

SEETHINGS AND SEATINGS

Strategies for Women's Political Participation in Asia Pacific

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**A Project of the Task Force on
Women's Participation in Political Processes**



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ISBN: 974-93775-1-6

Editorial board: Rashila Ramli, Elisa Tita Lubi and Nurgul Djanaeva

Concept for design and layout: Nalini Singh and Tomoko Kashiwazaki

Copy editors: Haresh Advani and Nalini Singh

Cover design and layout: Byheart design

Cover batik image: Titi Soentoro

Photographs of research subjects: Researchers and research subjects

Published by

Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)

189/3 Changklan Road, Amphoe Muang, Chiang Mai 50101, Thailand

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

APWLD expresses its sincere appreciation to the following individuals who made this publication possible:

Task Force on Women's Participation in Political Processes: Tahira Khan (Convenor), Rashila Ramli (Co-convenor), Beissova Svetlana Kapsultanovna, Chung Nam Ha, Elisa Tita Lubi, Milena Pires, Nimalka Fernando, Nurgul Djanaeva, Priscilla Singh, S.K. Prya, and Virada Somswasdi for initiating this project;

Researchers: Bernadette Libres, Bermet Stakeeva, D. Geetha, Naemah Khan, Hong Chun Hee and Saliha Hassan;

Research subjects: Adi Ema Tagicakabau, Balabarathy, Hyen Mi Kim, Liza Largoza-Maza, Toktokan Borombaeva and Zaitun Mohamed Kasim; and

Members of the APWLD Secretariat who assisted and gave input into the final publication: Nalini Singh and Tomoko Kashiwazaki.

Special mention to the members of the APWLD Programme and Management Committee:

Azra Talat Sayeed, Elisa Tita Lubi, Nurgul Djanaeva, Sultana Kamal, Wanee B. Thitiprasert and Virada Somswasdi.



MESSAGE FROM REGIONAL COORDINATOR

Politics is not for women! Politics is dirty, full of intrigue and competition over power that cannot be handled by women who are soft, emotional, and dull. Women's place is at home; to take care of (male) politicians who come home drained by their power competitions and games. Politics is for strong men, it is a man's world!

This is the political education we receive from our mothers, fathers, families, communities, society and states on politics.

Two phenomena are reflected from this mind-set. First, if a woman wants to enter politics, she will experience many forms of hardship and resistance. “Yes, she can be a parliamentarian if she is not neglecting her duty as a woman”, or “she has to prove herself to be capable to work until late night as the male parliamentarians do”, or “she has to have appropriate qualification”, and many other challenges. These challenges are not addressed to a man if he wants to enter candidacy, even though reality often shows that many incapable men are becoming parliamentarians through political links and not because of their capability.

Second, very few women are involved in decision making at high levels. Political decisions are determined and dominated by patriarchal mind-sets and we all know its impact on women, their families, communities, and States. This manifests in the neglect of women's rights and discrimination against women; both factors contributing to various forms of violence against women. Moreover, lack of real democracy to guarantee political participation of the majority of people has made women's access to politics more difficult. Also, women who have access to decision making at state institutions through their political links, as they are wives, daughters, nieces of politicians, usually only play the role as supporters of patriarchal politics and do not pursue the fulfillment of women's rights.

This book is about six women from Fiji, India, Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia and the Philippines who entered the political arena to be involved in political decision making machineries, to influence and change political decisions, to be women's voices and fulfill women's rights. It describes their experiences and challenges in their efforts. This book is one of APWLD's efforts through its Task Force on Women's Participation in Political Processes to assist women in Asia Pacific to challenge existing political structures (such as electoral processes) and increase their representation at national and local levels; to increase the capacity of Asia Pacific women decision-makers to promote a feminist perspective and agenda in existing political processes.



Through their experiences, we are more confident that participation in politics is essential for women to change women's lives and ensure women's human rights.

Titi Soentoro
APWLD Regional Coordinator



FOREWORD

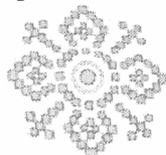
We live in times of extreme global inequality. “The world’s richest 500 individuals have a combined income greater than that of the poorest 416 million. Beyond these extremes, the 2.5 billion people living on less than US\$ 2 a day - 40 percent of the world’s population - account for 5 percent of global income. The richest 10 percent, almost all of whom live in high-income countries, account for 54 percent.” (Human Development Report 2005¹) Despite CEDAW and BPFPA, women remain discriminated against, marginalised and subjected to violence.

On the other hand, more people have turned to organising, education and mobilising of millions, especially at the grassroots level, to break free from poverty, defend their rights and work for peace based on justice. Women are in the midst of these peoples’ movements and initiatives. More women have joined organisations, groups and NGOs. They are active in spreading women’s orientation, agenda and perspective. They are tireless in providing services to other women. They are awesome when demonstrating on the streets, in communities, schools and workplaces.

Recently, women working for change have found a new arena to engage in - electoral and parliamentary politics. They use electoral campaigns to inform women and men on the situation of women, women’s analysis and stand on various issues and the women’s agenda and programme of action. Their campaign sorties to different parts of their country become venues for getting acquainted with local issues and meeting local women who can be organised. They file bills and resolutions in parliament towards pro-women and pro-people legislations. They give privilege speeches and call for investigative hearings. They make sure that their participation in national politics complements the basic strategies of organising-education-mobilisation of the women’s movement.

This book attempts to document the experiences of women in electoral and parliamentary politics. It is an initiative of the Task Force on Women’s Participation in Political Processes (TF-WPPP) of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD). It presents the results, in case study form, of the first in a series of researches to be undertaken by the task force in its advocacy for greater women’s participation in politics. Six women -Adi Ema Tagicakibau from Fiji, Balabarathy from Tamil Nadu in India, Kim Hyen Mi from Korea, Toktokan Borombaeva from Kyrgystan, Zaitun Kasim

¹ _____, 2005, “Tracking Human Development – excerpts from HD Report 2005”, Philippine Daily Inquirer, 25 September, p. A12.



from Malaysia and Liza Largoza-Maza from the Philippines - agreed to share their experiences in contesting elections and as members of their government's parliament or legislature.

