greater numbers of women into public life. She supports the one third quota of seats for women in local and national government. However, she stresses that this should be a temporary measure, accompanied by greater education and training for women to help them overcome historical disadvantage. Such training, she believes, should begin at the grass-roots level, with the emphasis on helping women understand how they can bring about change both in their own lives and in broader social terms.

Dandavate argues for greater autonomy of action by the women's wings of political parties, which should not be treated as mere adjuncts or appendages, or as silent resources to be tapped only at election time. She

advocates that women directly participate in the process of selecting candidates, rather than simply suggesting names. On the question of financial backing for women politicians, Dandavate recommends that women make it a point to link up with constituents who raise funds for election campaigns.

Far from advocating any blanket hostility to male politicians, she stresses the need for women to cultivate the support of men who are "gender sensitive." It is vital, too, she argues, that women in politics work closely with the larger women's movement. She recalls that whenever, during her stint in parliament, she moved a bill relating to women's issues, she created space for dialogue with a broad range of organisations. She attended workshops and seminars and also wrote articles for newspapers in order to stimulate debate and mobilise opinion.

As for the personal qualities that women need to cultivate for a successful and effective political career, Dandavate highlights dedication, a capacity for hard work, personal integrity and the readiness to "do your own homework."

MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a Federation consisting of eleven states of peninsular Malaysia and the two states of Sarawak and Sabah located on the northern coast of the island of Kalimantan (Borneo). Commanding the Malacca Strait, one of the world's main sea-lanes, the Malay peninsula has historically been a point of contact between peoples from other parts of Asia, a fact which finds reflection in its ethnically and culturally diverse population. Today, more than half its inhabitants are Malays, speakers of an Austronesian language called Malay and predominantly Muslim. Another third of the population is made up of people of Chinese origin who are followers of Buddhism, Taoism or Confucianism. There is a significant minority of South Asians, especially Tamils from South India and Sri Lanka, who tend to be adherents of Hinduism. In addition, there are various indigenous tribal peoples, some of whom still practise traditional faiths.

Under human habitation for at least six thousand years, the Malay peninsula saw the formation of small kingdoms in the second and third centuries AD, at which time contacts with India were initiated, beginning a millennium of Indian influence over the region. In medieval times, the Islamic city state of Malacca, protected by the Chinese government, was a major commercial and Islamic religious centre, until its capture by the Portuguese in 1511. A century later, the Dutch wrested control of the colony. The seventeenth century also saw the arrival in Malaya of Minangkabau peoples from Sumatra, who brought with them a matrilineal culture.

British colonial activity in Malaya can be traced back to the founding of a settlement on Singapore island in 1819. By the late nineteenth century, the British had established the Straits Settlements, had placed advisors in the Malay states and had begun investing heavily in the Malayan region, developing transportation and rubber plantations. Chinese migrants were by now arriving in growing numbers.

After the Second World War (during which Malaya was under Japanese occupation), the British tried to organise the Malay states into a single entity. A Malayan nationalist movement opposed to the continuation of colonial rule took shape; the pre-eminent anti-colonial force, the United Malaya National Organization (UMNO), was founded in 1946. In 1955, UMNO headed a coalition which won 51 out of 52 seats in Parliamentary Elections. Independence came two years later, and by 1963 the composition of the Federation of Malaysia had been established after several shifts.

At the summit of the Malaysian governmental structure is the Yang di Pertuan Agong, a constitutional monarch elected once every five years from among the sultans, the hereditary Malay rulers of nine of the

states. But under the Constitution adopted at the time of independence in 1957, real political power rests with the Prime Minister, his or her Cabinet and the bicameral federal legislature. The Lower House, or Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives), is a body of 69 members directly elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage for up to five-year terms. In the upper house, or Dewan Negara, there sit 192 members; each state is represented by two Senators, elected by the State Legislative Assemblies, and the balance is made up of nominations by the Yang di Pertuan Agong.

Malaysia's party system is dominated by the National Front (Barisan Nasional), a coalition of largely ethnic-based parties which has been in power continuously since 1957. Its major constituent is UMNO, headed by Mahathir Mohamed, the nation's long-serving Prime Minister. Opposition to the National Front comes from such organisations as the Democratic Action Party and the Parti Islam SeMalaysia, an Islamic party that governs one state. In General Elections held in April 1995, the ruling National Front swept back to power with 162 seats out of 192 in the Lower House and Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamed began his fifth consecutive term in office.

Given the complexities of a multi-ethnic society, national integration poses a special challenge. The political system can be said to be dominated by inter-ethnic elite accommodation in which competing interests and demands are thrashed out and decisions reached behind closed doors by the leaders of the parties representing the various communities. Public mobilisation behind what could be considered as ethnically sensitive issues is discouraged.

Women in Politics

Despite efforts by political parties to increase the proportion of women actively involved in politics, women remain underrepresented in the national parliament as well as in state legislatures. Following the 1995 General Elections, women occupy only 15 out of 192 seats (7.8 per cent of the total) in the Dewan Rakyat. In the upper house, they constitute 12 of the 69 members, or 17.4 per cent. In the cabinet, there are 2 women ministers out of a total of 25. Of 30 Deputy Ministers, only three are women. At the state level, women hold 22 assembly seats out of a total of 450 and 7 out of 80 positions on State Executive Councils.

This situation co-exists with high rates of primary membership by women in the nation's political parties. In the UMNO, for example, women constitute more than 50 per cent of total membership. The party's women's wing, Wanita UMNO, has been pressing for increased party nominations of women candidates. Similar efforts have been made by the women's wings of other components of the National Front.

DATO SERI RAFIDAH AZIZ

Minister of International Trade and Industry
Former Minister of Public Enterprises
Former Deputy Minister of Finance
Former Head of Wanita UMNO (UMNO's Women's Wing)

Back in 1976, Rafidah Aziz, a university lecturer and one of the first women economists in Malaysia, was surprised to learn from the then Prime Minister, Tun Hussein Onn, that he wanted to appoint her as a Parliamentary Secretary. Rafidah, who was doing well in her job, was not about to throw away her academic career for the uncertainties of a life in politics. She told Tun Hussein Onn that she was not interested in a one-off political appointment, and that if this was what was envisaged she would prefer to remain serving the party, UMNO, as an ordinary member.

The Prime Minister assured her that he had bigger plans for her. She would hold the Parliamentary Secretary position for only a year, using it as a training ground for her subsequent appointment as a Deputy Minister – provided, of course, that she performed. On this understanding, she accepted the job, resigned from the university, and a year later found herself promoted to Deputy Minister of Finance – the first woman in Malaysia to be appointed to an economic ministry at such a senior level. By 1980, she was in the cabinet as Minister of Public Enterprise. In 1987, she became Minister of Trade and Industry; three years later, in a period of growth of industrial exports and direct foreign investment, her portfolio was changed to International Trade and Industry. Today, she is counted among the ablest members of the Mahathir Cabinet.

If any were needed, Rafidah Aziz provides proof of the ability of women politicians not only to reach the top, but also to perform outstandingly in relation to "hard" portfolios traditionally seen as the domain of men.

Early Life

Rafidah Aziz, a Malay by ethnic origin, was born in 1943 into a family with a tradition of political involvement; her father was active in UMNO's youth wing. After completing school, she enrolled as a student of economics at the University of Malaya. Here, she involved herself in student politics, taking a special interest in women's issues and the cooperative movement.

As a Malay woman student reading economics, she soon attracted the attention of national women's groups, including the Wanita UMNO. When she was in her second year at university, she was asked by the National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) to help plan for the establishment of a women's bureau within the government. By the time of her graduation in 1966, she was addressing public meetings and giving radio talks on economics, consumer issues, household budgeting

and rural development. This made her the only Malay woman to talk about subjects conventionally seen as men's domain, and she was actively courted by the Wanita UMNO, the NCWO and other organisations.

Entry into Politics

In 1966, Rafidah became a Vice-President of NCWO and joined UMNO, together with other colleagues at the university. She was soon elected to the deputy leadership of the Petaling Jaya branch of Wanita UMNO where the University of Malaya was located. Not long after this, she was appointed to the Economics Bureau of Wanita UMNO and to the Economics Bureau of the main party.

Meanwhile, she pursued her academic career, gaining her Master's degree and in 1970 her promotion to assistant lecturer. Three years later she was promoted to lecturer and head of the Rural Development Division of the Economics Faculty. During this period, she developed her interest in Malaysia's co-operative movement. This eventually led to her election as Vice-President of ANGKASA, the Malaysian national cooperative organisation which was to bring together thousands of cooperatives across the country.

The first half of the 1970s saw Rafidah actively involved in public speaking, giving talks to women's organisations and addressing a variety of public fora on economic and development issues. She also led Malaysian delegations to international gatherings of the co-operative movement. At the party level, she was involved in policy making within the economics bureau, where she took a special interest in rural development and in promoting Malay participation in commerce and industry.

Rise to the Top

It was against this background that Rafidah made her spectacular political ascent in the second half of the 1970s. In 1976, at the invitation of Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn, she resigned her university job and was appointed to the national Senate to enable her to hold the position of Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Public Enterprise. A year later, she was Deputy Minister of Finance, a post she held for the next two years.

In the 1978 General Elections, Rafidah was asked by Tun Hussein Onn to stand for a parliamentary seat in the state of Selangor. By an impressively wide margin she defeated her main opponent, a well-known trade union activist from the opposition Democratic Action Party.

Following a cabinet reshuffle in 1980, Rafidah entered the Mahathir cabinet as Minister of Public Enterprises. She remained charged with this portfolio for the next seven years. Then in 1987, at a time when Malaysia was transforming its economic base from agriculture to manufacturing and the government was vigorously promoting direct foreign investment and the export of manufactured goods, Rafidah was appointed Minister of

Trade and Industry. Her portfolio was redesignated International Trade and Industry in 1990.

Parallel with her rise in government, Rafidah established her political clout within the structures of UMNO. In the late1970s, while she was still only a Senator, she won the second highest number of votes in the fight for a seat on the UMNO Supreme Council – a major achievement for a young woman who at that time lacked position in either state or national government.

In 1980, following her appointment to the cabinet, she defeated a senior party leader from Selangor to become Deputy Leader of Wanita UMNO, a position which gave her a crucial national-level political base. Four years later, when the incumbent head of the Women's Wing retired, Rafidah competed for the post and won. She would remain head of Wanita UMNO until 1996, when she was defeated by the Deputy Minister of Health, Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman, in an election outcome that reportedly took delegates by surprise.

Despite this setback, Rafidah Aziz continues to enjoy acclaim for her ministerial skills and her performance in high office. In Malaysia, she is widely seen as having risen on the basis of her own merit and technical competence rather than through political connections.

Enabling Factors

Rafidah Aziz regards her family not only as her primary commitment – ranking above both party and nation – but also as the pivotal factor behind her success. The support her husband and three children give her is, she says, reciprocated by the priority she places on them: "My children have never resented my absence from home because I've made it a point to phone them every other night before bedtime to discuss their school work, examinations and social activities."

She has also to shield family and home from political intrusion: "I do bring work home", she concedes, "but I don't allow any visitors to the house to discuss work or party matters. My time with the family is too precious to waste on other people's applications for one thing or another."

Beyond her family, Rafidah singles out the support she has been able to count on from her cabinet colleagues. "I thrived in the nurturing environment provided by cabinet colleagues who saw me as a young, smart woman with much to contribute. Their support and encouragement gave me confidence and motivated me to work hard for the party and the government."

Perspective on Women in Politics

Rafidah argues that if greater numbers of women are to embark on political careers, changes in strategy have to be adopted at two primary levels: that of the political party and that of women themselves.

As far as the party is concerned, she says that vigorous efforts need to be made to prepare women for leadership positions, give them experience at branch level, ensure that they figure on lists of candidates, and get them elected by, where necessary, "parachuting" them into safe seats.

In her view, UMNO has performed creditably in all these areas. Citing the practice of the party's women's wing, she says it makes a point of identfying women with potential and either entrusting them with party responsibilities or helping them on to local councils or local development committees. Their performance is then monitored closely, and the names of those judged to have done particularly well are passed on up the party structure for consideration as potential national or state parliamentary candidates. And while the final selections of candidates is the prerogative of the party president, the leader of Wanita UMNO has a strong say in the choice of women candidates.

To get more women into public life, says Rafidah, it may be neccessary to "parachute" them into seats they stand a good chance of winning. Reviewing her own experience, she recalls that when she was allotted the parliamentary seat at Selayang, she was a committee member of the Petaling Jaya branch of UMNO, located many miles away on the other side of Kuala Lumpur.There was considerable opposition to her candidacy from within the Selayang Division, but she was able to defeat the opposition candidate. In 1982, she was "parachuted" to another seat, this time in her home state of Perak.

Rafidah believes that political parties that are seriously committed to involving greater numbers of women must go out of their way to recognise and reward merit, irrespective of gender. In particular, they should not allow their political judgement to be clouded by the lobbying, money power and mud-slinging associated with old-style, male-dominated politics.

But women, too, must develop awareness of what the situation requires of them. Rafidah stresses that women entering politics must be prepared to be combative and tough. "In my own case," she says, "I had a tough time gaining acceptance by the party leadership in the Selayang division – that, too, in the short time before polling day. But I persevered."

At the same time, her own experience has led her to the belief that women should not embroil themselves in the "hassle and heartbreak" of fighting for position and challenging incumbents at the level of local politics. Rather than aggrieve local party leaders by usurping their position, women like herself who want to make a mark on national politics should reach out towards a national platform. Rafidah in fact frowns on women who get embroiled in all-out leadership contests, arguing that this is often at the expense of service and principles – qualities that are important to her.

She says, too, that she has made it a point not to resort to "feminine wiles" in order to get her way. Her approach to work and to the discussion of issues and party policy has been straightforward and direct, helping

her male colleagues to view her as an equal and as a person in her own right. Women who want to succeed in politics, she affirms, must cultivate professionalism, a capacity for long hours, and a readiness to commit themselves to the service of both party and government.

DATO KEE PHAIK CHEEN

Penang State Minister of Tourism, Youth, Sports and Women's Affairs
Most Senior Member of the Penang State Executive Council
Chairperson of the Women's Wing of the Gerakan Party

Among the officials with whom she has worked, Kee Phaik Cheen is known as the politician to whom one "never says no." To the residents of her rural constituency – fisherfolk, farmers, petty traders and hawkers – she is highly respected for her ability to serve the community and deliver the goods. This woman politician from Malaysia's Chinese community has built her career on the foundation of a grass roots activism that has embraced concerns as mundane as rubbish collection and clearing clogged drains. Hers has been a steady, step-by-step ascent to state-level office and national political prominence. Currently the most senior minister in the cabinet of Penang state, she is also national chairperson of the women's wing of the Gerakan Party, the dominant partner in the Barisan Nasional coalition ruling in Penang.

Early Life and Entry into Politics

Kee Phaik Cheen was born in Penang in 1947. She graduated from the University of Malaya in 1971 and took up a teaching post in the state of Selangor. Later she became the supervisor of a secondary school in Penang, but resigned the job in 1977 because of ill health.

By this time she was married to a medical doctor, also of Chinese ethnic origin. He had been a member of the Penang State Assembly since 1974, and she had helped him in his election campaigning. This had brought her into contact with the women's wing of UMNO. She was impressed by the discipline, dedication and hard work of these predominantly ethnic Malay women. They readily accepted her husband, a Chinese from another political party, and actively campaigned for him to ensure a Barisan Nasional victory.

On polling day, the Malay women were first at the poll, lining up to vote even before the station opened. Non-Malays, including the local ethnic Chinese community, in contrast seemed intent on finishing their marketing and household chores. Dismayed by this apparent political apathy, Kee Phaik Cheen determined to combat it.

Her first step was to join the Gerakan Party; she was at that time one of just a handful of woman graduate members. When, in 1979, the party

decided to open a women's wing, she became actively involved in the planning. As the coordinator for women members in Penang, she organised the women in each constituency of the state assembly to form *pro tem* committees. The women's wing was finally launched in 1982.

Work at the Grass Roots

By the early 1980s, Kee was an appointed Gerakan member of Penang's Municipal Council. Her husband was no longer active in politics, having made the decision in 1978 to concentrate on his medical practice. As a councillor, she adopted as her constituency a multiracial rural area that had formed part of her husband's state assembly seat. Unlike many of her colleagues, she was able to devote herself to her constituents – farmers, fisherfolk, hawkers and petty traders – on a full-time basis. Her husband's financial as well as moral support enabled her to manage on the modest allowance that councillors were paid.

What started as a one-year single term appointment to the council stretched into six years. In her constituency, Kee opened a contact centre in a vacant office adjacent to her husband's clinic and encouraged ordinary working people to drop in with their problems and grievances. And while she actively involved herself in urban beautification schemes aimed at transforming Penang into a garden city, much of her time was spent tackling mundane problems such as refuse collection, clearing drains and repairing roads.