Their experiences show that women's participation is not only a question of numbers. Women's organisations and movements have to lend some of their leaders to national politics to ensure that those women who sit in parliament or in any national government position are those who are committed to advance women's rights and welfare. The quota system for women's participation can only be effective if filled up by genuine representatives of women.

Some of the experiences also show that an election is not necessarily a process where the electorate can choose their leaders. When power, cash, stereotypes and advertising determine the results of elections, the women and other marginalised sectors hardly get a chance to win. One can have "a picture of a flawed electoral process - and therefore a 'democracy' severely constrained by elite dominance and power - in which the people participate only marginally, whereas it is the people who should be at the center of the critical task of deciding who will exercise the sovereignty that in theory they only delegate to their chosen leaders." (Querijero, 2004²)

Lastly, women's involvement in electoral and parliamentary politics is closely linked to the women's movement for change. Women leaders who have been tempered in political struggles are more able to resist cooptation by the system. Support from the women's and other movements, not only helps a lot in making the women's candidates win, but also ensure the efficacy of their being women's and people's parliamentarians.

Editorial Board, TF-WPPP
Rashila Ramli
Elisa Tita Lubi
Nurgul Djanaeva

² Querijero, N.B. 2004, *Subverting the People's Will*, Ken Inc., Quezon City.



INTRODUCTION: SEETHINGS TO SEATINGS

Political participation is essential for all women and men in order to ensure that their rights are addressed by relevant authorities within countries of their residence. Forms of political participation may vary from state to state. However, it is important to recognise that actual levels and extent of participation of women and men working for positive change in electoral and parliamentary politics can impact on the policies, programmes, as well as activities affecting women and men in societies.

For women to effectively use law as an instrument in striving to effect changes and improve their situation, it is an important step that they gain equitable representation in the formal decision-making bodies of their countries, whether at the national, regional, local and community levels. But achieving this has proven next to impossible in our societies, especially in the Third World, where there is frequently lack of real democracy to guarantee political participation of the majority of the people and where women are discriminated against and subjected to various forms of violence. It becomes very important therefore to learn from the experiences of women who have directly engaged in electoral politics, whether they have won seats in their Parliament or government or not. Women need to share with one another lessons and strategies in using the elections and seats in government to advance women's struggle to defend their rights and achieve emancipation.

In Asia Pacific, there is approximately 11% women representation in the houses of parliament. This is a low figure compared to Nordic countries where the level of representation is 35-40%. Despite the fact that there has been a move to introduce a quota system as well as a move toward a critical mass representation in many countries, such moves have not led toward greater representation of women within the formal electoral system. Therefore, if election is viewed as a vehicle that would increase the representation of women, and subsequently addressing women's issues, then, it is necessary to examine the strategies as well as the challenges faced by women candidates in the various elections which took place in 1999-2004 in Asia-Pacific.



However, women's participation in the political process cannot be just a question of numbers and ratios but of what kind of women will represent women. Women's movements and its allies have a few among its ranks to run for elected office and gain seats in parliament or other government positions. These are the women who can be most depended upon to fight for women's rights and interests plus those of other marginalised sectors and classes in society. They are the ones who will be more formidable against being co-opted and swallowed by a monopolistic, patriarchal and unjust system. It is important that we learn from the experiences of the few who have worked in an usually corrupt and graft-ridden government.

Genesis of a Text

The decade of the 1990s and into the new millennium can be considered as a challenging period. Countries still reel from the debt crisis that started in the 1980s and was intensified instead of solved by the conditions of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) imposed especially on the less developed countries by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). The United States calls for a New World Order that is unipolar and cognizant of its global power. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) springs out of the new GATT negotiations and becomes the international implementer and police of globalisation. The neo-liberal economic framework is discredited by the 1997 financial crisis that saw the collapse of the so-called Asian Tiger economies of Thailand, Indonesia and South Korea, along with the economic crises that befell Brazil and Argentina among others.

The whole world remains shocked by the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. Equally shocking is the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. U.S. President George W. Bush sustains his so-called "war on terror" especially against what he calls the axis of evil - Iraq, Iran and North Korea - and the Second Front, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines. Added to the infamous National Security laws are the anti-terrorism bills being pushed everywhere.

On the positive side, we are witness to the acceleration in technological advancement that impacts on many forms of interactions. There are also stronger sectoral and multi-sectoral social movements that advance the rights and demands of the people, especially the more marginalised ones. National movements have linked up with one another in cooperation and solidarity. A new breed of leaders has been borne out of the social movements, and they have started engaging in electoral and parliamentary politics.

It is in the political and socio-economic context of the period that this book is conceptualised and given reality. In the political arena where countries adhere to the electoral system, citizens have the opportunity to represent



others or to be represented by others. Women are no exception. How do women candidates strategise to optimise their chances of becoming a candidate as well as their chances of winning an election? What are the driving forces that energise women to enter politics? What are the restraining forces that challenge their position in politics? These are some hard core questions that need to be answered in order to prepare more women to enter politics in the future. This is especially important if women are to create a critical mass in any organisation. The legislative body of any government is a venue where women need to have a critical mass.

The purpose of this book is to collate and compile the information pertaining to strategies utilised by electoral candidates in elections which took place since the late 1990s. A number of elections occurred in various countries throughout Asia Pacific. As such, this project has four objectives:

1. To identify the factors that make it difficult (restraining forces) for women to win in elections and to be effective in parliament or any other elective position; and those factors that helped her (driving forces);
2. To pinpoint and assess the strategies used by women candidates to win and/or meet women's objectives in the elections;
3. To assess how these women advance the women's agenda and further the cause of the women's movement during elections and while in parliament or any other elective position; and
4. To draw lessons from women's engagement in elections and work in government, and use them as a guide to future efforts at strengthening women's participation in the political process.