For Gerakan appointees, council work was used as a training ground for political workers who showed electoral promise. Determined to make a difference, Kee earned herself a reputation as a hard worker who was able to deliver results. She badgered the bureaucracy to speed up its decision-making and take action to solve the problems of her constitutents.

In 1984, after serving four one-year terms as a city councillor, Kee decided to challenge the incumbent chairperson of her party branch. (In Malaysia, a party branch covers the area of a state assembly seat, while a division covers a parliamentary constituency.) The result showed that her hard work in her rural constituency had paid off: the working people she had helped had joined Gerakan and they supported her in the party election. She duly won – the first woman in Gerakan to be elected to such a post.

Four months later, she challenged the sitting chairperson of her division, who, conscious of the support behind her, opted to withdraw from the contest.

Kee's rise in the local party structure and her work at the community level soon brought her to the attention of Gerakan's national leadership. In 1985, she was appointed national chairperson of the party's women's wing. Unhappy that the position was an appointed one, she was instrumental in getting the party constitution amended so as to provide for

elections. She then organised the women's wing's first leadership election, which she won.

Rise to the Top

In 1986, after serving six years as a councillor, Kee was selected to stand as a candidate in elections to the state assembly. She was given the choice of two seats within the Balik Pulau parliamentary constituency; with her level of grass roots support, it was believed, she could win either of them. She duly joined the Penang State Assembly, making it a point to continue her efforts on behalf of her constituents. She expanded the service centre in her constituency and employed three full-time staff to help her.

In 1990, Kee joined the Penang State Executive Council (State Cabinet) as Minister of Tourism, Youth, Sports and Women's Affairs. There was nothing "soft" about this appointment: in Penang, tourism is the second most important economic sector. As a member of the executive council, Kee was able to organise "technical visits" to various areas of her constituency. Here, accompanied by government officials, she would conduct what were essentially meet-the-people sessions. As a result, civil servants saw for themselves the problems faced by the people and issued instructions for speedy action to be taken. Her constituents found their demands for better roads, community halls and other civic amenities seriously taken up.

In 1995, Kee was designated the most senior member of the state executive council. This places her third in the state government hierarchy, after the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister.

Enabling Factors

Kee's husband has been a crucial source of inspiration and support in her political career. It was his political involvement that helped her discover her own interest in politics. His subsequent decision to underwrite her political career both emotionally and financially, enabled her to develop her talents and pursue grass roots politics with an unusual degree of focus and dedication.

Kee has also derived much support from her children, whom she taught from an early age to be confident and independent. Her political career did, however, bring problems in its wake. Her teenage daughter at first resented her mother's choice of career, telling her friends at school that they should never allow their mothers to enter politics. But mother and daughter were able to discuss the problem openly. The daughter has coped by addressing her mother as "The Honourable" whenever she feels neglected. "That", says Kee, "never fails to make me sit up and pay her more attention."

Kee identifies the Penang Chief Minister as another key source of support, along with many of her women colleagues in the Gerakan party.

Perspective on Women in Politics

For Kee, the crucial element in a strategy to get more women into politics is to ensure that women involve themselves in solid work at the grass roots. She views this as more important than affirmative action, although she concedes that more conscious efforts need to be made at the party level to involve women and aid their political ascent.

As a result of her six years in local government, Kee says, she knew exactly what to do, where to go, and whom to see to get the problems of her constituents addressed and solved. This experience at the grass roots enabled her to shoulder her subsequent responsibitilies as a State Legislator and Minister faster and more effectively than would otherwise have been the case.

Her record as an effective grass roots party worker also served to place her in good standing with male party colleagues. "I was judged and selected strictly on merit," she affirms. "This was important to me because I wanted to be treated as an equal and not as the product of a quota system."

At the same time, she recognises that women politicians need special encouragement. As one who has actively educated and lobbied for women candidates, she argues that political parties need to make a more conscious effort to appoint women candidates and generally foster female talent. "In my own case," she says, "I've helped prepare five women councillors in four different states by identifying the talented women in the party and giving them exposure – appointing them to bureaus dealing with education, local government, fundraising and so on."

These appointments, she believes, provided women with opportunities to prove themselves. Those who proved particularly talented could then be given greater responsibilities. They could also be encouraged to take up part-time professional courses in order to augment and strengthen their qualifications.

Within the Gerakan party, Kee points out, there are signs of growing sensitivity to the issue of involving women. Back in 1990 she was the only woman candidate on the party list. But by the time of the 1995 general elections the Party President selected four women candidates – three for state assembly seats and one for parliament. Two were successful, and she expects the number of Gerakan women candidates steadily to rise. "No party leader with any common sense," she argues, "would turn away a talented person who will be a strong asset to the party."

At a more basic level, Kee believes more attention needs to be paid to helping women overcome their sense that politics is an alien world. While in her experience many professional women are ready to help political parties with specific projects on an ad hoc basis, rarely are they prepared to chart a career in politics. "With a professional career and children, many women feel they just don't have the time to spare for politics. They

see it as an alien field that demands hard work and time and that is detrimental to their marriage and family." By way of a strategy, Kee advocates time management training for women with children: "They need to focus on quality time if they want to get involved in politics and not feel guilty about neglecting the family."

DATO NAPSIAH OMAR

State Minister for Public Works in Negeri Sembilan
Former Central Minister of National Unity and Social Development
Former Central Minister of Public Enterprises
Former Central Deputy Minister of Housing and Local Government
Deputy Leader of Wanita UMNO

Napsiah Omar, formerly Malaysia's Minister of National Unity and Social Development and currently Minister of Public Works in the state of Negeri Sembilan, says her entry into politics was a case of being in the right place at the right time. Born into a family of UMNO activists, she had always been interested in politics, but had never thought of a career in public life.

Then, in the run-up to the1982 general elections, UMNO found itself with a problem in a Negeri Sembilan constituency. The incumbent, who headed a division of the party and was also a former Chief Minister of the state, had by virtue of a tarnished reputation become a political liability. Determined to hold on to his seat, he issued a challenge that he would step down only if someone could be found who was better qualified than he was – an unlikely prospect given that most other senior party leaders in the division were humble schoolteachers.

Those determined to oust him decided to call his bluff. They told him they had found someone more highly qualified than himself – a university professor and a woman, to boot! This was none other than Napsiah Omar, a zoologist and botanist and an UMNO party member with long experience of working with women at the grass roots level.

Napsiah duly resigned her university job and stood for election. Readily welcomed by male party workers in the division, she found herself campaigning in mosques and *suraus* (village prayer halls), often given place of honour next to the imam to deliver her campaign speech at the end of a prayer session. No doubt to the dismay of the ousted incumbent, she won the seat by a generous margin.

She would go on to serve in various cabinet posts at both the national and the provincial level. And she would play a crucial role in overturning gender stereotypes, presenting women in Malaysia with a positive role model of the politically active woman.

Early Life

Napsiah was born in 1943 in the state of Negeri Sembilan. Her parents were active supporters of UMNO who made it a point to attend every party function in their village and the surrounding area. Napsiah performed well at school and went on to study zoology and botany at the Australian National University. She also obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in Nutrition and Education from Cornell University in the United States.

From 1969 to 1982, she taught at Malaysia's Universiti Pertanian (University of Agriculture), first in the Home and Nutrition Technology Department and later in the Department of Human Studies. In the latter, she was Associate Professor and also Head of Department.

From early in her life, Napsiah felt concern for the plight of women in Malaysia. She saw the need for the empowerment of women to help them overcome traditional acquiescence in their lot and become active shapers of their lives. She involved herself in community work and, making use of her expertise in health and nutrition, began giving talks to women's groups. She also followed her students as they carried out their fieldwork in rural areas.

Dismayed at the level of ignorance about health and reproduction rights she found among women, she joined the Family Planning Association and started within it a task force on the status of women.

Entry into Politics

Napsiah's desire to strengthen her access to women at the grass roots level was a major factor behind her decision, in 1972, to join her local branch of UMNO. This was in Serdang, in the state of Selangor where the agriculture university was located. Once inside the party, she was spurred to growing activism by the subordinate role she saw women forced to play: she felt women were being used as mere vote banks, whether at the level of national, state or party elections.

The frequent talks she gave on health, nutrition and contraception as a member of the Family Planning Association, as a university lecturer and as a member of UMNO brought her to the attention of the UMNO party leadership. One divisional leader who noted her ability advised her to attend divisional meetings more regularly in order to make her presence felt within the local party structure.

At the national level, she began to be invited to attend seminars on leadership and politics. It was at one such meeting that the head of Wanita UMNO (the party's women's wing) noticed her and advised her to shift her party base from Serdang to the town of Kuala Pilah in her home state of Negeri Sembilan. She was told there was a possibility of a vacant seat in the state assembly since the incumbent, a woman, was already serving her second term and might not be reselected.

These events took place in the early 1970s, at a time when Wanita UMNO was striving to attract more women graduates as members and get them into party leadership positions or chosen as election candidates.

In Kuala Pilah, a small town in which Napsiah was well known and respected, party colleagues were by the early 1980s urging her to stand for the position of divisional deputy leader in upcoming party elections. But before this could happen, parliament was dissolved and general elections were called in April 1982. Napsiah was asked to consider running for the state assembly. Before she could even consider this, there came the offer – out of the blue – of the parliamentary seat with the disgraced incumbent. Much to her own astonishment, Napsiah found herself a member of Malaysia's National Parliament.

Rise to the Top

Further surprise followed. When Mahathir Mohamed announced his new ministerial team in the wake of the elections, Napsiah was included as Deputy Minister of Housing and Local Government. As the Minister in charge of the portfolio spent much of his time involved in party work, Napsiah ended up handling the bulk of ministerial work. She also answered parliamentary questions. The result was that she quickly learned on the job, rising to public as well as party prominence during the five years she held the post.

Within UMNO, too, Napsiah advanced at a rapid pace. By 1986, she held several party posts. At the branch level, she was elected head of Wanita UMNO, and she subsequently became divisional head of the organisation. At the national level, she was elected to Wanita UMNO's executive council and also joined the Finance and Information Bureau of UMNO. In 1987, she won a much coveted seat on the party's Supreme Council, the highest policy-making body. She was also appointed Chairperson of UMNO's National Unity Bureau.

Following a cabinet reshuffle in 1987, she was appointed Minister of Public Enterprises. At this time, Rafidah Aziz was Minister of Trade and Industry. This meant that the two women in the cabinet were both heading econonic ministries – breaking the tradition that women confine themselves to ministries handling welfare and social issues.

In 1990, Napsiah stood for election as deputy leader of Wanita UMNO, defeating the incumbent, a Deputy Minister who was more senior not only in age but also in party and governmental experience.

The cabinet reshuffle that followed the 1990 general elections saw her appointed as head of the newly established Ministry of National Unity and Social Development. Here she gained a reputation for her forthright positions on such issues as child labour and women's rights. During her five years at the Ministry, she earned the respect of women's groups and non-governmental organisations as well as the party for her strong com-

mitment to the cause of the less privileged. She came to be seen as the caring face of government and as a politician who was not afraid to speak out and, if necessary, tread on toes.

In the General Elections of April 1995 she did not stand for parliament, contesting instead for the Negeri Sembilan State Assembly. This led to comment and speculation, with some of her critics interpreting the move as a demotion. However, Napsiah was one of four cabinet ministers to be transferred to State Assembly seats, and it was widely expected was that they would become chief ministers. She no longer holds the Public Works portfolio in Negeri Sembilan but retmains as deputy leader of Wanita UMNO.

Enabling Factors

Napsiah identifies the support given her over the years by the top leadership of UMNO as a major factor in her political career. "With no financial resources at my disposal," she says, "I found such support invaluable. It gave me far greater clout."

Perspective on Women in Politics

Napsiah is a strong advocate of tackling generalised apathy among women towards politics by motivating, in the first place, educated women who can be persuaded into some level of activism. Such women, she says, are "confident, politically aware, and willing to fight for their just share of the party power structure." While she concedes that the growing numbers of women graduates and professionals entering UMNO of late tend to be urban-based, she believes they will start a process that will eventually reach the rural areas: "Eventually, such women will be encouraged to stand for party positions back in their home villages. The change in attitude in the rural areas will come through their increasing presence in the branches and divisions."

This strategy, which appears born of her own experience, by no means goes unchallenged within Wanita UMNO, the majority of whose members are not university educated. Efforts by the organisation to recruit more graduate members – for example, the campaign in the early 1970s which brought Napsiah and other professional women into the party – have triggered resentment. Despite this, Napsiah is clear that encouraging the involvement of educated women is the only realistic way to get more women into politics.

As far as party structures are concerned, Napsiah argues for strategies of affimative action aimed at increasing women's representation in decision-making bodies. She supports the proposal, still under debate within UMNO, to give women a guaranteed minimum level of representation at the annual party assembly. If this proposal is accepted, she says, Wanita UMNO will win a minimum of 165 such delegates – clearly something

that would strengthen the clout of the women's wing within the party. However, the proposal has recently twice been rejected by the party's Supreme Council.

Napsiah also argues for clear strategies to tackle the funding of women hoping to enter politics. Women, she says, have been disadvantaged by their lack of financial resources: "Access to campaign funds is the key to increasing the participation of women in politics."

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Papua New Guinea, an independent member of the Commonwealth since 1975, is an island nation located in the southwestern Pacific Ocean, encompassing the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and a chain of tropical islands. In ethnic terms, it is one of the world's most complex societies, embracing more than 700 distinct ethnic entities. Two large groupings predominate: Papuans, constituting some 80 per cent of the population, and Melanesians, roughly one in six of the nation's inhabitants.

Migrations to the Papua New Guinea region from southeast Asia are believed to date back some 50,000 years. In the modern period, Portugal was the first European power to make a landing, while Spain laid claim to the territory in the mid-sixteenth century. However, colonial annexation did not occur until the late nineteenth century, when Britain seized the southeastern portion of New Guinea and Germany took the northeast.

In 1906, British New Guinea passed to Australia, which occupied the German colony during the First World War and later won a League of Nation mandate to administer the territory. The Second World War brought Japanese occupation, but after this Australia regained control. The administration of Papua and the New Guinea mandate was then combined, and the resulting Territory of Papua New Guinea became self-governing in 1973. Independence followed two years later.

The 1975 Constitution, while retaining the British monarch as the nominal head of state, vests executive power in a national executive council headed by a Prime Minister, elected by a majority vote in the single-chamber national parliament. The latter's 109 members are elected for terms of up to five years on the basis of universal adult suffrage.

Since independence, Papua New Guinea has been under coalition rule; no party has been able to win a big enough majority to form a government on its own. Major parties include the People's Progress Party (PPP), the Pangu Pati, and the People's Democratic Movement (PDM). A coalition of the PPP and the Pangu Pati ruled the country for much of the 1990s, with Sir Julius Chan as Prime Minister. This period saw the growing challenge posed by an armed secessionist movement on the island of Bougainville.

After national elections held in June 1997, a new governing coalition was formed, comprising the PPP, the Pangu Pati, the PDM and the People's National Congress (PNC). The leader of the PNC, Bill Skate, was elected Prime Minister by parliament on 22 July 1997.

Women in Politics

While the number of women candidates standing for national election has increased in recent years, Papua New Guinea's national parliament

has never had more than three female members at a time. Two women returned to parliament in the general elections of June-July 1997. A similar situation prevails in provincial and local government. Only one woman has ever been elected head of a provincial government and the female presence in provincial assemblies has never exceeded two or three.

Interestingly, the only three women to have been elected to Papua New Guinea's national parliament to date have this point in common: each has, or has had, an expatriate husband or partner.

The constitution provides for one nominated female representative in parliament, but as yet no woman has been nominated to this reserved seat, partly as a result of disagreement on how the choice should be made.

NAHAU ROONEY

Former Minister of Justice
Former Minister of Culture and Tourism
Member, Constitutional Reform Commission
Founder Member of the People's Democratic Movement
President, Pihi Manus Council of Women (Manus Province)

Back in the 1980s, when she was Papua New Guinea's Minister of Justice, Nahau Rooney found herself sentenced to eight months in jail. In what became known as the "Rooney Affair", she was judged by the Supreme Court to have interfered in the working of the judiciary in a landmark deportation case. In the event, the intervention of the then Prime Minister, Michael Somare, ensured that she did not go to prison. What the incident revealed, however, was the readiness of this woman political leader to place herself at the centre of controversy and go into battle. As she put it to an interviewer, "politics is not for the faint-hearted."

Early Life

Nahau Rooney was born in 1945 in Lahan village on the south coast of Manus province. She had four siblings, making her family a relatively small one by the standards of Papua New Guinea. She did not begin attending school until the age of ten, but this was in a context in which very few girls received any education at all.