In order to do so, selected countries within Asia-Pacific are chosen as case studies for the purpose of analysis. These countries are Fiji, India, Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia and the Philippines. The countries span the length and breadth of Asia-Pacific. Some countries are multi-ethnic (Malaysia, India and Fiji) while others may be rather homogeneous (South Korea). Some countries have a long tradition of parliamentary election while others are practicing the presidential form.

Creative Path

This study is based on a three-pronged approach, i.e. **contextual assessment**, descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. Contextual assessment is a macro level compilation of data that will include the political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions of the country under examination. Initial literature review includes studies that have been conducted by others in each selected country. Furthermore, researchers utilise resource material collated by the Asia Pacific Forum for Women, Law and Development



(APWLD) such as information in the Collation of Laws (2001, 2002), the Report on “Sharing Experiences in Central Asia” (2002), the Report on the National Colloquium (2003), and Women and Globalisation by Titi Soentoro (2004). In the assessment, matters which are addressed are obstacles and challenges, political systems, religion and class factors, as well as other location-specific issues.

The **descriptive analysis** focuses on two aspects: First, personal background of the subject under study includes detailed background information with regard to her education and her involvement with the women’s movement leading to her active involvement into the political power structure. Second, all authors are requested to include the political setting of each country. The inclusion allows for a better contextualisation of each case study.

Finally, the **inferential analysis consists** of a documentation of strategies in which the women candidates advanced the women’s movement or were supported by the movement. The analysis includes the subject’s personal views on the strategies utilised as well as the obstacles faced by her. Furthermore, there is a need to recognise factors which had assisted her in negotiating her position within the political arena.

The three-pronged approach is dependent upon a good selection of suitable subjects. It is important for the authors to identify suitable subjects and respondents in order to allow for an in-depth discussion. Therefore, it is imperative that our subjects are women who went through the electoral process and/or have connection with the women’s movement and women’s groups.

- A woman leader who has won or lost in an election, at least at the state level
- Allies with women’s movements and organisations
- Carries women’s agenda and/or contributes to women’s agenda
- Each author also studied in great detail whether or not the respondent has been:
 - effective in Parliament - having tactical alliances, usage of press, media, family, connections to the political party;
 - utilising political machinery and financial management; and
 - developing specific strategies in her capacity to maintain her position as a political leader in her party.

The data excavation is qualitative in nature. This means authors collected their data through in-depth interviews with their subjects. An open-ended



questionnaire guideline was developed in order to ensure that all authors covered similar material. In some cases, authors observed the activities of subjects from a distance. The six countries chosen for this study are Fiji, India, Kyrgystan, Malaysia, South Korea and the Philippines. Below is a brief description of each country's emphasis.

Fiji

This case study addresses the strategy employed by Adi Ema Tagicakibau in her political career in Fiji. The study reports on her background and includes an analysis of her life and education. It also analyses Ema's entry into the women's rights movement in Fiji and her reasons for entering politics. Once in politics this study examines her electoral strategies and how she was helped by the women's movement in Fiji.

For this research, seven interviews of one hour in duration were held with Ema. Additionally there was an interview with Gina Houg Lee, the Coordinator of the Fiji Women's Rights Movement at the time that Ema was in office. There was also an interview with Dr. Cokanasiga, who was the Minister for Health and a member of the Fijian Association Party. Various reports and documents were considered and analysed including contemporary news stories from the time that Ema was in office. The difficulties of drawing broad, generalised conclusions from Ema's experience are that women's experiences in Fiji differ depending on their ethnicity and class difference.

India

The candidate chosen for our case study is Balabharathy. She is formerly known as Nagalakshmi and is a current Member of Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu. She contested the election of State Legislature twice. She was unsuccessful in her first attempt but won the seat in her second attempt. Her experience of participation in the election gives an understanding about the general participation of women in the electoral process. Similar to the Fijian author, the intensive interview and secondary data sources were used to delve into the strategies utilised by the candidate.

Korea

The case of (South) Korea focuses on the process of how women become professional politicians. The case study is on Kim Hyen Mi (44 years old) who ran for the Central Committee of the Uri party. Kim Hyen Mi is a professional politician who became the first university graduate woman party executive. She became a lawmaker through the proportional representation after 18 years of active involvement in the party. Prior to her victory in electoral politics, she planned other people's election campaigns. She won in a



proportional representation system utilised by the party. Even though it was an election within a party, the process was very meaningful since it gave a chance to evaluate her 18-year involvement in mainstream politics and reflect on her presence and participation in the history of Korean politics. Here, based on interviews with Kim Hyen Mi and relevant people, and Kim's webpage and press reports, is shown how a South Korean woman becomes a politician and a member of the Central Committee of a political party.

Kyrgyzstan

The Kyrgyz case centers on Toktokan Borombaeva. During research the following methodology was applied. The contextual assessment included the political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions of Kyrgyzstan. Review of the country's legislations related to elections and political processes, as well as social factors that affect women's participation in political processes in Kyrgyzstan was part of the study.

The descriptive analysis includes Toktokan's personal background, with focus on her political involvement and relations with women's movement leading to her ascendance into the political power structure. The inferential analysis covered strategies used by Toktokan during elections and in advancing the cause of the women's movement during the campaign. It included her personal views on the strategies utilised as well as the problems, difficulties and obstacles that she faced. Attention was paid to factors which helped her in negotiating her position within the political arena.

During research the following tools were used: numerous interviews with Toktokan, activists of the women's NGOs, members of political parties and members of the Parliament; statistical information analysis; questionnaires; work with archival data; collection and analysis of primary and secondary literature; and analysis of the campaign materials.

Malaysia

Zaitun Kasim (better known as Toni) is the focus of the Malaysian case study. To research and analyse Zaitun's experiences in the context of the current discussion, three research methodologies were used. First is the qualitative approach of library research that is indispensable in putting together background data that involve the larger Malaysian election scenario, women participation in it and the gender dynamics relevant to this study. Much of the library research was based on personal library resources of both the researcher and individuals interviewed, especially those of Zaitun and Saira Shameem, newspaper archives, and the internet. Second is the series of lengthy and exhaustive interviews that Zaitun had agreed to. Saliha (the author of the case study) and Zaitun managed to squeeze in three sessions in



between Zaitun's hectic schedule with each lasting between three to four hours.