At the primary level, she attended a boarding school in Lorengau, the administrative headquarters of Manus district. Since there was no provision for secondary education for girls in the district, she travelled to Morobe district and enrolled in Busu High School, set up in the early 1960s to prepare young women for positions in the colonial administration. It was in fact the only school in the country to give women an opportunity to enter the emerging educated elite.

After completing school, Rooney underwent training as a teacher, grad-

uating from Port Moresby Teachers' Training College. She went on to win a scholarship to study home economics in Fiji. Later she won a Winston Churchill Fellowship which enabled her to study for a year at Melbourne Teachers' College in Australia. She then read for a Bachelor's degree in social work at the University of Papua New Guinea.

Entry into Politics

It was while she was studying at the University of Papua New Guinea that Rooney first became involved in politics. During her time at university, the campus was the hub of lively political activity, with students debating such issues as self-government and independence, citizenship and the form the constitution of an independent Papua New Guinea should take. Rooney was elected President of the Student Representative Council, her first leadership position.

In 1973, she stood as a candidate of the Pangu Pati for the National Capital District City Council and won. She served as a City Councillor for one term.

Before Papua New Guinea's independence in 1975, Rooney worked as a research officer for Michael Somare, then Chief Minister and effectively Prime Minister-in-Waiting. Her work as a researcher, consultant and advisor involved her in the interplay between decision-making and representation. She decided that the political arena was the one in which she would make her contribution.

She began work as a Special Projects Officer within the local government council of Manus province; this body later became the area body. Her responsibilities included the handling of land disputes, and she found herself listening to case and clan histories which she then wrote up and got recorded ready for submission before dispute settlement committees.

By this time, the mid-1970s, decentralisation of decision-making was a live issue; the secessionist movement in Bougainville province was already active, and in Manus plans were being drawn up for the establishment of a provincial government. In 1976, Rooney was asked to assist in the preparation of a constitution for the new body. She was appointed executive officer to the planning commission on the constitution. This required her to travel throughout the province interviewing people about the form of provincial government they wanted. She gained not only visibility but also the confidence of the people she met. "They felt that perhaps I should represent them in the national government," she recalls.

In the 1977 general elections, Rooney stood for and won the Manus open seat in the national parliament. She was one of three successful women candidates. Prior to the election, she had informed the Pangu Pati of her candidacy, but it was only subsequent to her victory that the party gave her official endorsement.

Rise to the Top

In parliament, Rooney's assertiveness and articulateness soon impressed the Pangu leadership, in particular the Prime Minister, Michael Somare. In August 1977 she was appointed Minister for Corrective Institutions and Liquor Licensing – the first woman to enter the National Cabinet.

From March 1979 to September of the same year she served as Minister of Justice. This was the period of the so-called Rooney Affair. The controversy centred on a deportation order served by the government on a political science lecturer at the University of Papua New Guinea. In June 1979, the Foreign Affairs Minister revoked the lecturer's entry permit, which was valid until 1982, and gave him two weeks to leave the country. The lecturer took the matter to court, and the Supreme Court issued an interim injunction restraining the government from deporting him for a period of one month.

As Minister of Justice, Rooney took issue with this ruling, arguing that four weeks was too long a period. In a letter to the Chief Justice, she was critical of the judiciary, accusing it of meddling in political matters which should be left to the executive. She also made it known over the radio and in the press that she did not have confidence in the judiciary. Foreign judges, she argued, were administering foreign laws.

Her letter to the Chief Justice, the broadcast on national radio and newspaper reports became the basis for three charges of contempt of court brought against the minister by the Public Prosecutor. The Supreme Court found her guilty of contempt of court and sentenced her to eight months' imprisonment. The same day, Prime Minister Somare pardoned her, using mercy powers provided by the constitution. His action outraged the Chief Justice, who resigned, and so did other members of the judiciary. It also ignited a parliamentary and public outcry that quickly evolved into the country's first major constitutional crisis.Looking back on the experience, Rooney concedes having made mistakes. But most of her comments since the Rooney Affair have focussed on the relevance or otherwise of "foreign" laws in Papua New Guinea and the need to raise the indigenous content of the judiciary.

Her brief stint as Minister of Justice ended in September 1979. From January 1980 to March 1980 she served as Minister for Decentralisation in the Somare government.

In 1982, Papua New Guinea held its second general elections since independence. At that time, Pangu had three strongholds: the National Capital District and the districts of Morobe and East Sepik. What Rooney did was to take the party to Manus district. In the months before the election, she campaigned widely, projecting herself and the party through posters and calendars carrying her name and photograph.

In the event, the election result in her seat was extremely close. After the first count, she and her main opponent had equal votes. A recount

gave her opponent a majority of one. She appealed to the Court for Disputed Returns, which ordered a second recount. The final result was a victory for Rooney by a margin of eleven votes.

Rooney was the only woman to be elected in the 1982 elections. She did not become a minister in the new Somare government; the cabinet had been formed before her electoral dispute was resolved and a ministerial berth had been given to another Pangu representative from Manus. In Papua New Guinea, Prime Ministers must ensure that all regions are represented in their cabinet – and that no region can be construed as over-represented.

A New Party

In March 1985, Rooney was one of fifteen members of Pangu to break away and form a new political party, the People's Democratic Movement (PDM). Led by Pius Wingti, the PDM embodied in part the impatience of younger members of Pangu, including Rooney, who found themselves waiting on the back benches. Rooney became Secretary-General of the new party.

In November 1985, Rooney played a key role in the success of a vote of no confidence against the Somare government. In order to ensure victory, she took the unorthodox step of locking all doors to the parliamentary chamber so that the inmates could not leave and upset the projected outcome.

As a result of the successful no confidence motion, the Somare government resigned. Pius Wingti, the new Prime Minister, named a caretaker cabinet in which Rooney was included. When the finalised cabinet took shape, she was given the portfolio of Culture and Tourism, a post she held until March 1987.

In the 1987 general elections, Rooney contested as an independent rather than as a candidate of the PDM and was not re-elected. In the elections of 1997, too, she failed to win a seat in parliament.

Since leaving parliament, Rooney has involved herself in women's issues as well as in the running of her own business interests. She is currently President of the Manus Council of Women, or Pihi Women's Association, and is a member and former Vice-President of the Women in Politics (WIP) group, based in Port Moresby. She also serves on the country's Constitutional Reform Commission.

Enabling Factors

Rooney, who is married to an Australian, emphasises the importance to her political career of the support given by her family. She is of the view that traditional extended family structures, as found in Papua New Guinea, in fact make it easier for women to enter politics. As she notes, "a woman politician spends long hours talking and attending meetings at odd hours.

The help of extended family in domestic and maternal duties is essential. In Papua New Guinea, one can count on one's sister, mother, aunt or in-laws to look after the children as if they were their own."

Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

Rooney, one of very few women to have been elected to Papua New Guinea's national parliament, does not favour affirmative action as a means to get more women into politics. "Women," she argues, "have to earn their place in parliament and not be placed here because of special circumstances. She also advises women against being projected or labelled as "women's only" candidates. Reviewing her own experience, she says that in spite of her commitment to women's empowerment, she avoided taking up women's issues on the floor of Parliament. She did so in order to weaken the perception of male colleagues that, as the only female Member of Parliament, she was bound first and foremost to represent women.

She believes that work in local government offers potential women politicians an effective training ground. Travelling about Manus province as a local government officer, she became extremely knowledgeable about the workings of politics. Her knowledge helped make her articulate and persuasive, besides bringing her to the attention of the leaders of the political party she supported. She also gained visibility among ordinary voters. "This kind of exposure is vital for woman politicians", she says. " If a woman is a completely unknown personality who simply turns up during elections, the chances are she'll be perceived simply as a woman – rather than seen for her ability or for what she represents."

During her parliamentary career, Rooney showed she was not afraid to play the games male politicians play. At the same time, she recommends that women in politics not allow personal ambition to take over and rule their careers. In Papua New Guinea, she points out, "ambitious politicians have fallen very quickly; they lose respect amongst their peers and their local support base."

ENNY MOAITZ

Former Premier of Morobe Province
Former Provincial Minister (various portfolios)
Founder and Patron of the Wanchef Women's Association

When Enny Moaitz, a teacher and an active member of the Lutheran church, was approached by colleagues within the church to register as a candidate for the 1980 provincial elections in Morobe province, she was

dumbfounded. "I told them I knew nothing about politics," she recalls. "All I wanted to be was a teacher."

Her supporters pressed her to give "his new thing" a try. Accompanied by her pastor, she went along to the district office and duly registered. So great was her standing in the community through her work with the church that she won her seat almost without trying.

In the provincial assembly, Moaitz entered the cabinet, where she handled a variety of portfolios. Then, in July 1987, the former teacher became Premier of Morobe Province, prompting one national daily to run the headline: "Morobe's New Premier – a Woman!"

Handling such entrenched male attitudes correctly, she says, is vital to women's success in politics: "The first hurdle is to overcome the attitudes of the men. If you present yourself properly, men will respect you. You have to earn respect."

Early Life

Enny Moaitz was born in Morobe in 1945 and was educated in institutions run by the Lutheran church. After completing six years of primary education at the Bula Lutheran Primary Girls' School, she trained as a teacher at a Lutheran teachers' college in Goroka in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea. This was by no means a common step for a woman to take. As she explains, "I was singled out as an experiment to see whether women were capable of becoming teachers."

Moaitz spent two years at the college before being posted to a demonstration school attached to Balob Teachers' College. While teaching at Balob and later at Port Moresby, she attended evening classes to complete her secondary school education.

In Port Moresby, she married Papua New Guinea's first commercial pilot. For a period she worked as coordinator of Lutheran women's fellowship groups from the headquarters of the church. However, she felt a strong need to return to Morobe and help the women from her community benefit from the experience she had gained. Her husband resigned his job, ending a promising career, and the couple moved to Morobe. Moaitz resumed her work as a teacher, teaching for the next twelve years eventually reaching the position of deputy headmistress of St Paul's Lutheran School in Lae.

In 1973, she became involved in the Girl Guides movement. As Papua New Guinea moved towards independence, its Australian administrator realised the need to fill certain symbolic or high visibility positions with members of the indigenous polpulation. Moaitz was appointed Territory Commissioner of the Girl Guides, a post previously held by the Australian administrator's wife. At independence in 1975, she became Commissioner for Girl Guides. She held the post from 1975 to 1986, and again from 1994 to 1997.

Entry into Politics

In 1977, the people of Morobe began preparing for the establishment of a provincial government. An interim government was put in place in 1978 and a seat in it was reserved for a woman's representative. A number of women in the province got together and agreed to nominate Moaitz for the job. She served as women's representative in the interim provincial assembly for the next two years, while continuing to teach full-time. During this period she was Minister for Youth, Women and Home Affairs.

When the first Provincial Elections were held in 1980, Moatitz was "conscripted" as a candidate. Hopeful of becoming headmistress of St Paul's Lutheran School, where she had worked for the preceding twelve years, she was initialliy reluctant to get involved in the rough and tumble of electoral politics. But her supporters in the local church and community eventually persuaded her, and she won the Wanpa seat, beating six male opponents in the process

In this first election, Moaitz says she did little by way of direct campaigning. Electoral politics were still a novelty at both the national and the provincial level, and for her the support of the Lutheran church, which put out the message that voters should choose "a good church person", was enough to get her elected. In subsequent elections, the element of competition grew and she was obliged to campaign more actively. As she recalls, "some male politicians began bribing voters and so it was necessary for me to campaign to give the correct impression about my policies and platform."

As a precaution, she made a point of screening carefully people who wanted to campaign on her behalf. She also set up committees of four members in each of the forty villages in her constituency.

Moaitz served as an elected Member of the Morobe Provincial Legislature from 1980 to 1991. During this period, she held a number of ministerial portfolios, including those of Education, Women, Youth and Home Affairs, Finance and Forestry.

It was in her third term as a Member of the Assembly that she was elected Premier of the province. The former Premier, Utula Samana, was the leader of the party to which she belonged, a Morobe-based organisation called the Morobe Independent Group (MIG). Samana and the MIG dominated the politics of Morobe in the 1980s. In 1987, Samana resigned as Premier in order to contest national elections. Moaitz was elected unopposed to replace him.

She did not contest the 1991 provincial elections because she was already a candidate for the national elections of 1992. Her chosen seat had no less than nineteen contenders, and she came fourth. She was again unsuccessful in the general elections of 1997.

Of late Moaitz has dedicated herself to work among women and young people. She was a founder member of Wanchef, a women's organisation involved in literacy promotion, better health and hygiene, Aids aware-

ness and training programmes for women. Wanchef is affiliated to Papua New Guinea's National Council of Women and is also active in the Morobe Provincial Council of Women. In addition, Moaitz continues her involvement in the National Girl Guides movement.

Enabling Factors

Moaitz pays tribute to the support she has received from her husband, who fully backed her political career while continuing to pursue his own professional interests. The latter point, she feels, is important: "A husband who has his own career and is doing well is less likely to be intimidated by his wife's success."

Perspective on Women in Politics

Moaitz believes that strong community involvement is the key to women's success in politics. Over the years, she points out, her work within the church and among women and young people enabled her to build a firm base within her constituency. This level of involvement also placed her in a position to use pre-existing networks, for example that built up by the church.

Women, she argues, must also ensure that they belong to strong party organisations. In her own experience, it was her membership of MIG, the dominant provincial political force prior to its eventual split, which enabled her to be elected premier. As an independent candidate, she might have made it to the legislature, but there would have been no chance of ministerial office.

She also stresses the importance of training campaign workers so that they can accurately put across a woman candidate's values and message. "I want them to say what I would say, not what they would like to say," she argues.

As for the personal traits that women in politics need to foster, she highlights thoroughness and professionalism. "Once you show that you can perform as well as men can, that your gender does not affect your performance and competence, then there are no problems."

DAME JOSEPHINE ABAIJAH

Member of Parliament
Former Governor of Milne Bay Province
Founder of the Papua Besena Movement
Former President of the National Council of Women of Papua New Guinea

Dame Josephine Abaijah has been active in the politics of Papua New Guinea since 1972, when she first ran for election. At that time, men in the country frowned on their wives or partners running for political office. She remembers that when she was campaigning in Goilala, a rural inland

region of the Central Province, male voters would tear up her pamphlets in front of her to register their disgust. In fact, she was able to garner her strongest support from outside her home area – an unusual achievement in a country at that point still in the grip of tribal and ethnic politics.

Once elected, Abaijah became active in opposition to the colonial plan to unite the two territories of Papua and New Guinea. As a native of Papua, she was instrumental in forming the Papua Besena Movement, which at first had secessionist goals. The Papua Besena swept the Central district and the National Capital district in the 1977 elections, and thereafter functioned as a regional party, largely divesting itself of its separatist aims.

Abaijah's achievement has been to live through, shape, and survive politically, different phases in Papua New Guinea's recent history. A successful businesswoman who has also headed the National Council of Women, the largest women's grouping in the country, she is now back in Parliament, having defeated a number of male opponents in the 1997 General Election.

Early Life

Josephine Abaijah was born in 1940 in Wamira, a village near Dogura in Milne Bay province. She was the eldest of seventeen children, four of them adopted. Soon after her first birthday, her parents – ordinary working people – moved to Samarai Island, the administrative headquarters of Milne Bay province, and then to Misima Island. Here, Josephine grew up and received her primary education.

For her secondary schooling, she won a scholarship to a Church of England Girls' School in Queensland, Australia, from which she graduated with a junior certificate. She then returned to Port Moresby, where she enrolled in the newly established Papuan Medical College – one of the first women in the country to do so. She went on to matriculate, attending adult education classes while working full time as a secretary at the medical college.

Abaijah, one of very few women in pre-independent Papua New Guinea to have received formal secondary education, then proceeded to London University, where she obtained a diploma in health education. She also studied at the University of the Philippines, where she completed a two-year postgraduate course in health education.

Entry into Politics

When Abaijah made the decision in 1972 to get involved in politics, she found herself at a disadvantage. She had lived away from her tribal home for so long that mobilising her "tribal vote" seemed problematic. Instead, she decided to concentrate her efforts in Port Moresby, whose relatively high population density allowed her to reach large numbers of people.

From the start, she made clear her opposition to the colonial government's plan to merge the two territories of Papua and New Guinea. Her separatist proclivities came under fire from the government, and she enjoyed enhanced media publicity as a result. She made adroit use of the print media, placing full-page advertisements carrying her platform and photograph in a daily paper.

Once elected to the House of Assembly, she was the only Papuan representative vigorously to assert the demand that Papuans remain Australian citizens until they were ready, in her words, "to take over the independent government of their own country." She toured rural areas of Papua, explaining to villagers the political and economic situation of Papua as she saw it.

Her work in and outside Parliament helped prepare the way for the Papua Besena ("Papua Tribe" or "Descendants of Papua") movement, formally launched in July 1973. It was clear from the start that she was the movement's leader.

Using both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary methods (the latter including marches and mass demonstrations), and putting to work her considerable personal charisma, Abaijah built Papua Besena into a major force, particularly in the Central province and the National Capital district. In the 1977 General Elections, Papua Besena swept the board in these two regions, garnering all eight seats. Abaijah herself defeated the country's Deputy Prime Minister, at that time the second most powerful Pangu Pati leader after Michael Somare.

This was the height of Papua Besena's influence. The movement subsequently split when other elected Papuan politicians formed a political party to enable them to function more effectively on the floor of Parliament. Abaijah concedes that she tended to see Papua Besena as her movement and that she was reluctant to let others help decide its fate.

Enabling Factors

Abaijah identifies her political strategist, Dr Eric Wright, as perhaps her most important source of support. The fact that her adviser is white has drawn criticism in certain circles, but to this she retorts, "Pangu has its white advisors, so why can't I?"

She also pays tribute to a second advisor: Sir Percy Chatterton, a British missionary of the London Missionary Society who first came to Papua in 1924 and worked in different parts of the territory until his retirement. He served two terms in the pre-independence House of Assembly and put this political experience to use in the 1972 Elections, when he worked as Abaijah's campaign manager.

Abaijah emphasises her family as a source of support. She has been able to count on her large family for help with rearing her three children and handling her domestic arrangements.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Looking back on her own experience, Abaijah believes that her lack of a "tribal base" worked to her advantage in the long run. By successfully contesting a seat outside her home area, she was able to demonstrate – even before Papua New Guinea gained its independence – that politicians could cross tribal or other primordial boundaries. This, she feels, is the way forward for women politicians.

Conditions in Papua New Guinea, including great hostility among men to the idea of women running for public office, encouraged her to adopt placatory strategies. She recalls that in the Mekeo region of the Central province, she was able to win over male chiefs to such an extent that she was permitted to sit with them on their special platform. She avoided projecting herself as a "women's candidate", and focussed on issues of concern to both men and women as a means to make people see past her gender.

Abaijah emphasises the importance to women in politics of high visibility. Women, she says, must not only make careful and imaginative use of the media; they must also pay their electorate frequent visits. She attributes much of her electoral success to the fact that she was well known in her constituency even before campaigning started. "I went there on health patrols, and I took students into the rural areas. It was on this basis that I was able to build such strong, dependable support."

SEYCHELLES

The Republic of Seychelles, located in the western Indian Ocean some thousand miles to the east of Kenya, is an archipelago comprising roughly 115 islands. French colonists with their black slaves began arriving on the previously uninhabited islands in the late eighteenth century, and were joined later by deportees from France. In the early nineteenth century the French and the British battled for control of the strategically sensitive islands, and in 1814 the territory was formally ceded to the British. During the course of the century, settlers arrived from Mauritius and Réunion, joined by smaller numbers of Asians from China, India and Malaya. One result is today's ethnically mixed population.

During the colonial period, a plantation economy took shape, dominated by land-owning descendants of the original French settlers. At the base of the hierarchical social structure were labourers of African origin. Here, a matriarchal society evolved based on loose family structures; with the men usually away working on the outer islands or the plantations, women increasingly assumed responsibility for family and home. Such socio-cultural factors meant that Seychellois women had a degree of access to education and land, and a number of them became socially and economically independent. Today, some 45 per cent of households are headed by women.

In 1903, Seychelles became a British crown colony. The archipelago's first elections were held in 1948, when representation on the newly created Legislative Council was granted to a tiny minority of 2,000 voters. One of the representatives elected was a woman, Dr Hilda Stevenson-Delhomme, who later went on to form her own party in 1964.

By the 1960s, there was growing popular mobilisation around the demand for independence. Two major political parties were founded: the Seychelles Democratic Party (SDP), which favoured maintaining ties with Britain, and the Seychelles People's United Party (SPUP), which pressed for complete independence. In 1965, Britain agreed to universal suffrage for Seychelles and to the demand for an enlarged legislative council. General elections were held in 1967 and by 1970 an elected Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers were set up. In 1976, a coalition of the SPUP and the SDP led the country to independence.

In 1977, the SPUP, led by France Albert Réné, staged a coup, ousted SDP leader James Mancham from the national presidency, and introduced socialist one-party rule. Over the next fifteen years, Réné was voted in three times as President in general elections uncontested by any other party. Multiparty politics were restored in 1991, and a new Constitution, drafted by an elected commission, was approved by a popular referendum in June 1993. This institutionalised multiparty politics and provided for a National Assembly of 33 members, 22 of whom are directly elected, with the balance allocated to parties on a proportional basis.

In general elections held in 1993 under the new constitution, Réné, now heading the successor to the SPUP, the Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF), won a landslide victory with 59.5 per cent of the vote. The runner-up was James Mancham of the Democratic Party, with 36.7 per cent. A similar distribution of votes took place in elections to the national assembly. Here, a new element was the recently formed coalition party, the United Opposition, led by an experienced woman lawyer, Annette Georges (profiled in the book). This won nearly 10 per cent of the vote, thereby acquiring an allocated seat.

Women in Politics

The relative independence of women in the Seychelles is reflected in higher than average representation of women in politics. Under the former one party government, women constituted 41 per cent of parliamentarians in the period 1980-1985. In the 1993 multiparty elections, this figure fell to 27 per cent (9 out of 33) – still high in international terms and the highest figure within the Commonwealth. From 1993 to 1997, women ministers made up 25 per cent (3 out of 12) of President Réné's Cabinet. However, the death of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Danielle de St Jorre in 1997 reduced, for a short time, the figure to 17 per cent. The new Cabinet, appointed after the General Elections of March 1998, retained a 25 per cent share of Women Ministers through direct appointment by the President. However, the percentage of women in the National Assembly after the March 1998 General Elections declined further to 23.5 per cent – with the SPPF again holding all 8 of the women seats (6 directly elected and 2 nominated for the 6 SPPF proportional seats!) Both the UO and DP were unable to have women representation partly as a result of winning only 4 seats between them.

Since independence, the Seychellois Government has always placed emphasis on primary health care, education and housing security. It consistently allocated more than 20 per cent of annual government expenditure to such sectors which provided a strong basis for women's advancement. The principle of gender mainstreaming has also gained official recognition; in the National Human Resources Development Plan, adopted in 1994-1995, emphasis is placed on the benefits that derive from a just and equal balance between men and women in the nation's development.

In the Seychelles, women were actively involved in the political struggle for independence. Political parties, especially the ruling SPPF, have played a major role in raising awareness and facilitating women's access to positions of decision-making, both within the party and within government structures. In addition, the shortage of skilled management resources in a small population of only 68,000 people meant that women were called upon to fill key decision-making posts at all levels.

With a gender-sensitive constitution, a government committed to gender justice, and the need for educated and skilled management personnel, the social structures of the Seychelles have provided opportunities for women to gain access to positions of power and authority. Quotas and other affirmative action mechanisms have not been found necessary in this situation.

SYLVETTE FRICHOT

Minister of Local Government, Youth and Sports
Former Minister of Information, Culture and Sports
Chairperson of the Women's League of the Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF)
Secretary for Mobilisation on the Central Executive Committee of the SPPF

As the fifth child in a family of eleven children, Sylvette Frichot was entrusted by her parents with many responsiblities, especially in times of difficulty or crisis. That experience, combined with her subsequent career as a teacher, helped prepare her for a life in politics that would see her assume ever larger and more challenging responsibilities. Today, she is one of three women in the Cabinet of the Seychelles and a major force within the ruling party. She is known for the energy with which she tackles problems confronting women and for her determination to see women take advantage of the better opportunities being offered them.

Early Life

Sylvette Frichot was born in June 1945. Her father, a businessman and a politically active lobbyist for taxpayers, encouraged her to take an interest in his work. She completed five years of primary schooling and spent two years, from 1958 to 1960, at secondary school. Like other girls of her day, she was not encouraged to pursue higher education. After leaving school, she became a teacher.

As a teacher, she discovered that she was being paid much less than male colleagues and was angered by the injustice of this. She was also made aware of other social inequalities, in particular the restriction of grammar school education to children whose parents could afford to pay the fees.

Entry into Politics

Frichot grew up in a context of growing political fervour in the Seychelles. Demands for the eradication of poverty and for a better life for the people of the Seychelles became linked with the struggle for political independence. In 1966, Frichot joined the Seychelles People's United Party (SPUP), led by Albert Réné, and the Workers' Union. Not long after

joining, she began working for the party as a clerical officer. She showed herself to be an active party worker, and was promoted to the post of Principal Coordinator of the SPUP.

Rise to the Top

In 1968, Frichot was one of the founder members of the SPUP's Women's League. She was elected Chairperson two years later and remained in the post until 1977. During this time she also held for ten years the chair of the Seychelles Women's Association Committee.

When the SPUP came to power in 1977, she became Principal Secretary of the newly formed Ministry of Political Organisation. A year later, she was appointed Secretary for Information and Culture on the party's Central Executive Committee, a post she held for the next seven years. Since 1985, she has been the Central Executive Committee's Secretary for Mobilisation, a major post within the party.

In 1989, Frichot joined the Cabinet as Minister of Information, Culture and Sports. Two years later, she moved to the post of Minister of Local Government, Culture and Sports. The same year, 1991, saw her return to the Chair of the party's Women's League, a reflection of her grass roots support among women. After the introduction of multiparty democracy in 1993 and the return to power of the party, now renamed the Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF), she was again given the portfolio of Local Government, Youth and Sports. Following the General Elections of March 1998, she was re-appointed by the President to the Ministerial post responsible for the Local Government and Sports portfolios. It is a key post for mobilisation of support among the young people.

As the country's long-serving Sports Minister, Frichot has participated in a number of major international gatherings in the field of sport. She was elected President of the Sports Committee for the Indian Ocean region from 1989 to 1992. She also presided over the Conference of Ministers for Youth and Sports of Francophone Countries (CONFEJES) in 1993-1994.

Enabling Factors

Frichot identifies the political movement to which she belongs as the basic enabling factor behind her political success. "The party's strong commitment to recognising the contribution of women," she says, "greatly facilitated the progress of women politicians like me." That commitment included, firstly, recognising the strong role of women as educators and trainers at the level of the family, the community and the nation. Secondly, it meant including capable women in policy-making and decision-making. A third aspect was recognising the important net-

working role played by women in times of hardship and poverty. And, fourthly, the party, says Frichot, has made it a point to place capable women in ministerial posts not limited to "women's issues" or the social services sector.

Frichot, who is married with two sons, stresses the value of her family support network but also pays tribute to facilities such as day care that have been provided by the government.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Women, suggests Frichot, can only hope to advance politically if they are part of a larger movement with a genuine commitment to gender equality. At the same time, women can maximise their political potential by building on their own individual experiences and talents. In her own case, she says, she was able to tap her experience as a teacher, which helped make her a good communicator at all levels. Her years as a teacher also gave her useful insights into human psychology.

Despite her limited formal education, Frichot was able to advance on the basis of an active programme of self-education. She developed and pursued an intense personal training plan which was supplemented by party training programmes. These included on-the-job experience for women; access to civic and political education; and sensitisation to human rights issues, including women's rights.

The qualities she identifies as important for women hoping to pursue a life in politics include commitment and dedication to larger objectives and the determination to develop to the maximum their organisational, management and leadership skills. "Women in politics," she says, "must have inner strength and must be ready to make personal sacrifices."

DANIELLE JORRE DE ST JORRE

Minister of Foreign Affairs, Planning and Environment (from 1992 until her death in February 1997)
Renowned Linguist, Expert on "Kreol"

At international gatherings, it was often Danielle Jorre de St Jorre who, with a combination of skill and charm, represented the Seychelles. As often as not, she was the only female head of a national delegation. As her country's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Planning and Environment, she presided over "hard" portfolios, spoke for her country on the Board of Governors of the World Bank and of the African Development Bank, and served on a range of other international bodies. She was also a scholar of linguistics who championed the cause of Kreol, the indigenous language of the Seychelles and the mother tongue of large numbers of its citizens and people in other regions of the world.

Early Life

Jorre de St Jorre was born in September 1941 on Mahé, the main island of the Seychelles archipelago. Her home environment was French creole and her childhood, she says, was "sheltered and stable". She began her formal education at the only girls' grammar school on Mahé, a private institution run by Irish nuns. At school, she won prizes, became a house captain, and involved herself in such extracurricular activities as debating and drama.

Since education beyond the fifth form was not available in the Seychelles at this time, she continued her schooling in the United Kingdom, where she studied for her A-Level examinations at Southend-on-Sea Technical College. She went on to the University of Edinburgh, where she obtained a master's degree in 1965. A year later, she received a postgraduate certificate in education from the University of London.

As a student, Jorre de St Jorre developed a strong interest in language. In the 1970s, after six years back in the Seychelles, she returned to the UK to read for a B Phil degree in linguistics at the University of York.

Entry into Politics

Jorre de St Jorre first became interested in politics during her student days. One factor which kindled her interest was her experience of living and working in a kibbutz in Israel. In the 1960s and 1970s, she also found herself identifying strongly with the independence movement in the Seychelles. At this stage of her life, however, she was not overtly involved in political activities. She worked her way up through the professional ranks of the civil service, occupying important posts in the ministries of education and tourism.

Although Jorre de St Jorre became a member of the ruling party, she did not hold any major post within the SPPF until her appointment to the cabinet as Minister for Planning and External Relations in 1989. Throughout her professional life, however, she worked closely with the SPPF government to implement its social policies in the fields of education and culture.

After joining the Cabinet, she was appointed a member of the Central Committee of the SPPF. With the addition of the important Environment portfolio in 1992, she became Minister for Foreign Affairs, Planning and Environment, the post she held until her death in February 1997.

Her career in politics saw her actively involved in the cause of the Kreol language. Her strong belief in the central importance of the mother tongue in national development led her to advocate the use of the national Kreol language as the medium of instruction at all state schools. The SPPF used the concept of Kreol as a living language and culture to strengthen its connections with the grass roots.

Jorre de St Jorre published three linguistic studies on the Kreol language of the Seychelles. She was a founder member of the international Kreol network known as Bann Zil, and was also instrumental in instituting the Kreol Festival, a major annual event in the Seychelles. At the time of her death, she was Vice-President of the Comité International des Etudes Créoles (CIEC).

Jorre de St Jorre had wide experience of serving on boards and organisations, both national and international. She served as governor for the Seychelles on the boards of governors of the World Bank and the African Development Bank. She was Vice-President of the Advisory Committee on Protection of the Seas (ACOPS), East Africa region, and was a board member of the International Ocean Institute, based in Malta. She was also a member of the Council of the Earth Summit Action Programme for Health and Environment, under the auspices of the World Health Organisation.

At home, her responsibilities included chairing the Seychelles Development Bank and the Environment Trust Fund and serving as Vice-Chairperson of the Natural Resources Inter-Ministerial Committee.

Enabling Factors

In an interview conducted not long before her death, Jorre de St Jorre identified as key supportive elements in her life her professor at the University of York, whose perspective on language greatly influenced her work, and the President of the Seychelles, Albert Réné. Of the latter she said, "I owe a special debt to his vision of development and the need for change in the country." She also cited the "strong commitment" of the SPPF to the advancement of women as an important factor in her own political career.

Perspective on Women in Politics

This popular woman leader believed that professionalism and dedication were the traits that women seeking a life in politics need to foster. `Women also need to be flexible and to be able to adapt to circumstances," she told her interviewer. In her own case, she said, she had been able to build on her general interest in young people and her formal training in psychology and education to improve her interactive skills at all levels.

It is vital for women in politics, she insisted, to bring good organisation and planning to the task of balancing their many roles – as professional, mother and politician. As a divorced woman, she emphasised the need for a strong support network at home, including the cooperation of the children – although in her case, she candidly admitted, "this was not always easy."

ANNETTE MARY SOLANGE GEORGES

Treasurer and Former Leader of the United Opposition Party [(now re-named the Seychelles National Party (SNP)]

A lawyer by profession, Annette Georges is a relative newcomer to politics. It was while working in the office of the Attorney General of the Seychelles in the 1980s that she became increasingly aware of the conflict between the state, the ruling party and the judiciary in the period of one-party rule. After leaving her government job to practise with her husband, a fellow lawyer, she took up the cases of a number of political dissidents. Following the introduction of multiparty politics, she helped form a new coalition party, the United Opposition (UO), and served as leader of the party for the critical phase of the transition from one party rule to multi-party democracy. Later she was elected Treasurer of the UO now renamed the Seychelles National Party (SNP) at its 1998 convention when she was again re-elected as Treasurer.

Early Life

Annette Georges was born in 1957 into a family with a tradition of political involvement. Her father was an active member of the Seychelles Democratic Party; he won a seat in the National Assembly and later became a Minister in the SDP-SPUP coalition government that led the country into independence.