In each session they went through the editors' guidelines, sifting through details of Zaitun's thoughts, actions and lessons learnt while all the time maintaining an analytical approach of her particular experience as an election candidate. The research was much helped by Zaitun's concise and articulate style as well as a paper that she had presented in Jakarta, Indonesia, on the subject in 2004. In fact, Zaitun constantly referred the researcher to the paper as she actually had answered most of the research questions in it. Third, a short but in-depth interview was obtained with Saira, the individual who played a pivotal role in Zaitun's candidacy, being both her campaign manager and the prime mover of the Women Candidacy Initiative (WCI) which was Zaitun's core campaign machinery. The success of this interview owed much to Saira's insightful focus on what was needed for this project. (The writing was done and successfully completed around lecture schedules and other academic duties at the Political Science Programme of the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia where the researcher is an Associate Professor.)

The Philippines

Liza Largoza-Maza, as president and number one nominee of the Gabriela Women's Party (GWP), sits as her party's representative in the Philippine legislature. GWP is the only one of three all-women parties in the Philippines which won in the 2004 elections. Liza is also the Vice-Chairperson of GABRIELA, the largest national coalition of women's organisations in the Philippines which is composed of women workers and peasant, indigenous, urban poor and professional women. Liza exemplifies the feminist leader who is both in the women's movement and in parliamentary politics. She is the subject of this study.

Her extensive involvement in electoral politics in 2001 and 2004 provides insights to the strategies that one could utilise in an election. The researcher reviewed existing materials on Liza, the Gabriela Women's Party (GWP), GABRIELA and on Philippine politics and electoral struggles. The materials reviewed include books and magazines, pamphlets and web materials. The researcher also looked at various campaign materials and unpublished documents of the GWP. Aside from the main subject, Liza, other leaders of the women's movement and GWP were identified for interviews. Identification was based on the interviewees' knowledge of Liza, GWP, the women's movement in the Philippines, and on the landscape of Philippine economy and politics. After the review of literature, the researcher formulated interview questions based on the research objectives and framework and on the particularities of each interviewee.



The chapter on Liza will show the interplay of individual leadership, the potential of an all-women's party, the dynamism of the women's and the people's movements in the Philippines-all of them fighting for their rights, addressing both women's and people's issues, and advancing the women's and people's agenda.

From Seething to Seatings

Women have always participated in politics. The political participation may be in the electoral system or otherwise. In the electoral system, there are many obstacles and challenges faced by women. On the one hand, the obstacles can bring forth frustration, anger and resentment. On the other hand, the challenges can lead to innovative ideas, character building and the discovery of hidden potentials. It is imperative that women learn from other women in order to champion women's issues especially at the national level. Thus, from the seething of labour, one can hope for more seatings in the wider realm of political representation.

The six case studies portrayed in this book will not allow us to make a generalisation on overall strategies in political participation. It will not allow for a formulation of a universalised method of participation in Asia- Pacific. It will, however, give insights to the challenges and obstacles that women face and need to overcome in different electoral systems. By having these insights, better strategies can be developed in order to cater to local situations in the future.



FIJI: BAKING AND BASKING IN THE SUN

By Naeemah Khan



Adi Ema Tagicakibau

Introduction

This case study addresses the strategies employed by Adi Ema Tagicakibau in her political career in Fiji. The study reports on her background and includes an analysis of her life and education. This study also analyses Ema's entry into the women's rights movement in Fiji and her reasons for entering politics, examining her electoral strategies and how she was helped by the women's movement in Fiji.

Ema's political career was successful but, ultimately, brief. It was brief due to an unsuccessful *coup d'etat* in May 2000 which was led by failed Suva businessman George Speight. However, Mr. Speight did illegally oust the democratically elected government in which Ema was a Minister and created a tense standoff which lasted nearly two months before his eventual arrest and imprisonment for life.

Ema's political career "took off" when she was elected to government in 1999 and made an Assistant Minister in the Prime Minister's office. Although the May 2000 coup meant that Ema's political career was illegally cut short, her strategies and considerable achievements provide invaluable lessons to other aspiring female politicians in Fiji. To draw broad conclusions from Ema's experience for all women in Fiji does provide a challenge. This is because of the different challenges women face due to their ethnic and/or socio-economic origins.

Although Fiji is a multiracial society, it is not a racially harmonious one. Politicians in the past and present have sought to exploit racial differences to further their own political careers and, as a result, an aspiring female politician from a different ethnic background will face different challenges than Ema. This is not to detract from Ema's success, but is included to ensure that the challenges that women from different ethnic backgrounds face are not downplayed, as they come from uniquely complex and different backgrounds.



Fiji: Political context/setting

Fiji has inherited the “Westminster system” or representative system of government from the colonial period and maintained it after independence. The governance of Fiji is split into a central government, which is “supreme”, and local governments whose functions are controlled by Acts of Parliament and which fulfil an administrative function.

The Fiji Parliament is the supreme lawmaking council or assembly of central government formed by the House of Representatives made up of elected representatives and the Upper House or Senate that consists of nominated members¹.

There are two types of local government: rural and urban. In urban areas these are City/Town/Municipal. Since 1997 local government consists of locally elected members nominated by their own political parties. Local government has a wide administrative function and its powers and duties are defined by Acts of Parliament. Local government may not act outside its defined powers.

In the rural areas there are two sets of administration based on ethnicity. The indigenous Fijians are administered through village, *tikina* (district) and provincial councils. At the top of the hierarchy is the Great Council of Chiefs. The Indo-Fijians are administered through advisory councils.²

Legislative context of Fiji’s political system

The people who are elected into Fiji’s political system are controlled by a number of legislative provisions which include:

- The 1997 Constitution
- The Electoral system
- The Great Council of Chiefs

The Constitution

There are no specific provisions in the Constitution regarding the participation of women in politics or elections.

The Constitution states that:

¹ Vakatale Taufa. “Role of women political leaders in promoting the status of women”. In Proceedings of the Seminar on the Participation of Women in Politics as an Aspect of Human Resources Development. 18-20 November, 1992, 59-66

² *ibid*



A person is qualified to be nominated for election if he or she is not an:

- i) unregistered voter
- ii) undischarged bankrupt or
- iii) has an interest in an agreement or contract entered into with the government or a government authority.³

The electoral system

The 1997 Constitution affects the electoral process mainly through the following provisions:

- i) Ethnic restrictions on voters and candidates. In the election process for members of the House of Representatives there are 71 seats in the House of which 46 are elected on reserved communal basis; 23 contested by Fijian candidates, 23 contested by Indo-Fijians, 3 by General Voters and 1 by the Council of Rotuma. For these seats the candidates and voters belong to the same ethnic category. The rest of the seats are open or common roll seats with no ethnic restrictions on voters or candidates.
- ii) Since 1999 Fiji has used the preferential or alternative voting system.⁴ This system replaced the first-past-the-post system that Fiji had inherited.⁵

The language of the Electoral Act is gender neutral with no specific restrictions or favourable provisions for women to enter into politics or to participate in elections.

The Great Council of Chiefs (GCC)

The GCC is an indigenous Fijian institution which is made up of Chiefs around Fiji. The GCC was established by the British colonial administration and has been institutionalised by the 1990 and 1997 Constitution. The GCC appoints the President and Vice-President from amongst its members.⁶

³ Government of Fiji. *Constitution of the Republic of the Fiji Islands*. 1998 p.41

⁴ The preferential or alternative voting system is a type of electoral system whereby the candidate who receives more than 50% of the first preferences is declared elected. If no candidate receives an absolute majority of the first preferences, votes are relocated until one candidate has an absolute majority of votes cast. The “first-past-the-the post’ is when the winning candidate is the one who wins more votes than any other candidate. (International Institute for Democracy & Electoral Assistance; document downloaded from <http://www.idea.int/esd/glossary.cfm> on 02/11/04)

⁵ Lal, Brij, V, “A time to change: the Fiji general elections of 1999.” In *Fiji Before the storm: elections and the politics of development*, 2000. p. 23.

⁶ Colowai, Asenca, “Fiji Islands Report”. In *APWLD Women’s Participation in Political Processes Task Force Collation of Laws on Women’s Political Participation*, 2002, pp. 26-51.



There are female chiefs in Fiji; however, these women may also face discrimination as Fijian culture is strongly patriarchal. Women normally rise to a chief's position if there is no male successor (although there have been exceptions).⁷

Women's participation in politics

Women are generally underrepresented in decision-making positions, representing 13 percent of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in the Civil Service, 15 percent of the members of Boards of Government Statutory Bodies⁸ and 17 percent of Legislators, senior officials and managers.⁹ Women are overrepresented in the lower paid occupations and professions that are traditionally associated with them such as teaching and nursing. With two exceptions women did not participate in politics until after the 1987 coups. The exceptions were Adi Losalini Dovi who was the government whip in the Alliance government and Irene Jai Narayan in Opposition.

After the 1987 coups more opportunities opened up for Fijian women as they were promoted in the civil service and in donor-funded political education bodies. During this period there was mass migration of skilled Indo-Fijians, men and women alike.¹⁰

The 1992 and 1994 elections saw a small number of women elected into government who played significant roles. The 1999 elections saw eight women elected into government, the largest number ever.¹¹ In the 2001 elections the largest number of women contested the elections, however, only four were successful. Currently, there are four women in government, two have ministerial portfolios and the other two are assistant ministers.

Case Study: Adi Ema Tagicakibau

BIOGRAPHICAL

Childhood/Education

Adi Ema Golea ("Ema") was born on 28 October 1958, in Somosomo, Taveuni. She was the fourth of seven children. Her father Ratu Vakamino Golea had been a schoolteacher and her mother Vika Sorokibau was a nurse.

⁷ Vakatale note 11 supra.

⁸ Fiji Bureau of Statistics. *Bureau of Statistics Statutory Bodies Gender and Race Analysis Fiji*. 2004.

⁹ _____. *Fiji Population Census Report*. 1996.

¹⁰ Reddy, Chandra, "Women in Politics in Fiji". In *Fiji Before the Storm: Elections and the politics of development*, 2000, pp. 149-158

¹¹ Colowai note 15 supra.



They lived in the village of Somosomo on the island of Taveuni where her father had a copra farm. Her father was of a chiefly background¹² and a strong Christian. The family belonged to the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church and Ema grew up with strong Christian values. Her father encouraged all his daughters in education.

Ema spent her childhood in her village and attended Somosomo District School. The family religion set them apart from the rest of the village and there were a lot of activities that they couldn't attend due to their religious beliefs. The Sabbath began on Friday evenings and lasted until Saturday evening. Ema's family was cut off from cultural obligations and her father believed that the cultural obligations of indigenous Fijians was financially draining and that more resources and time should be concentrated on farming activities.

Ema's father was a strong influence on her and she says that many of his ideas and values shaped her beliefs. Through her father's beliefs she inherited an understanding of equality. She remembers him saying to her that "in God's eyes people are all equal: it is us human beings that make-up the differences". As a child she questioned practices that she felt were discriminatory. Her father was also compassionate and maintained friends and dealings with people of other ethnic backgrounds.

Ema had many debates with her father, which is uncommon in indigenous Fijian culture, as children traditionally are not allowed to talk back to their elders, especially fathers. Her father was "a very political man" and his interest in politics sparked Ema's interest. She recalls that during her childhood her father would always listen to radio programmes with discussions on political issues. Thus, Ema grew up politically aware.