After completing her schooling, Annette travelled to the United Kingdom, where she read law. She was called to the Bar in 1980. On her return to the Seychelles, she joined the chamber of the Attorney General. She worked for eight years as State Counsel and was later promoted to Senior State Counsel and Assistant Official Notary. She deputised for the Registrar-General and in 1985 was appointed a temporary Magistrate, a post she still holds.

Entry into Politics

Georges' family background, as well as her training in law and professional experience, gave her a broad exposure to political issues. During her years at the Attorney General's office, she became increasingly critical of what she saw as the flaws and lack of transparency of the one party system. In 1988, she resigned from her job and joined her husband's law firm, but found herself confronting the same conflicting issues and lack of transparency.

She reduced the volume of her legal work and opened a candle making venture, a project that allowed her to work with her hands and also gave her time more time for politics. She did not join either of the two main parties, instead joining forces with a smaller opposition party which articulated the views of young people and others critical of

society. She developed independent views which she aired with growing outspokenness.

Among the cases her law firm took up was that of Jean-Francois Ferrari, the son of a former Minister of the SPPF. Her client, who had broken away from the ruling party some years earlier, was a daring and sometimes reckless critic of one-party rule. Georges was impressed by his defiance and his support for free speech and democracy.

Rise to the Top

When the government announced in December 1991 a switch to multi-party politics, the first opposition party to register its existence was the Parti Seselwa. Georges was a founder member, though she did not sit on the executive committee. Subsequently, the Parti Seselwa merged with two other opposition parties to form a new force, the United Opposition, to contest the presidential and national assembly elections.

The election laws stipulated that a party leader must not hold a position on the executive committee of another party. In a context where the opposition was still weak and very few people were prepared openly to declare their political affiliation, Georges was approached by the UO to become party leader. Aged just 36, she found herself heading a new opposition force in a time of political transition.

In the general elections of June 1993, the UO obtained 9.7 per cent of the vote in the National Assembly elections, thereby winning a seat in the new Assembly. Georges remained as party leader till 1995 when, at the UO's annual convention, she was confirmed as party Treasurer and the Reverend Ramkalawan was elected party Leader. Georges was the Vice-President candidate for UO in the general elections March 1998, where the UO won only 1 seat (directly elected) but received over 26% of the total votes qualifying it for 2 proportional seats in the Assembly. The March 1998 General Elections were the turning point for UO as it effectively became the major Oppostion Party in the Assembly, ousting the Democratic Party (DP). Georges sees her future as a politician as even "more challenging" now!

Enabling Factors

Georges identifies her mother as a longstanding source of support and as someone central to her success in both law and politics. Georges says she has also drawn strength from a network of colleagues, friends and political supporters who share her vision.

She and her husband have no children, a fact she believes has facilitated her legal and political careers. As she puts it, "I would have found it very difficult – physically, morally and psychologically – to take political risks if I'd had children to think about."

Perspective on Women in Politics

Georges is clear that she would not have been able to survive in politics without financial independence. The fact that she and her husband run a law firm has given her the latitude to be involved in politics without having to worry about money.

She believes that a professional training in the law is particularly useful for women hoping to enter politics. "My legal background," she says, "gave me a wider and more mature understanding of the socio-political situation of my country. And since lawyers are figures of authority and role models in the Seychelles, my status as a lawyer helped me obtain people's respect and trust."

She identifies will power, perseverance, self-confidence and moral strength as among the personal qualities women contemplating a life in politics need to cultivate. "You also need to develop a strong sense of justice and fairness," she says. "And you must combine the ability to build a good team with the determination to hold on to your independent personality."

SOUTH AFRICA

An independent nation since 1931 and a Republic since 1961, South Africa has been home to one of the epic struggles of the twentieth century: the battle of its people against apartheid, a system of institutionalised racial segregation and oppression, backed by state violence, that dominated national life from 1948 till the 1990s. The long walk to freedom has brought in its wake a heightened sensitivity within the new, multiracial South Africa to all dimensions of equality and justice, including the issue of gender justice and the need to involve women actively at all levels of national politics.

South Africa is a multi-ethnic society with a complex history. In essence, European colonial expansion in the mid-1600s introduced to the Cape region, for centuries the homeland of San (Bushman) and Khoikhoin (Hottentot) tribes, white settlers from Holland and, later, Britain. As the settlers moved deeper into the interior, they encountered settled populations of Xhosa and peoples with whom they battled for control of the land. The discovery of diamonds and gold in the late nineteenth century raised the stakes, and also intensified tensions between the British and the Dutch settlers, or Boers. Britain went to war with the Boers and gained control of all South Africa. In 1910, the British formed the Dominion of the Union of South Africa.

The fertile farmlands, vast mineral wealth and rapid industrialisation of South Africa rendered its people vulnerable to extreme forms of exploitation that from early on assumed racial expression. In effect, class and race were made to dovetail, with the black population – the overwhelming majority of the people – forced into menial labour.

This was the reality that the full-fledged apartheid system, introduced after the electoral victory of the white supremacist National Party in 1948, sought to institutionalise and perpetuate. Under it, the people of South Africa were divided into rigid racial categories ranked hierarchically from the whites at the top, through intermediate categories such as Asians and "Coloureds", to blacks at the bottom. These racial divisions were reinforced by physical segregation, bans on intermarriage, ceaseless policing of the black population through such devices as the pass laws and the outlawing of all civil rights and liberties, especially attempts to organise politically across racial boundaries. The racist regime was ever ready to resort to extreme violence to uphold the status quo.

In the 1980s, however, various factors combined to undermine the apartheid edifice. The remarkable resilience and durability of the anti-apartheid struggle from both within and outside the country, led by the African National Congress (ANC), resulted in the growing international isolation of South Africa during a period of escalating economic difficulty. As ever, the regime resisted change but the reality of changed times could not be repudiated. In December 1991 there began multiparty negotiations

to dismantle apartheid. These resulted, in December 1993, in the adoption of an interim Constitution providing for the historic, first non-racial elections which were held in April 1994.

In the 1994 elections, the ANC won 252 seats in the National Assembly and 62.6 per cent of the popular vote. Second place fell to the National Party, with 82 seats and just over 20 per cent of total votes, while the Inkatha Freedom Party of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi came third with 43 seats and 10.5 per cent of the vote. Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as post-apartheid South Africa's first President on May 10, 1994.

In the Government of National Unity formed after the historic elections of April 1994, former President F W de Klerk, leader of the National Party, was appointed Second Executive Deputy President, serving under the presidency of Nelson Mandela. (Subsequently, however, de Klerk and the National Party withdrew from the government.) The new constitution was approved by Parliament in May 1996.

Of special relevance to the position of women are the constitutional provisions for gender equality. Unfair discrimination on the grounds of "race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status" and a list of other factors is specifically outlawed. The new constitution, widely regarded as one of the most liberal in the world, incorporates an Equity Clause in a Bill of Rights; provides for affirmative action; and lays down rights to health care, basic education and adequate housing.

Women in Politics

In the old South Africa of white rule, women comprised only a tiny minority within Parliament. This situation has been sought to be remedied by the ANC, which at its first openly held National Conference in South Africa in 1992 resolved that women should constitute at least one third of candidates on its electoral list.

Largely as a result of this decision, contemporary South Africa has one of the highest proportions of women in Parliament: 27.8 per cent in the National Assembly and 16 out of 90 Senators, for an overall figure of 25 per cent female Parliamentarians. The seventh highest proportion in the world and the highest such percentage in the Commonwealth!

Both the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker are women, and there is a significant representation of women in the Government of National Unity. Honouring a pledge made on the eve of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, President Mandela has used cabinet reshuffles to raise the proportion of women Ministers from 15 per cent in 1994 to 25 per cent in 1997.

Women parliamentarians have constituted a multiparty Parliamentary Women's Group (PWG), intended to function as a critical mass to help push through legislation on women's equality. This is seeking a formal status within Parliament and a budgetary allocation for a permanent sec-

retariat. It has lobbied for improved facilities for women in parliament and has initiated a Women's Budget, a critical analysis of the national budget undertaken each year to assess the extent to which the government's financial plans are contributing to women's advancement.

Besides the provisions for gender equality in the new Constitution, legislation since 1994 has introduced separate taxation for men and women and has instituted a Commission for Gender Equality.

FRENE GINWALA

African National Congress (ANC) Activist and Leader
Speaker of the National Assembly
Former Convenor of the Women's National Coalition

Like others belonging to South Africa's non-white majority, Frene Ginwala does not recall a specific moment when she entered politics. Growing up in the apartheid state meant exposure to an oppressive political reality from birth and ever sharper awareness of state-mandated, institutionalised racism.

Her opposition to apartheid led Ginwala into the African National Congress and into long years of exile from her native land. While living overseas she was sometimes challenged by feminists who took issue with her for concentrating on the struggle against apartheid rather than making women's equality her priority. To this, she would reply: "Well, look, what do we fight for? To be equally oppressed with black men?"

For her, the view that removing apartheid was not the top priority for South African women was nonsensical. But she also became sensitised to the gender oppression that was integral to the apartheid regime. Within the ANC, she became an active lobbyist for the position equating anti-racism and anti-sexism.

As the edifice of apartheid crumbled, Ginwala helped shape the fledgling women's movement in South Africa. An important milestone was the setting up, in 1992, of the Women's National Coalition, which brought together women from all major political parties, trades unions, and other organisations across racial, religious and other divides. Within the ANC, Ginwala lobbied for a one third quota for women on party lists. She also campaigned for gender parity in party delegations to the multi-party talks that preceded the historic 1994 elections.

Today, as the Speaker of democratic South Africa's National Assembly, she is a forceful, articulate and effective advocate of women's equality and women's right to be at the heart of the political process. Within the ANC, she does battle with all remnants of sexist thinking and behaviour. "Racism and sexism," she says, "are both structured forms of oppression which have been integrated into society and must be eradicated, not reformed."

Early Life and Entry into Politics

Frene Ginwala was born in Johannesburg in 1932; her family was of South Asian origin. Following the National Party victory in 1948 and the introduction of full-fledged apartheid, her family was forced by the Group Areas Act to move from the centre of Johannesburg to a barren and dusty area some thirty kilometres away from the city. This was "reserved" for Indians.

Her parents sent Frene to study in the United Kingdom, where she eventually read for a law degree. On her return, she became active in the Indian Congress, established early in the twentieth century to mobilise the Indian community against apartheid, and then moved to the African National Congress (ANC).

By the 1960s, she was so respected within the ANC that the leadership sent her abroad to help arrange the escape from South Africa of the party President, Oliver Tambo, who, like other anti-apartheid activists, was facing arrest. She remained in exile for more than twenty years, returning to South Africa only in 1991.

Exile

While in exile, Ginwala lived in the United Kingdom, Tanzania, Mozambique and Zambia. She made her mark in political research, served as the ANC's spokesperson in London, and managed to continue her studies. She also became a journalist of some note; among other responsibilities, she edited the ANC publication, *Spearhead*.

As she travelled the world on behalf of the ANC and participated in the formulation of its policy, she became aware of the rumblings which heralded the movement for women's equality in the 1970s. She and fellow ANC activists began to be challenged about their politics from a feminist perspective. "We'd be asked why we were working in the ANC and not fighting for women's equality," she remembers. "We would say, 'well, look, what do we fight for? To be equally oppressed with men?' That's what a purely feminist fight would have been. And that was absolute nonsense. One had to focus on the removal of apartheid."

Ginwala concedes that at that time her attitude towards gender politics was coloured by her disdain for the ANC's Women's League. Some members of the League, she recalls, tended to view it as a welfare agency, and interpreted their role as little more than looking after male exiles in the camps run by the ANC.

But it was while working within the women's wing of the party in Zambia that Ginwala found herself becoming more overtly committed to the struggle for gender equality. In Lusaka, she met Florence Mposho, a veteran ANC activist who had left South Africa after organising the famous Alexandra bus boycotts.

Mposho made Ginwala confront and recognise the reality of gender oppression. She also helped her to see that it was integral to the apartheid

system. "Mposho forced me to recognise that it was not something I could opt out of," Ginwala recalls. "I owe a lot to her. She pushed in her own way to help me make the connections between national liberation and women. She was saying that if you did not address the issue of gender oppression, you were going to end up starting a new battle at the end of apartheid."

The issues became clearer for Ginwala as she and Mposho sat up late into the night debating and arguing. "I began to see that just as I was saying that we couldn't fight to be equally oppressed with black men, so too we had to fight not to be oppressed by black or white men."

Promoting Gender Equality within the ANC

In the wake of her discussions with Mposho, Ginwala became active within the ANC on the question of gender justice and women's equality. Her focus was on getting the organisation to equate racism with sexism. "The concepts of anti-racism and anti-sexism are equally important to me," she says. "Racism and sexism are both structured forms of oppression which have been integrated into society and which must be eradicated, not reformed."

By the mid-1980s, Ginwala and women colleagues with the ANC were seeing concrete results. At the Second United Nations World Conference on Women, held in Nairobi in 1985, Oliver Tambo of the ANC made a joint declaration with Sam Nujoma, leader of the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). The two leaders pledged before the world assembly that they would not consider the Namibian and South African liberation struggles complete until the women of both countries were liberated. "We could now call the ANC to account," comments Ginwala with a hint of pride visible. "We could say, 'Now, redeem your pledge'."

It was at Nairobi, too, that Ginwala became conscious of the contradictions within the United Nations system. "You had a lot of delegations led by Mrs Head of State," she recalls. "But as the groups got smaller and smaller, you saw more and more men. Countries fielded men in all the important debates." The only real exception was the ANC delegation. "To my great pride, the only all-woman delegation was the ANC one."

For Ginwala, the demonstration of male power at Nairobi was instructive. "When it came to the crunch, there were very few delegations where the women had the power." She began to notice certain parallels within the comparatively enlightened ANC, particularly during meetings: "You'd be there and you would eventually force yourself to intervene in the sense that the chair would finally recognise you. When you stopped, the debate just went on as if you hadn't said a word. Or you would say something and nobody would pay attention. An hour or two later, a man would say the same thing and suddenly everybody would see the point."

At Nairobi, the South African women in exile established strong links with women from other developing countries. In the conference, they got together and pushed for gender rights to be seen as political and economic issues, not simply as social issues. This placed them in opposition to the US lobbying effort. "We said again and again that social and economic conditions are political issues," remembers Ginwala. "We also argued that the Conference marked a shift in international feminism. The battle for equality was not a battle against men; it was part of a social shift that was necessary."

The Women's National Coalition

When Ginwala and her fellow ANC exiles began returning to South Africa from 1990 onwards, they found a women's movement that was vibrant if embryonic. The movement was largely confined to supporters of the anti-apartheid struggle who had for many years been influenced by ideas and movements from outside the country. Its adherents included women workers in trade unions, students and political activists.

The two strands – the returning exiles and the South Africa-based women's movement – began working together to form one movement out of two. This involved disbanding anti-apartheid organisations which had been formed during the period in which the ANC was banned. And ANC structures such as the Women's League and the Youth League had to be re-rooted in the country.

This period saw the ANC and the struggle against apartheid move away from opposition politics to negotiations for a transfer of power. The challenge of public office drew closer. It was in this new context that the Women's National Coalition was born in 1992. This brought together women from different political parties and different sections of civil society, cutting right across racial, ethnic, religious and other divides.

Ginwala, who was deeply involved in the formation of the coalition and was its convenor until her appointment as Speaker of the National Assembly, views it as an attempt to ensure "that women were part of the process of bringing change to our country and that women would benefit from the process." More specifically, the coalition was established to draw up a women's Charter for incorporation in the constitution.

In the process of preparing what became the Women's Charter for Effective Equality, the coalition conducted research that put it in contact with more than one million women. This was all the more impressive, Ginwala reminds us, in view of its small budget. Its spirited team of women researchers provided a richly detailed picture of South African women and their economic and social status. This research was put to use in the design of a Women's Empowerment Policy within the framework of the

Reconstruction and Development Programme.

Ginwala, who stepped down as convenor of the coalition just before she was appointed Parliamentary Speaker, believes it has lost momentum in the period since the April 1994 Elections. She is particularly critical of the coalition's decision that no MPs could hold executive positions. "The coalition took a decision to cut women MPs adrift," she says. "They're out on a limb. This has created tension between the coalition – which many believed was the embryo of a South African women's movement – and women in Parliament. Women MPs have got to be rooted in the women's movement. They must constantly be reminded by women that their job is to help remove the structured obstacles which they themselves have overcome."

Affirmative Action for South African Women

Ginwala, a strong advocate of affirmative action for women, played an active role in efforts within the ANC to secure a one third quota for women on party lists. A resolution proposing that one in three of those on the ANC's lists must be women was put forward at the organisation"s first national conference within South Africa in 1992. Debate was fierce, with many opposed to the idea.