Ema attended the Adi Cakobau Secondary School, an all-girls boarding school in suburban Suva, on the main island of Viti Levu. In secondary school Ema was influenced by female role models and she cites some students who are in senior positions in Government today. (One of her teachers, Ms. Taufu Vakatale, later became a Minister for Education/Women and Assistant Prime Minister.) These women strongly influenced Ema's beliefs.

Ema studied for a Diploma in Education at the University of the South Pacific (USP). Ema became politically active while at University and protested

¹² "Chiefly background" means that traditionally power in Fiji was held by its chiefs. Fiji is divided into provinces each with its own group of leaders/chiefs who belong to a clan. The system still exists despite the introduction of constitutional democracy to Fiji. Today in Fiji chiefs still retain power and influence. A person who belongs to a chiefly clan has the title of *Ratu* (male) and *Adi* (female).



against nuclear testing on the Murorua Atoll in French Polynesia. She was involved in many other protests including protests for better student allowances and protests against the Ministry of Education policy of not allowing diploma holders to teach. The lecturers at the time were a strong influence on their students as they were radical and encouraged political activism.

Early work

Following graduation Ema taught at Bucalevu Secondary School in Taveuni. Here she worked with an exemplary head teacher who provided good leadership and training. This was important, as it was her first exposure to the job market. The head teacher also encouraged volunteerism, encouraging teachers and staff members to do community work.

After three years Ema was transferred to Saqani Junior School in a remote rural area on Vanua Levu. This was “a challenge” and contributed significantly to her character development. Ema developed resilience, tolerance and the ability to adapt to different environments. The school and surrounding area lacked resources and proper infrastructure. Ema observed that it was the women from the village who ran the school and ensured that the school was always supplied with water and even fundraising in times of need to hire carpenters and providing them with meals while they worked.

Ema married a fellow schoolteacher, Seremaia Tagicakibau. In 1986, her husband was offered a scholarship to study at USP and they moved to Suva. She was posted to Wainibuka Secondary School outside Suva. Her husband lived in Suva and Ema, who had had her first child by then, lived in Wainibuka. Following the 1987 coup, as the area became unsafe, Ema relocated to Suva where she commenced teaching at Ballantine Secondary School.

Further studies

Ema pursued further studies by distance education. After teaching for two more years, she attained a scholarship to USP to study for a Bachelor of Arts Degree majoring in History/Politics and Language. She juggled schoolwork with her family life. By then she had had her second child.

During her undergraduate studies Ema became drawn to feminist ideology. She was introduced to ‘gender issues’ in the history/politics courses. The women’s movement in Fiji was becoming increasingly vocal in the media and she had feminist lecturers who influenced her. Ema feels that she was naturally drawn to feminist ideas and values due to her inherent beliefs and upbringing.



Ema continued at USP doing a Post Graduate Diploma in Development Studies. Ema concentrated on research on rural women and rural issues. Ema then moved to Monash University in Melbourne, Australia where she did her masters thesis in Women's Studies on a scholarship from the Australian Government (AusAID). This was the first time that Ema had travelled overseas. She experienced the political activism of students in Australia and also of people from other countries especially from neighbouring Asian countries who were studying there. Through her studies and through interacting with fellow students Ema realised that women's experiences from around the world were similar. Although issues may be slightly different women shared a common experience of oppression and inequality.

Ema shed her inhibitions and the knowledge and experience she gained drew her closer and entrenched in her the values of equality and human rights. Ema graduated in 1995 with a Masters Degree in Women Studies.

Political will

In 1995 Ema returned to Fiji and joined the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) as the centre's new development officer. FWCC is a non-government organisation that provides counselling and support for women and children survivors of violence. This was Ema's entry into the women's movement in Fiji. Whilst at FWCC Ema learnt a lot about lobbying and advocacy.

Two years later Ema joined the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM) as a legal rights training officer. FWRM concentrates on legal reform and advocacy for women. Ema learnt about issues of women's human rights and conducted awareness-raising of women's legal rights at the grassroots level. While she was employed at FWRM the Fijian Association Party (FAP) approached her to join the political party in order to stand for elections in 1999. Ema resigned from her position from FWRM and was assured that there would be a place for her if she wanted to rejoin the organisation.

Entry into politics

Ema was approached by the FAP as the party recognised that she would be a good candidate due to her work in the women's movement.

The FAP is a party comprised of indigenous, mostly educated professional Fijians. FAP was established in the early 1990s by Fijians opposed to the government. In 1999 FAP's leader was a seasoned woman politician, the late Adi Quini Speed. FAP understood that women added different dimensions to various issues and created an equal balance in the party's policies/manifesto.

Ema agreed to be considered by FAP because she felt that her background, skills and knowledge would allow her to contribute to the development of Fiji



and for the advancement for equal opportunities for women. However, though passionate about politics, Ema would not have entered politics but for the approach by the FAP.

Ema also became involved with the Women in Politics in the Pacific Centre (WIPPAC) in 1998. This is an informal umbrella body whose focus is on networking, training, media and research for women in politics in the Pacific.¹³ The Fiji National Council for Women was the implementing body; the Fiji Women in Politics (WIP) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Pacific acted as the secretariat of WIPPAC. In 1998 WIPPAC organised a workshop for women about 6 months before the elections. This was for women who were going to contest the elections in 1999 and out of this a Women's Caucus was formed.

Ema succeeded at the 1999 election and became an Assistant Minister in the Prime Minister's Office. However, she was unable to complete her term as on 19 May 2000, the Government was overthrown by a coup. Ema was in Parliament the day of the takeover and was taken hostage for 10 days when she was released to attend her sister's funeral. The coup ended the People's Coalition Government.

At the 2001 elections Ema stood as a candidate as a matter of principle and out of loyalty to her ailing Party leader Adi Kuini Speed. Ema and her party were aware that the odds were against them as the political climate was very different from 1999. In 2001 in particular, and as a result of the May 2000 coup, voters had become more starkly divided along racial lines. The atmosphere was fiercely nationalistic as a result of the ethnic tensions which surfaced in the coup. The electorate had become more pessimistic and apprehensive¹⁴. As a consequence the voter turnout was low and incidence of invalid votes was high. The reason for the high incidence of invalid votes is not known, although two mooted possibilities are ballot papers "spoilt" in protest and "vote rigging".

In addition, the political alliances formed in 1999 no longer existed and politics had become more confrontational. The People's Coalition of which FAP was a part of became fractured with prominent members leaving the Coalition. The agreements of vote transfers and sharing of preferences which had been in place for the 1999 elections were no longer there.

The fracturing of political parties was not limited to any particular political group. The May 2000 coup had allowed so many issues to bubble to the

¹³ United Nation Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), *Pacific Women: Getting into Politics: Fiji as a best practice case study*, 1999, pp. 7-22.

¹⁴ Lal B.V. "In George Speight's shadow: Fiji General Elections of 2001" in *The Journal of Pacific History* Vol, 37.1 2002 pp. 87-101.



surface that indigenous Fijian parties too were caught up in internal conflict and there was dismay at the large number of parties with “divergent and sometimes diametrically opposed agendas”.¹⁵ In this changed political climate Ema still stood as she felt that her party had “unfinished business”. Her campaign in 2001 was low key and financially constrained as she had been out of a job since the coup. This time, in this changed political climate, Ema was not successful.

Ema’s current plans

Ema presently has no plans to re-enter politics. There are three main reasons for Ema’s decision to remain outside politics at this time. First, Ema has had a bad experience in which she was taken hostage. Ema describes this experience as a “baptism of fire”. Secondly, Ema does not feel that in the present political climate her views and contribution would be appreciated. Ema reported that for her there was no point in being in politics for the sake of it. Ema acknowledges that she could seek an entry as part of the current ruling party but that her views and way of working to get results would not be considered or appreciated; in particular, Ema feels that politics in Fiji at the moment is very adversarial and divisive with emphasis on ethnicity and not on issues. Thirdly, Ema is disillusioned with the political climate and is disinclined to participate in a system which she feels has been tarnished by the illegality of the May 2000 coup.

Ema currently works for the Pacific Concerns Resource Centre (PCRC) which is a regional NGO established to consolidate the work against nuclear testing in Pacific. She is the assistant director of Peace and Disarmament Desk/Peace and Disarmament Coordinator. The organisation is lobbying to close down all types of military activity in the region, eg, American military bases, missile tracking stations that are in the South Pacific region and other military-based issues. For instance, the current issue is the military recruitment of Fijians to Iraq and Kuwait and the British Army. She also works in peace-building and conflict prevention with women and youth groups. Her aim is to create awareness of the importance of conflict prevention and she plans to increasingly involve traditional chiefs/leaders in this work.

¹⁵ Lal note supra 21.



Baking and Basking

Pre-Election

Personal Strategies

i) Making contact with people

In her 1999 campaign Ema concentrated on getting recognition amongst her constituents. Ema was contesting the Tamavua / Laucala Fijian Communal Seat. This is an urban seat in a densely populated area. Ema was running against two men, both of whom were well-known. One of these men was the sitting minister from the ruling Fijian political party and the other a prominent Methodist minister.

Ema targeted squatter settlements and low-income housing areas of her constituency. Ema's personal contact with the voters was effective because her constituents learnt who she was while she learnt the issues the voters faced. Ema was reported to have worn out a pair of shoes on "foot patrol", going door-to-door meeting her constituents.¹⁶

This strategy saved money. Ema was on a shoe string budget and was unable to advertise in the media. For Fiji Ema's strategy was a unique way of campaigning as most (especially male) candidates met constituents in party organised political rallies. Ema was well received by the community and succeeded in her aim to show her future constituents that she was "accessible" for them.

ii) Utilising her knowledge and experience

During her campaign Ema drew upon her work experience in the women's movement to formulate her personal manifesto. She spoke on poverty issues and the need for economic empowerment and education of women and what her party would do to further these issues.

Ema's background in the NGO community gave her an advantage over her peers as she had had direct experience with the media and in public speaking. Ema said the NGO background assisted her because:

- She was in touch with the difficulties and issues people were facing including socio-economic and social justice issues.
- She was assisted by her prior lobbying and advocacy roles.

¹⁶ Lal note supra 21.



- She had experience of the types of policies/laws and other changes needed to address the issues in the human rights and development context.
- She was able to show audiences that she could provide possible solutions that would work for everyone.
- She possessed communication skills to deal with the media including writing press releases and appearing before audiences.
- She was able to anticipate questions frequently asked by those who, like her, were from NGO backgrounds.

Overall, Ema said that at every step she used knowledge and experience gained as a women's rights activist and rural school teacher. Ema's background made the constituents feel that she was in touch with their needs. Ema's knowledge, experience and her background could be seen as the cake resulting from a successful baking.

iii) Utilising her existing networks

Ema acknowledged the importance of drawing on existing networks to enter politics. Ema took practical steps, for example:

- Ema expressed a preference for a seat where her background would appeal to constituents.
- She cultivated her friendship with a local journalist and secured wide coverage of her campaign. Ema said that this was a positive influence on voters and was important to her success.¹⁷
- Ema used her other contacts in the media to secure extensive coverage.

iv) Utilising opportunities

The utilisation of opportunities was crucial due to Ema's limited budget. To make the most of her limited resources Ema organised small rallies with her running mate (an FAP candidate who was contesting a different seat in the same constituency). This enabled both candidates to pool their resources.

Ema took every opportunity to meet her constituents. For example, she was approached by an ex-prisoners group and a youth group to organise a public debate between her and her two opponents. Ema agreed to this suggestion, organised a venue, and paid for refreshments.

¹⁷ Ibid.



v) **Provide an alternative**

Ema's campaign theme was "it's time for a change".¹⁸ This strategy was also deployed by the People's Coalition. Ema's political party was part of the People's Coalition and the coalition attacked and criticised the policies of the ruling party as well as providing workable alternatives.