"It was a problem to push through the quotas," recalls Ginwala. "But I blame us – the exiles. We came into the country and took a decision on a quota and the Women's League did nothing about it. They did not produce a single leaflet explaining the quota." But depite this, the resolution went through.

The battleground then moved to the multiparty negotiations known as CODESA, or the Convention for a Democratic South Africa. During the first stage of the negotiations, no women sat on the delegations of any of the parties at the talks, although a gender advisory committee sat at the talks to appraise various constitutional proposals from a gender audit point of view. Women were far from satisfied, and it fell to Ginwala to intervene. "I made the point that women were not only the majority of the population, they were the majority of voters, too. If parties wanted to win elections they had to offer women something."

At about this point, the breakthrough came. It was decided that the delegations of all parties to the talks would consist of two members: one male and one female.

For many of the women who sat on the delegations, it was like being thrown into a choppy if not turbulent sea and told to swim. "Most of the women did not intervene" remembers Ginwala. "It was very difficult, even for the most articulate of women. You would be sitting next to probably the most powerful leader in your party." But as the party realised the great advantage of having two negotiators instead of one, the situation began to change. "They began to change the women on the delegations to bring

in people who were able to contribute. By the end of the multiparty talks, you had women intervening on all kinds of issues."

Since becoming Speaker in 1994, Ginwala has striven to remove the obstacles in the path of women Parliamentarians. As she notes, "Most of our national institutions are fashioned to suit men. And they are fashioned on the assumption that outside of that situation there is a world in which there is someone who will take care of a whole range of things called the domestic sphere."

At the level of physical amenities, she has been instrumental in starting a creche within Parliament and in getting more toilets for women. She has explored the possibility of changing Parliament's working hours to suit women with family responsibilities better. She has also challenged the long-established geographical split within the Government of South Africa that locates the executive branch of Government in Pretoria and the legislature a thousand kilometres away in Cape Town. This, she points out, imposes a taxing dual existence on women ministers and deputy ministers, especially those with young children.

Ginwala played a key role in getting the Parliamentary Women's Group off the ground. It was at her initiative that a Parliamentary Committee on the Quality of Life and Status of Women was constituted. A strong advocate of opening up Parliament and the corridors of power to ordinary people, she has established the post of Parliamentary Liaison Officer and she consistently makes herself available to groups of students and other visitors to Parliament.

Ginwala is widely known and respected outside South Africa. Her years in exile saw her lecture at universities and institutions in a number of countries. She participated in international conferences on South Africa held under UN auspices, and she also attended major fora on conflict resolution, women, development and technology transfer. She was one of fourteen international experts invited to advise the Director-General of UNESCO on the agency's programme on peace and conflict resolution.

Ginwala has been named by a US-based women's lobby group as a potential candidate for the post of Secretary General of the United Nations.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Ginwala is a strong advocate of affirmative action to get women into positions of political responsibility. As we have seen, she played a central role in efforts within the ANC to establish a quota for women on party lists. Today, she advocates filling any further Cabinet vacancies with female appointees.

Looking back on a life of networking, she is clear that women should work across party lines to further common objectives. Strong links should be created, she says, between women in office and those in civil society.

And women should consciously foster an international perspective, building networks with activists in other lands.

The qualities she believes women in politics need to develop include assertiveness and the boldness to tackle leadership structures. Women, too, should always try to "marry theory and practice, so that decisions are firmly grounded and well conceived and that slogans don't prevail."

It is essential, she argues, to tackle in a very practical way the obstructions women in political office confront. Efforts such as lobbying for a change in Parliament's working hours or to get creche facilities are of crucial importance. Otherwise, "women go into an institution and they can't function and people say, "You see, they were tokens." But they can't function not because of their innate capacity but because that institution was never designed for women."

Most important of all, suggests Ginwala, women in politics must work to change the basic attitudes of the men with whom they work and struggle. Within her own lifetime, she has seen a sea-change in the attitude of her male ANC comrades. For the leadership, she says, "there is no question of saying, "Ah, she's just a woman," and paying no attention." And change has come, too, at the level of ordinary party workers: "Men in the ANC have begun to know how to treat women as cadres. There is a consciousness about including women. If you set up a group and there are no women in it, somebody will say, "Hang on, there are no women." And it won't only be the women who say it."

DR NKOSAZANA ZUMA

ANC Activist and Leader
Minister of Health

When Nkosozana Zuma was a young trainee doctor in the South Africa of the 1970s, one particular encounter brought home to her the interconnectedness of racial and gender oppression under the apartheid regime.

One day, she was assisting in surgery at the King Edward VIII Hospital in Durban when a pregnant and very sick woman was wheeled in. The woman had breast cancer and the pregnancy was taking its toll, but she would not permit an abortion. She desperately needed a son, she said, to take care of her daughters. Without a brother, the girls would become dependent on the extended family who would not be able to provide for them. In the woman's experience, it was very difficult to live without a man, to sign things and to help navigate a system that was vicious to black people and doubly so to black women.

The woman went through with the pregnancy and had a son. She died a year or two later. Zuma, deeply moved by her plight, found herself beginning to relate to the struggles of women. Her new consciousness would

follow her abroad into exile and, years later, on her return to South Africa and subsequent appointment as the newly democratic country's Health Minister, it would continue to shape her vision.

Early Life and Entry into Politics

Nkosazana Zuma was born in 1949 into a politically conscious family and one to which racial and gender discrimination were anathema. Unusually for a black woman in South Africa at that time, she completed high school and went on to read for a science degree at the University of Zululand – one of the few universities for blacks in the country. She went on to enrol for a medical degree at the University of Natal, a white institution which, in the 1970s, opened its doors to a limited number of black students.

South Africa's university campuses were in the 1970s greenhouses of anti-apartheid political struggle. At the University of Natal, Zuma joined the growing ranks of young activists led by black consciousness leader Steve Biko, with whom she studied. Biko was later to be tortured to death in apartheid prison cells.

Zuma became involved in underground political work for the ANC. Eventually this caught up with her and she was forced to flee the country. She went to the United Kingdom, where she completed her medical degree at Bristol while continuing her work for the anti-apartheid movement.

Exile

After she completed her medical studies, Zuma was sent by the ANC to Swaziland, on the borders of South Africa. Her job at the biggest hospital in the country provided a cover for her to continue with her underground political work, which took her to Botswana, Tanzania, Lesotho and other African countries.

At this point in her life, Zuma recalls, she regarded herself as "an activist within the broader struggle. Women's consciousness came later." She worked with the women's section of the ANC (later to become the ANC's Women's League) but did not "package" her political work "into anti-apartheid and women's work."

The ANC's women's section came to be influenced by the growth of women's consciousness internationally and by developments back home in South Africa, where women were making their voices heard in protests against the pass laws, in boycotts and in other forms of struggle. As the organisation came to reappraise its gender politics, women members found Oliver Tambo, then ANC President, a firm proponent of women's rights and equality. "No nation can boast of being free until its women are free," Zuma remembers him saying. "It is the duty of every member of the ANC to ensure this."

Zuma, who headed the ANC's health committee, chose maternal and child health as her area of specialisation and focus. In 1986 she obtained

a diploma in tropical child health from the School of Tropical Medicine at the University of Liverpool.

Return to South Africa

When she returned from exile in 1990, Zuma was stunned by the level of sexism she encountered: she could not get a bank. She asked them, "Who do you think is going to pay?" she remembers. "Here I was, a grey-haired professional woman, and I couldn't do the things I wanted to do."

Before the start of political negotiations, Zuma headed one of the ANC's provincial health committees. She was also leader in Natal of the Women's Alliance, which for the first time in South Africa's history brought together women from across the political, ethnic and racial spectrum.

She actively pursued the organisation of women across racial and political lines during the arduous political negotiations that preceded South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994. She remembers early pictures of the talks showing "row upon row of men (black and white) in black or grey suits with only one or two women dotted in between."

Zuma was among the group of women which successfully lobbied for women to be included in every single delegation at the talks. She also sat on a gender advisory committee which checked every clause of the draft constitution to ensure that it would advance women's equality.

Rise to the Top

When President Mandela came to select his Cabinet in May 1994, Zuma was the natural choice to head the Health Ministry. During the first weeks of the new administration, the Minister of Health signalled her intention to bring about profound changes to the health system.

One of her first steps was to introduce stringent new anti-smoking regulations, to the dismay of the powerful tobacco industry. She then announced free health care for pregnant women and children under the age of six in families without access to health insurance.

Since taking office, Zuma has also restructured the health budget so as to provide health care to areas which previously had none. Her Ministry has built or refurbished hundreds of primary health care clinics. And efforts have been made to improve the situation of doctors in the state sector. Foreign doctors have been brought in to help plug serious staffing gaps, while Zuma has successfully pressurised the Cabinet into substantially raising doctors' salaries and paying them overtime.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Like her fellow ANC activist, Frene Ginwala, Zuma is a staunch supporter of the ANC's one third quota for women on its electoral lists. She is clear that without it women like her might never have got into parliament. "I

have no hesitation in saying that whether I came through the quota or not, I am capable," she adds.

Zuma has made it a priority to appoint women to top positions within her Ministry. "It's not enough to say 'I've made it' and leave it at that," she says. When she took over as minister, white males made up 99 per cent of its management. Under an agreement made between the ANC and the outgoing white minority government, civil servants were guaranteed job security for five years. Despite this, Zuma has been able to effect gender-related changes in top management – 30 per cent of the department's directors are now women.

To her male Cabinet colleagues who claim there are just not enough suitable women around, Zuma replies, "If you look, you will find. Women must be in decision-making positions; they must not just be making tea and cleaning."

Her years as part of a great democratic movement of national liberation have made Zuma very much a team player. This history leads her to urge women in politics to see themselves as part of a larger struggle. And it infuses her advice to young women hoping to enter government. "Organise!" she tells them. "Belong! For as an individual you can only achieve a limited amount."

SHEILA CAMERER

National Party Spokesperson on Justice and the Status of Women
Member of Parliament
Former Deputy Minister of Justice

Sheila Camerer, a long-standing Member of Parliament for the National Party and a Deputy Minister during the period of transition to democracy, is regarded as one of South Africa's most dynamic woman politicians outside the ANC. Her achievement has been to rise to the top of a party that, for much of its history, has had no serious space for women. Between 1948, when it came to power, and 1989, the National Party did not appoint a single woman to any of its successive cabinets. When it eventually gave up power, only eight of its 308 MPs were women.

In the apartheid years, Camerer recalls, "parliament was run by men for men. There were no spouses' galleries, there were wives' galleries. To reach the showers, women members had to walk past the men's urinals. And in the chamber, every time a man spoke after one of the handful of women, he would say how pleasant it was to speak after such a charming lady! The Speaker used to send little notes saying, "I like your dress, you're wearing a smart suit today."

But times, believes Camerer, have now changed – even within the conservative National Party. "Relative to what there was," she says, "there

has been a burgeoning of commitment and realisation that women are definitely on the agenda."

Early Years and Entry into Politics

Sheila Camerer was born in Cape Town. Her father was a long-serving MP for the United Party, and for this reason her family was based in both Johannesburg and Cape Town. She attended Pretoria High School for Girls and in 1964 obtained a law degree from the University of Cape Town.

During her student days, Camerer was not politically active. "I think my involvement amounted to going out with the Chairman of the Progressive Party at the time," she recalls. "I remember carrying a placard down Adderley Street in Cape Town once."

Camerer married a businessman who developed an interest in politics. It was as a mother with young children and as a lawyer seeking to run a legal practice that she first became actively involved in political campaigning. "The National Party was looking for a candidate to contest a marginal council ward, and I was sort of talked into it." The party, she says, did field some candidates at that stage, but this was no sign of commitment to women's equality. "Women were usually 'victim candidates'. I don't think they expected me to win the seat, but I did. And I've been involved ever since."

Rise to the Top

When Camerer was first elected to Parliament, she was one of just a handful of women members, and had to face the condescension and patronising attitudes of the conservative male majority. Change came only in the late 1980s, when Dr Rina Venter was appointed Minister of Health. In 1993, Camerer became the first woman in the National Party to be appointed a Deputy Minister when she entered the Justice Ministry. She served until the installation of the new government in 1994.

She became Deputy Minister of Justice again for a few months under the Government of National Unity arrangements, but gave up this post when the National Party withdrew from the Government of National Unity in March 1996. She is now the party's spokesperson not only on justice but also on women's affairs, the latter a newly created post.

Perspective on Women in Politics

The National Party, says Camerer, is still ambivalent towards affirmative action for women in politics but is "coming round to" the idea that quotas are an important way of getting women to test the political waters. Her own reviews reflect something of this ambivalence. "The problem with quotas," she argues, "is that they tend to seal participation at the set quota." She points out, however, that even the German Christian

Democratic Party, with which the National Party has close links, has now adopted the quota system it used to speak disparagingly of.

Networking at home and abroad seems to have brought Camerer closer to a position of support for quotas. "I have done a lot of trips abroad talking to other women politicians," she notes. "All of them swear that the only thing that gives women that lift to a level where they can compete with men is quotas to bump up women's representation. That, and winning women's votes, of course."

Camerer highlights the importance to political women of a networking strategy. The National Party is a participant in the Parliamentary Women's Group established since the 1994 elections. Camerer, who sits on the group's Steering Committee, recognises the inherent difficulties of establishing a multiparty political caucus of this kind but regards the experiment as important. There remain, she says, elements of male "clubbiness" about Parliament in a situation where the power structures are still male dominated.

She believes women hoping to enter politics should first gain experience in local government, a "university" for politics where they can learn the ropes. "It really does help you to see what works and what doesn't and to see how committees operate – because a lot of work in Parliament is done in Committees. Experience of working in NGOs is also helpful.

Camerer advises aspiring women politicians not to "get stuck on a single issue." She says this was one of the first lessons she learnt on entering parliament: "I realised the importance of getting the air of the house and never becoming a single-issue person, because you'll just switch them off. Try to say something new and interesting. You should try to be reported because then they must sit up and take notice."

In recent years, the National Party has established a Women's Caucus which includes male MPs. Camerer, a strong supporter of the initiative, points out that this provides a forum in which party policy on gender issues can be thrashed out. But it is not something which sits easily with all her party colleagues. "A large number of National Party MPs are white, Afrikaans-speaking men who have a very Calvinistic background. I think this change of attitude has been quite difficult for some of them and I don't think all of them have made it entirely."

UGANDA

Uganda, a landlocked, equatorially located Eastern African nation, gained its independence from British rule in 1962. For centuries prior to colonial conquest, its territory had been a meeting place of different peoples; long settled by Bantu speaking peoples, it saw the arrival of Nilo-Hamitic groups in the seventeenth century and of Arab mercantile settlers in the mid-nineteenth century. British explorers, the first Europeans to reach the area, crossed the Buganda kingdom in the 1860s. For a while British jostled with German colonialism for control of the territory, a contest eventually won by the British, who formally declared it a crown protectorate in 1894.

Not long after winning independence in 1962, Uganda entered a period of instability and by 1971 was under the brutal military rule of Major General Idi Amin Dada. Amin was deposed in 1979 and in 1980 Milton Obote, who had ruled the country from 1966-1971, was elected President. He was again ousted by a military coup in 1985, but the new army rulers were in their turn pushed out by the National Resistance Movement (NRM), led by Yoweri Museveni. The NRM leader, inaugurated as President of Uganda in January 1986, continues to rule the country.

Since the ascendancy of Museveni and the NRM in the mid-1980s, Uganda has followed a form of government in which candidates stand for election as individuals rather than as representatives of political parties. The President is assisted by a Prime Minister and a Cabinet composed of representatives of various political parties; the latter continue to exist, but campaigning and other overt, organised forms of party political activity are banned. The country's legislative body, the National Resistance Council, comprises 216 elected and 67 presidentially appointed members.

A new constitution, drafted by an elected Constituent Assembly, was promulgated in October 1995. This ratified the country's system of no-party politics, and pledged to protect basic human rights, including the rights of women. The Government undertook to hold elections within nine months of the date of promulgation, and Uganda's first direct Presidential Elections took place in May 1996. The result was a landslide victory for Yoweri Museveni, who won 74.2 per cent of the national vote. The President consolidated his position in Parliamentary Elections held in June 1996, when his supporters won a convincing majority in the new National Assembly.

The Ugandan Government has placed considerable emphasis on decentralisation. Today, the country is divided into 39 Administrative Units or Districts, each headed by a District Resistance Chairman. Districts are in turn divided, under the Resistance Council system, into county, sub-county, parish and village units.

Women In Politics

In the early years of independence, very few women in Uganda occupied positions of political leadership. Recent years have seen efforts, including government initiatives, to redress this situation.

The drafting of the country's new constitution took place in a context of raised awareness of gender justice. Women delegates to the constituent assembly formed a Women's Caucus, headed by Winnie Byanyima, one of Africa's few women aeronautical engineers. This initiated a series of gender dialogues with male delegates in a bid to garner support for issues of concern to women. Among the achievements of the caucus was the writing of the Constitution in gender neutral language; explicit provisions for equality of men and women before the law; an Equal Opportunities Commission; and affirmative action provisions.

Under the new constitution, 30 per cent of representatives on all statutory bodies must be women. One post of Secretary is reserved for women on all nine-member Resistance Council Commitees from the national to the district level. Every district, too, is obliged to send a female representative to Parliament, which guarantees women a minimum of 39 seats, roughly 14 per cent of the total.

In addition to the 39 women who entered Parliament via this route in the 1996 elections, two women came in as nominees from other interest groups (the army and the disabled) and eight women won seats by contesting elections. This has raised the number of women legislators to 49 out of a total membership of 284, or 17.3 per cent. They are given practical support by a non-governmental organisation, the Forum for Women in Democracy, set up by the Women's Caucus after the dissolution of the constituent assembly. The forum offers woman legislators induction courses, support in running workshops for their constituents, and access to national and regional networking.

Today, Uganda has a woman Vice-President, Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, and several women Ministers of State handling portfolios such as Agriculture, and Gender and Community Development. The Ministry of Gender and Community Development has organised training sessions where women politicians from other countries have shared their experiences with their Ugandan counterparts.

Current Government policy is directed at strengthening the position of women in the economy by raising the value and productivity of their labour and giving them access to, and control over, productive resources such as land, capital, credit, education and information.

SPECIOSA KAZIBWE

Vice-President and Minister of Agriculture
Former Minister of Gender and Community Development
Former Minister for Women in Development, Culture and Youth
Former Deputy Minister of Industry and Technology

Speciosa Kazibwe, Uganda's first woman Vice-President and Africa's highest ranking woman politician, remembers her first election attempt well. As a first year medical student at the University of Makerere in the early 1970s, she stood for election as hall chairperson, but was turned down because of her "fresher" (newcomer) status. Undaunted, she stood again the following year – and won.

"I know that many women, when they try the first time and don't make it, give up," she says, looking back on the experience. "They think people don't like them; that they are not good enough. But I think it is very good to keep on trying and face the challenge."

Early Life

Speciosa Kazibwe was born in 1955 in a region of Uganda near Lake Kyoga. She was the eldest of nine children and the only girl in the family. Her father, who worked for the local branch of the post office, appreciated the value of education and had no prejudices about sending his daughter to school.

At a time when pre-school facilities were rare in Uganda, Kazibwe was fortunate enough to attend a nursery school with sporting and recreational facilities near her father's place of work. She then moved on to a girls' primary school a two-and-a-half mile walk from her home. The distance to be walked subsequently rose to four miles when her father was transferred to another work place. "This experience," says Kazibwe, "gave me endurance and a determination to achieve."

In 1967, she gained high marks in her primary school leaving certificate and was enrolled at Mount St Mary's College, Namagunga, one of the best girls' high schools in the country. Here, she acted as school librarian, a responsibility which helped nurture her interest in reading and acquiring knowledge. "Fellow students used to call me a walking encyclopaedia," she recalls with a chuckle. "I was never allowed to participate in the school quiz, because every time I did, my class would win." Instead, she was given the job of setting the questions.

At high school, Kazibwe served as a prefect and as a member of the school council. She was an enthusastic participant in singing, drama and dancing, pursuits that helped to build her confidence in front of audiences and her communication skills. She also involved herself in voluntary work on behalf of the poor, sick, disabled and elderly.

After completing high school, she moved on to Makerere University, where she read medicine. At that time, Makerere was one of the most renowned universities in Africa. Its hall chairpersons constituted the University Students' Council, and as a member of this, Kazibwe interacted with the university administration, gaining knowledge of management and decision-making as well as of issues relating to discipline and leadership.

Her student days at Makerere coincided with the worst years of repression under the Idi Amin regime. During a demonstration against injustice that subsequently came to be known as "Black Tuesday", a number of students were assaulted and beaten by Amin's security forces, while others were abducted. As a student leader, Kazibwe felt she had to speak out. "We had to stand against all odds to fight for the rights of other people and to speak for them," she says. "You should not back out when things become very hot."

The trainee doctor completed her Master's degree in surgery in 1987. She worked at Mulago Hospital and later at Butabika Hospital for the mentally disturbed. Working among severely disturbed people, she believes, taught her patience and the ability to listen to other people's problems.

Besides her hospital work, Kazibwe involved herself in a number of women's organisations, including the Senior Women Advisory Group on Environment and the Mothers' Union. By this time she had married her engineer husband and was in the process of raising her four children.

Entry into Politics and Rise to the Top

Kazibwe began her political career in the period after the rise to power of Museveni and the National Resistance Movement (NRM). While still a medical practitioner, she participated in her local Resistance Council Committee. In 1988, she was elected to represent her area in the district council of Kampala. The following year, she was elected to Parliament as the woman representative from Kampala district under the Government's Affirmative Action Policy for Women.

In 1989, the year of her arrival in Parliament, Kazibwe was appointed Deputy Minister for Industry and Techology. In 1991, she joined the Cabinet as Minister for Women in Development, Culture and Youth, and in 1994 she was given the additional portfolio of Tourism and Wildlife. The same year, she contested the elections for the Constituent Assembly that was to draw up the country's new Constitution. Opting not to make use of the affirmative action ticket, she stood against six male candidates in the mainstream election, and won.

In November 1994, Kazibwe was appointed national Vice-President and concurrently Minister of Gender and Community Development. Her appointment coincided with the Dakar Regional Conference for African Women being held in preparation for the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women

Enabling Factors

Kazibwe identifies her experience of family life as very important to her subsequent development. Growing up as the eldest child and as a daughter with eight younger brothers, she learnt to interact with men as equals – and to have males subordinate to her. "The feeling of equal status between me and my brothers at home," she says, "prepared me to deal with male counterparts as equals in adult life without suffering from an inferiority complex and without regret at being female. And I didn't harbour stereotyped notions of what women could or could not do."

Perspective on Women in Politics

Kazibwe believes that women in politics need to foster positive attitudes about themselves and the contribution they can make. Having herself always shunned gender stereotypes, she urges women to aim high and to dispel the notion that they should be led and protected by men. "Believe in yourself in order to empower and give confidence to others," she affirms. "Women should offer themselves as leaders. They should make themselves visible and take on the challenges given to them."

As an experienced politician, she highlights the importance of collective responsibilty and of working as a team. "Women need to get out of their cocoons," she says. "They must learn to recruit and draw on other people's resourcefulness and expertise in work." Delegation should be used as a strategy for collective achievement and as a way of helping others identify with the task or challenge in hand.

Women hoping to succeed in politics must be able to deliver, she argues. This demands thorough-going professionalism and attention at all times to performance, since "performance must be the basis for credibility." Broadmindedness and a continuing thirst for knowledge are also important. "When you become a leader you become a jack of all trades," she points out. "You become a fount of knowledge. The culture of reading has helped me to go beyond my medical profession in that I have taken interest in reading about subject matters not related to my profession. And that's a good thing for any politician."

JANAT MUKWAYA

Minister for Gender and Community Development
Former Minister Responsible for the Rehabilitation of the Luwero Triangle

As a child, Janat Mukwaya aspired to become a magistrate. She duly became one, but soon found herself caught up in activity of quite a different type. Her opposition to the regime of Idi Amin led her to take to the bush, where she fought alongside the male guerilllas of the National Resistance Movement (NRM), emerging from the war with the rank of captain.

The experience equipped her with the skill to mobilise and organise people around a common cause. It also awakened her to women's double burden of oppression: political and gender. After the coming to power of the NRM , she put these lessons to work as a cabinet minister handling challenging portfolios and as an elected member of Uganda's Constituent Assembly. She succeeded Speciosa Kazibwe as Minister of Gender and Community Development.

Early Life

Janat Mukwaya was born in 1951 into a family with a tradition of political involvement. Her father was a veteran politician, involved in clan politics and in a nationalist organisation called the Bataka Bu, which agitated against colonialism. Janat was the eldest of nine children: four girls and five boys. As the first born, she was expected to provide a role model for her younger siblings and was therefore encouraged to develop leadership skills at an early age.

Both parents appreciated the value of education. Mukwaya feels a particular debt of gratitude to her mother, a trained midwife, who devoted much of her earnings to paying school fees and buying her children the materials and equipment they needed.

Mukwaya attended nursery school and primary school in her home district of Mukono. She then moved away to boarding school, eventually becoming deputy head girl of Nabisunsa Girls' High School. Life at boarding school helped her to gain independence and maturity. She became an active member of the debating club, building skills in public speaking, reasoning and persuasive argument. On one occasion, she mobilised her fellow students to demonstrate against an American teacher who had called the students "black monkeys." The teacher was eventually deported.

After completing school, Mukwaya obtained a diploma in law and fulfilled her childhood ambition of becoming a magistrate. She developed a particular interest in family law and in issues relating to human rights.

Entry into Politics

As a child, Mukwaya was surrounded by the political talk between her father, his friends and members of the family. These discussions kindled her interest in politics.

By 1980, her interest led her to involve herself in election campaigning for the Democratic Party. The elections were plagued by charges of fraud and the Democratic Party – widely regarded as having won the elections – was not allowed to form a government. Mukwaya recalls the anger she felt not only towards the way the elections had been conducted but also towards the timid reponse of the Democratic Party, which did not protest against the injustice.

Disillusioned, Mukwaya joined the National Resistance Movement and took to the bush to fight the government. She rose to the rank of captain in the guerrilla army.

After the war, she was appointed Director of Women's Affairs at the NRM secretariat. Here, she further developed her skills in organisation, management, planning and setting priorities. In 1990, she went back to study at the University of Makerere, obtaining a degree in political science and sociology in 1993.

The same year, she was one of seven women to contest and win elections for seats in the Constitutent Assembly; like Speciosa Kazibwe, she did not gain her seat under the affirmative action programme. At this time, too, Mukwaya joined the Cabinet as the Minister responsible for the reconstruction of the Luwero Triangle – Uganda's killing fields during the civil war. Her ministerial appointment automatically made her a nominated Member of Parliament.

She contested the elections of June 1996 as an ordinary candidate (i.e., not under the affirmative action programme) and won her seat. She was subsequently appointed Minister for Gender and Community Development, the high-ranking post previously held by Speciosa Kazibwe, who was now Vice-President.

Enabling Factors

Mukwaya identifies her husband as her greatest source of support: "Far from being upset by my achievements," she says, "he has been my companion through all challenges and successes." Her extended family has also been supportive, although she had to work quite hard with her in-laws to help them understand her point of view.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Mukwaya believes that in order to succeed in politics, women must be as organised as possible. While political involvement does reduce the amount of time women can spend with their families, careful planning can mitigate the situation. As she points out, "as a woman, if you are not well organised you can lose your home. This is not only in politics but in any other career."

In general, she suggests, women need to develop the same skills as men in politics. She believes in the closest possible contact with her constituents: "Continual consultations with the people one represents; getting to know and understand their needs and interests; and having a good grasp of locally important issues: these are the key to the success of any politician." Then come the skills of mobilising people, along with organising, setting priorities and allocating resources. It is also important, she says, to learn how to delegate. And everyone who wants to succeed in politics must keep themselves conversant with topical issues, nationally and glob-

ally, and be able to communicate their knowledge to people in a language they can understand.

At the personal level, women in politics – in common with their male colleagues – should make it a point to be open, honest and consistent. "Declare your intentions – and do not make false promises," she advises.

RHODA KALEMA

Former Deputy Minister of Public Service and Cabinet Affairs
Former Deputy Minister of Culture and Community Development
Former Member of Parliament

Rhoda Kalema has her own claim to history making. Back in the colonial Uganda of the 1940s, when clerical work was a male preserve, she was, she thinks, the first woman in the country to "try a typewriter". From then on she made it a point to challenge stereotypes. This eventually led her into politics, where she encountered the assumption that only a man could effectively deliver the goods. "In my constituency," she recalls, "I'd be known as 'our man.' People would say, 'you are a woman and a half.' Children would call me 'our man', which tells us that people believe that it's a man who can be effective in administering politics."

Early Life

Rhoda Kalema was born in 1930 into a distinguished political family. Her father was the Katikiro (Prime Minister) of Buganda, and she grew up amid affluence and political influence. For her primary schooling she attended King's College, Budo, a prestigious boys' school which had just become co-educational. The girls, she remembers, were acutely aware that they were in a "boys' school", because there were so few of them. But the experience helped build their confidence and taught them to deal with the boys as equals.

In 1945, Kalema enrolled at a commercial college where she studied typing, stenography, shorthand and office administration. After completing her course in 1947, she got a job at Gayaza High School, where she worked as a secretary and bursar. In 1950, she married a teacher who was based in Budo and began teaching secretarial courses on a part-time basis.

In the mid 1950s, she travelled to the United Kingdom to join her husband, who was studying for a degree. She enrolled in an adult education course at the University of Edinburgh and went on to study social work.

On her return to Uganda, Kalema worked as an officer in charge of probation and welfare in what was then the Ministry of Culture and Community Development. She also became involved in the women's movement. By 1958, she was a member of the Uganda Council of Women and was asked to be Secretary of the Sub-committee investigating the

status of women.

One of the tasks handled by the Sub-committee was educating men on the need to make wills. At this time, many widows were being deprived of their possessions by their husbands' families. With the support of the then Prime Minister, Ben Kiwanuka, a commission to look at marriage issues was instituted and a report compiled. This train of events culminated in a national conference on the rights of women in 1960.

In 1966, Kalema retired from the civil service on medical grounds.

Entry into Politics

In the early 1960s, Kalema's husband was actively involved in politics. He became an MP in the government set up immediately after independence in October 1962. But it was not until after the overthrow of the Idi Amin regime at the end of the 1970s that Kalema herself entered the political arena.

In 1979, she joined Parliament as a member of the National Consultative Council, representing Kampala district. She was the only woman member on the Consultative Committee and gained invaluable experience by being on it. In the period 1979-1980, she also served as Deputy Minister of Culture and Community Development.

When the second Milton Obote administration turned sour, Kalema joined the NRM. She contested the 1989 elections as the National Resistance Council representative for Kiboga, and won. From 1989 to 1991, she served as Deputy Minister of Public Service and Cabinet Affairs. She later contested the election to the Constituent Assembly, and was one of a handful of women to win their seats in direct competition with men rather than through affirmative action.

Enabling Factors

Kalema highlights the support she won from her husband. "He encouraged me to pursue further studies and to stay a year longer than he did at the University of Edinburgh so that I could finish my course," she says.

Another factor which helped shape her success in politics was the fact that her children were grown up by the time she started pursuing a political career.

Perspective on Women in Politics

Kalema believes that women in politics must be bold, assertive and willing to take on challenges. In fact, she says, such attitudes are the key to women gaining acceptance: "If a woman has confidence and she is determined to deliver and not just to talk, she will be accepted. I think that is how they accepted me."

At the level of practice, women must be taught basic skills in such areas as organisation, management, public speaking and book-keeping. Educated

women, she argues, have a special responsibility to appreciate the needs of other women and take concrete steps to help them up the ladder. "Educated women must realise that they are educated to raise others," she affirms, pointing out that her own circumstances were such that she could have led a comfortable life without exerting herself.

Conclusion

This study has explored the individual experiences of 33 women, drawn from eleven Commonwealth countries, who have succeeded in the political arena. Their case histories are varied, reflecting the specificities of their particular societies and national historical experience.

Some of the women in the study belong to affluent, developed societies which never had to battle colonial exploitation; others come from lands that had to wage long, painful struggles for freedom and independence. For some, success in politics has come against a backdrop of kaleidoscopic social and ethnic diversity; for others, there has been religious fundamentalism to contend with and surmount. In some cases, the battle for basic democratic rights such as universal suffrage and equality before the law was fought and won before our women politicians came on to the scene; in others, the women of our study found themselves makers of history, participating in momentous events and helping to shape the future in a very direct way.

Given this diversity of background and experience, what conclusions can we draw from these individual stories? What do the women of the study have to tell us about the challenge, at the end of the twentieth century and the start of the new millennium, of getting women into political life in numbers that embody fairness and equality? Is there a sense in which their experiences can be generalised? Can specific approaches, strategies and agendas of change be extracted from their stories and presented as having broader, or even universal, application?

Two levels of analysis suggest themselves as we attempt to answer these questions. The first pertains to the level of the individual narratives. What factors made it possible for these particular women to enter politics, sustain their political careers and rise to positions of responsibility, prominence and leadership? Examples of the factors likely to have played a role include family background; level of education; professional status; quality of family support; and personal skills, qualities and abilities. We should also be able to identify greater societal enabling factors, such as a political context of national liberation or struggle against racist oppression, or a political environment in which growing emphasis is placed on women's equality. We can, in addition, try to identify specific policies which worked to the benefit of the women politicians of this study.

Having tackled the question of how these particular individuals have been able to perform so successfully, we can then turn to the second level of analysis, which involves a shift from the particular to the general. What do these stories have to tell us about the way forward for women in a general sense? Are there certain broad conclusions we can reach – in terms, say, of policy prescriptions and political strategies? What, for example, do the case studies tell us about the relevance and importance (or otherwise) of affirmative action programmes? What should governments, not to men-

tion political parties, be doing? And what should be the priorities of the wider women's movement?

Let us look in turn at these two levels of analysis: the particular experiences outlined in our 33 case studies, and the general lessons which can be drawn from those experiences.

I. THE PARTICULAR EXPERIENCES

The case histories presented in this study reveal the variety of factors that, in different combinations and with differing degrees of emphasis, played an enabling role in the political careers of these particular women. Here, an attempt is made to identify the factors which surface most regularly in the narratives. Some of these, for example, equality within the marital and family relationship or the support provided by a gender sensitive political party, are recognised by the women themselves to be important. Other factors, such as the existence of larger societal processes of change, can be seen to contribute to the framework or context in which a woman has been able to rise politically.

I.1 Family Background

For many of the women in the study, family background and circumstances can be seen to have had a direct bearing on their entry into politics and pursuit of public office.

In some cases, families had a tradition of political involvement. Syeda Begum Sajeda Chowdhury grew up amid the ballads and stories of undivided India's freedom movement, her imagination stirred by a politically conscious father who taught her to oppose oppressive government. In Dominica, Eugenia Charles was raised in a politicised family milieu, as was Rafidah Aziz in Malaysia. For Rhoda Kalema in Uganda, her childhood was shaped by the fact that her father was a prominent political figure. The father of Annette Georges in Seychelles was, also, a significant political player who for a while served as a minister. And Cheryl Kernot, born into an Australian working class family, had a grandfather who was a Labour Party organiser. For some of the women profiled here, then, politics was in the air from the very beginning of their lives.

In socio-economic or class terms, their families show considerable variation. Some of the women grew up amid relative affluence: examples include Margaret Alva in India and Sheila Camerer in white supremacist South Africa. For Danielle Jorre de St Jorre in Seychelles, family circumstances enabled her to study abroad. But for other women, childhood was a time of hardship. In Uganda, Speciosa Kazibwe was part of a large family whose principal breadwinner, her father, was a postal worker. Josephine Abaijah in Papua New Guinea also grew up in a large working-class family. What does appear to unite these less

advantaged families is the importance they attached to getting girls educated: we shall explore this further in the next section.

Not everyone, however, grew up in a nurturing family environment. For Lois O'Donoghue, an Australian Aboriginal, there was hardly any family at all. Separated from her mother as a toddler and never to meet her father, Lois was raised in institutions that sought to cut her off from her origins and roots. For her, the impetus to become politically active would come from other sources.

I.2 Educational Level

A high level of educational attainment characterises most of the women in the study, suggesting that access to secondary and higher education was an important enabling factor in their subsequent political careers. Almost all the women profiled here are graduates, with some holding higher degrees.

In many cases, a woman's access to education was integral to her affluent or middle-class roots and upbringing. In India, there was nothing unusual about Margaret Alva, Sushma Swaraj and Promila Dandavate going to college; all three came from relatively well-to-do families with a tradition of educational achievement – even if in Promila Dandavate's case the parental expectation was of a daughter simply marrying and settling down.

In some instances, however, the atmosphere was hardly congenial to women's educational progress. All three political leaders from Papua New Guinea profiled here had to struggle for schooling and qualifications in a milieu that did not identify the education of girls as a priority. In Australia, Lois O'Donoghue had to battle against racial prejudice and the assumption that, as an Aboriginal, she was "fit" only for domestic work.

Sometimes, a girl from a relatively disadvantaged background was encouraged to pursue her studies by socially enlightened parents. Speciosa Kazibwe in Uganda recalls that her father, a rural postal worker, appreciated the value of education and had no prejudice against sending his daughter to school. Janat Mukwaya, also from Uganda, feels a strong debt of gratitude to her mother, a midwife, who made her children's schooling a priority and devoted much of her earnings to their educational needs.

I.3 Professional Status

In line with their high level of educational attainment, most of the women in this study have a professional status outside their political careers. Among the professions, lawyers and teachers predominate. Examples of qualified lawyers include Margaret Alva and Sushma Swaraj in India, Joyce Newman in Australia, Eugenia Charles in Dominica, Sheila Camerer in South Africa and Janat Mukwaya in Uganda. The teachers portrayed here cover every part of the educational spectrum, from schoolteachers such

as Enny Moaitz in Papua New Guinea and Urmia Johnson in Guyana to university lecturers such as Rafidah Aziz, the Malaysian economics professor who so suddenly found herself in Parliament.

Other than teachers and lawyers, there are to be found in this study doctors, nurses, and social workers. In a number of cases, women improved their professional status after returning to higher education as adults; an example is Rhoda Kalema in Uganda, who began her career as a secretarial worker and stenographer but who later studied adult education and social work at Edinburgh University.

I.4 Choice of Spouse/Partner

Most of the women in the study identified a supportive attitude on the part of their spouse or partner as a significant element in their political success. While the degree of support a woman may have received is difficult to measure, and while we need to allow for the possibility that in some cases acknowledging the support of a spouse is an automatic reaction, the choice of marital or life partner does seem to be important for a woman politician.

In some cases, marriage brought a woman into a political partnership. The most striking example in the study is that of Janet Jagan, whose marriage to Cheddi Jagan in Guyana not only carried her to a distant land, but also propelled her into a life of political activism. Another significant and productive political partnership is that between Promila Dandavate and her husband, Madhu Dandavate, in India.

Such partnerships may, however, attract questions and even controversy, particularly where a woman is seen to "inherit" high office from her husband. While Janet Jagan can be seen to have a political identity and a historical contribution all her own, independent of her late husband, her decision to run for the presidency has been seen by some to contain dynastic elements. Similar debate might attach to the case of Viola Burnham, who before her marriage to Forbes Burnham was not politically active, but who later became her country's Vice-President and deputy Prime Minister.

The more general experience traced in this study has been of husbands or partners actively backing women's decisions to become politically active. In Bangladesh, Syeda Begum Sajeda Chowdhury was encouraged by her husband and his circle of friends to join the Awami League. In the case of Margaret Alva in neighbouring India, husband and father-in-law combined forces to persuade her to enter politics.

But perhaps even more important than this support at the outset has been the willingness of many life partners to provide continuing support, financial, emotional and in the sense of sharing childrearing and domestic responsibilities. For Kee Phaik Cheen in Malaysia, the readiness of her husband to underwrite her political career has made a world of difference.

In Canada, Sheila Finestone pays tribute to her supportive spouse, while Thérèse Lavoie-Roux acknowledges the importance to her career of a husband who was willing to act as "mother and father" to their young family.

I.5 Positive Personal Qualities

Beyond family circumstances, socio-economic background, educational attainment, professional status, and choice of life partner, the personal qualities of individual women emerge as important factors in a successful political career. All the women profiled here reveal themselves as purposeful and determined. In some cases, these qualities have enabled women to combat and overcome extremely adverse circumstances: an example is Lois O'Donoghue, the Aboriginal woman from the Australian outback. Strong personality traits are also apparent in Frene Ginwala, the South African ANC activist whose persistence has played a key role in sensitising the ANC leadership and cadres to the centrality of gender justice.

I.6 Historical Context and Greater Societal Forces

For many of the women in this study, their political ascent has taken place in the context of larger, societal processes of change. It cannot, therefore, be accounted for purely in terms of their individual experience and circumstances.

For Frene Ginwala and Nkosazana Zuma in South Africa, political high office has come about as the result of their participation in the front ranks of the struggle against apartheid. They are part of a powerful liberation movement that embraces political emancipation, socio-economic change and the outlawing of inequalities, including discrimination against women. It is through this movement that their energies and talents have been recognised, mobilised and actualised.

In the case of Lois O'Donoghue and Ethel Blondin-Andrew, the struggle of aboriginal peoples for equality and justice has formed the context of their political rise. For Motia Chowdhury, Bangladesh's "daughter of fire", becoming politically involved was inseparable from her country's national liberation struggle. In India, Promila Dandvate is part of a larger battle against oppressive survivals from the past that continue to bear down upon women and to deny them their equal place in society. Janet Jagan in Guyana was drawn into politics through her trade union activity.

More generally, the women of this study have entered the political arena in a context where traditions of male pre-eminence are under challenge. In most of the societies portrayed here, women's equality and gender justice have become live issues, placed firmly on national agendas by the growing weight of the women's movement, both domestic and international. Several of the women in this study mention the encouragement

they have derived from belonging to political parties or movements that are embracing such change.

In Seychelles, for example, Sylvette Frichot lauds her party not only for recognising the contribution women can make, but also for its concrete actions of placing women in pivotal posts and giving them responsibilities outside the conventional realm of "women's issues". She sees the party and movement to which she belongs as the basic enabling factor behind her own political success. A similar position is taken by Cheryl Kernot in Australia, a former party leader who freely acknowledges the debt she owes to that party's "woman-friendly" history and experience.

This is not to discount or minimise the very major obstacles that continue to be placed in the path of women's advancement. Nor is it to overlook the uneven development of the women's movement, which continues to be weakly expressed in some of the societies explored here. The point is that, to a greater or lesser degree, each of the women in this study has benefited, in political terms, from this situation of challenge and change. In South Africa, for example, Sheila Camerer's experience suggests that even the conservative National Party is being obliged to accept a greater role for women. In India, too, the traditionalist Hindu majoritarian party, the BJP, has had to come to terms with the growing political consensus in favour of affirmative action for women.

I.7 Policy Factors

Policy changes, whether at the level of government or within political parties, can be seen to have acted as enabling factors in a number of our case studies.

One such change has been the introduction of quotas for women, whether at state level or within the structures of political parties. In Bangladesh, both Syeda Begum Sajeda Chowdhury and Jahan Ara Begum entered parliament in the first instance through an affirmative action programme that reserved a certain number of parliamentary seats for women. Speciosa Kazibwe in Uganda had a similar experience.

Other policies, while eschewing formal quotas, have lent women seeking to enter politics a helping hand. In Malaysia, Rafidah Aziz was "parachuted" by her party into a comparatively safe seat as a way of getting her into parliament. And Thérèse Lavoie-Roux in Canada received all-important financial support from the Québec state Liberal Party.

II THE GENERAL LESSONS

The 33 women whose political lives are presented here cannot, it bears emphasis, be taken as a representative sample of the wider experience of women in politics. To the extent that generalisation is possible on the basis of their individual experiences, this must be tentative. However, the lives of these women do illustrate aspects of the larger picture. They pro-

vide pointers to the types of strategy that may be enhancing or facilitating women's political empowerment. Similarly, they suggest that certain paths may be blind alleys that are better avoided. And these case histories set out some contentious issues within the worldwide movement for women's equality, issues that seem certain to remain at the centre of debate over the coming years.

II.1 Affirmative Action

The women of this study illustrate the divergence of opinion that currently exists in relation to affirmative action as a strategy for getting more women into public office.

Some women oppose the very notion of quotas, which they see as smacking of tokenism and as depriving women of the chance of rising through their own merit. In Papua New Guinea, where one parliamentary seat out of a total of 109 is reserved for women and where even this level of quota has not proved workable, politicians such as Nahau Rooney are clear that women must "earn" their place in parliament. In Australia, where there is no state-mandated affirmative action programme for women in politics, Jocelyn Newman states her preference for "incentives" and incremental change. For Kee Phaik Cheen in Malaysia, another country which has not yet introduced quotas for women in its legislative bodies, it is important to be treated by male colleagues as an equal and "not as the product of a quota system."

Others, while conceding some value to affirmative action, see it as a short-term strategy with a limited shelf life. For Jahan Ara Begum and Syeda Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, whose initial entry into the Bangladesh parliament was facilitated by a system of reserved seats for women, quotas should be timebound. They are conscious of the pitfall of patronage, pointing out that, in their experience at least, women who enter legislatures through this route may be seriously circumscribed in their actions.

But for others still, constitutionally mandated affirmative action is seen as essential to getting women into politics. In India, where despite decades of democratic electoral practice the proportion of women in state and national legislatures remains low, there is now broad party political support for the plan to reserve one third of seats in these bodies for women. This consensus finds expression in the views of Margaret Alva and Promila Dandavate, women from different political traditions who both strongly support affirmative action.

The experience of democratic South Africa seems especially instructive here. It is surely significant that in the process of nation-building following the dismantling of the apartheid state, affirmative action to get women into public life has figured prominently. In the narratives presented here, ANC women leaders set out how this was done and deal frankly with the obstacles along the way. They make the point that getting women

in equal numbers to men into the delegations at the all-party talks proved very significant: inexperienced women embarked on a learning curve and the negotiating process was forced to take women and their concerns into the reckoning. They also highlight the importance of the decision taken by the ANC back in 1992 to have women constitute at least one third of candidates on its list.

The fact that in South Africa nearly one quarter of parliamentarians are women – the seventh highest proportion in the world and the highest within the Commonwealth and the island-state of Seychelles in second place – speaks to the potential contribution of affirmative action strategies.

II.2 Linking Political Empowerment to Broader Change

A recurrent theme in the case histories set out in this study is the need to link the political empowerment of women with the broader struggle for social and economic emancipation. The argument goes that without the involvement of ordinary working women in campaigns to improve their socio-economic conditions, access to education, and general control over their lives, the representation of women in political bodies will continue to be low.

In India, Promila Dandavate makes the point that broad strategies, including mass education and training, are essential to help women overcome their historical disadvantage. Janet Jagan of Guyana, whose own political career developed out of trade union activism, has a record of linking women's political and socio-economic demands reaching back to the 1940s. For Gertrude Roberts in Dominica, economic empowerment is "the key" to greater involvement by women in politics.

II.3 Steps Governments Need to Take

Beyond affirmative action, there are a number of steps governments could take to facilitate the position of women in politics, suggest some of the women in this study. Simple, practical steps such as providing creche facilities in parliament can make the world of difference to women who have to juggle political and family commitments. Parliamentary hours are not immutable and can be amended to fit in with women's agendas.

II.4 Steps Political Parties Need to Take

In addition to introducing quotas for women on party electoral lists, various steps are recommended to political parties as a means of raising the representation of women.

Reflecting the fact that a number of the women in the study rose to political prominence through the women's wings of their political parties, one suggestion is that women's wings be given greater autonomy of action and decision-making. In Malaysia, Rafidah Aziz advocates a stronger voice for women's wings in the selection of candidates.

Several women advocate affirmative action at all levels of the party, not simply in relation to electoral lists. For example, Napsiah Omar in Malaysia favours a fixed minimum level of representation for women at the annual assembly of her party.

Financial help for women activists is identified as a further step political parties could take. And there is broad agreement that parties can do significantly more by way of preparing women for office through on-the-job training and skills development.

II.5 Steps Women Need to Take

Finally, the women in this study suggest strategies that women themselves should adopt towards the goal of political empowerment.

One recommendation is that women actively seek the support of male colleagues, especially where the latter show sensitivity to gender issues. Frene Ginwala of the ANC articulates this position when she affirms that the battle for women's equality is not, and should not be presented as, a struggle against men.

There is broad agreement, among the women whose stories are told here, that women in politics need to build their organisational and management skills. They need to foster assertiveness and to combat gender stereotypes that may affect their own self-perception.

There are, however, divergent views on where women who have successfully entered public office should concentrate their efforts. Some believe they should avoid "ghettoisation" in women's issues, instead opting for "hard" portfolios that have traditionally been the province of men. Through such a strategy, the argument runs, women will prove their parity with men.

Others argue that women who are politically successful should never stop seeing themselves as part of an ongoing struggle. "Their job," insists Frene Ginwala of the ANC, "is to help remove the structured obstacles which they themselves have overcome."

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women *in* politics

Profiles 33 women in politics from 11 countries of the Commonwealth: Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Dominica, Guyana, India, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles, South Africa and Uganda, illustrating the diversity of their experience. The study focuses on the realities of life for those committed and courageous women who have decided to take up politics, emphasising the challenges and barriers which women politicians face.

These narratives prove that, to a great extent, the degree of women's integration into political life depends on the prevailing system of values in a society and on the established political patterns. However, it is evident that their personal values and strengths, their resilience and commitment, and in most cases their sheer physical, psychological and mental endurance are what kept these women in politics and made it possible for them to achieve success.

At another level the study analyses, through the narratives of these 33 women, the different strategies that women could develop and put into place for entry into the world of politics – strategies that could be adapted to the national situations in Commonwealth countries to empower women and enable them to participate more effectively in politics. These profiles demonstrate the critical role which women can play as the Commonwealth strives to achieve the goals of gender equality, development and peace in the new Millennium.

50 THE MODERN COMMONWEALTH CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS

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