The Coalition and particularly the Fiji Labour Party highlighted "bread and butter" issues of employment, better health, education and social welfare, and this hit a nerve with the people.¹⁹ FAP had a similar message. The "it's time for a change" theme was very effective as the political climate was such that people were looking for an alternative. This was because amongst other things at the time:

- There was high unemployment;
- Crime had increased;
- Infrastructure problems including the roads and water supplies;
- Further redundancies were threatened in the public service and in the garment industry; and
- Mismanagement and corruption scandals had engulfed the government and there was dissatisfaction about the way the scandals had been handled.

Driving Forces

(i) **"Personal is political"**

Ema believed that she had "something to offer" her constituents and women in Fiji. Ema's study of feminism and development issues as well as her work experience made her qualified to participate in politics. Her initial interest in politics was based on what she could do for women and her views meant that she should enter politics. Ema's view is that women who are sensitive to gender and equality issues should participate in politics because

- In too many cases skilled and professional women tend to shy away from politics
- If you want a government which works towards equality for women then you should enter the public domain and make your voice heard.

Ema's campaign message and her personal manifesto stemmed from her strong belief that "personal is political". She stated in an interview that if

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Lal note 14 supra.



“women are concerned about water, housing, the cost of education and having food on the table, then we have to care about politics and be involved in it”.²⁰

(ii) Women in Politics (WIP) and Women’s Caucus

WIP was the driving force behind most of the women candidates. WIP provided technical assistance, training and moral support during the 1999 elections.

The Women’s Caucus was set up about 6 months before the 1999 elections with the aim of providing technical assistance and support for all the women candidates. Ema received training on the new voting system (alternative voting) system that Fiji began to use in 1999. WIP also provided training on how to run a campaign. Ema like the rest of the women candidates received valuable assistance on how to run an effective and organised campaign. Ema cited the following assistance which was particularly useful:

- Training on how to formulate a personal profile based on what the voter would want to know;
- The women candidates were given access to office facilities which was of great assistance to Ema due to her limited resources;
- The WIP training included preparing the Women’s Caucus for the campaign including logistical preparation and
- Financial support.

However, a shortcoming of the WIP was that it was not sustainable. The person in charge of the programme was also a candidate herself and when she lost the election she also lost interest in the WIP programme. This led to a weakening of the organisation and lack of support for women candidates in 2001.

(iii) Faith

Ema had a quiet confidence that she would succeed. Her religious beliefs provide guidance and support in difficult times. Her faith and confidence also stems from her cultural heritage. She views herself as a leader as she is from a chiefly background and felt that she should use her status for the betterment of her people.

In a report by UNIFEM Ema stated that the reason for her success is “It came from my faith in God and faith in myself...”.²¹

²⁰ The Fiji Times, *Activist wants changes*, February 10, 1999.

²¹ UNIFEM note 19 supra



Constraints

i) Lack of financial resources

In order to run an effective media campaign in Fiji Ema estimates that it is necessary to spend \$FJD20, 000 (about US\$ 12,000). Ema was on a limited budget and she was required by her political party to contribute \$FJD2, 000 (about US\$1,200) which she paid in instalments.

Ema was financially constrained as she had resigned from her job and did not have a regular source of income. Her husband was at that time studying overseas and there was minimal financial support from the political party.

ii) People's expectations

Ema dealt with varying expectations, for example, when she was meeting people there would be questions which she could not answer which referred to her party manifesto. Some constituents believed that if they voted for Ema and she made it to government then she would be responsible for paying their expenses, eg, school fees and electricity bills.

Ema found that different groups of people have different expectations. Ema's constituency covered a large area in which there were high income groups and lower-income groups including squatter settlements. Ema targeted the lower-income groups as her aim was to work for those who were most marginalised and vulnerable.

iii) Political party

Ema found that she needed to question the party manifesto. For example the manifesto contained a policy that the party would assist indigenous Fijians in acquiring work permits for overseas countries. Ema felt that this was not a viable policy and asked to have it removed from the manifesto.

Ema had to balance her personal policies with her party's policies and those of the Coalition. Although they were some shared views she had to decide where her views should take priority over other views.

iv) Fiji's political climate

Ema found that Fiji's political climate is an important factor with regard to political success in Fiji. The Fijian people tend to vote along party lines. The 1999 elections results were largely based on the way political parties shared preferences.

Although issues and campaigns do contribute, success is dependent on the party one belongs to and how the party fares in the political set-up. It depends on which parties are able to gain support and share preferences. According to a UNIFEM report "for many of the women candidates their



defeat was not in the way they ran their campaign but in the parties and coalitions they belonged to and the distribution of preferences”.²²

Ema’s success was partly due to her political party being part of the People’s Coalition. In the first count of the votes in the 1999 election the SVT candidate and sitting minister at the time had the most votes and Ema had the second most number of votes. The candidate with the least votes was from *Veitokani Ni Levenivanua Vakaristo* (VLV) party and, under a prior agreement with FAP, the votes for the VLV party transferred to FAP pushing Ema into first place.

The practice of vote sharing worked against Ema when she contested the 2001 elections as the political climate had changed and there was a different sharing of preferences.

Post-Election

The FAP won 11 of the 23 Fijian communal seats after the 1999 elections. The Fiji Labour Party won the majority of seats and FAP was one of the parties invited to form a government with them. FAP received three ministerial portfolios; Ema was given the portfolio of Assistant Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office.

The People’s Coalition government was in power for a year before they were removed by the May 2000 coup. Therefore, it is difficult to properly analyse Ema’s work in parliament as she was not in government long enough.

In an interview with Gina Houng Lee, who was the Coordinator of the Fiji Women’s Rights Movement in 1999, she recalls that Ema was very supportive of women’s issues during her time in parliament; however, in terms of concrete examples, it was hard to state any because Ema was not in parliament long enough to have made any significant impact.

Personal Strategies while in power

As an Assistant Minister, Ema used the following strategies to implement her priority issues or the promises she had made.

i) Individual lobbying

Ema actively supported motions made in parliament on issues that concerned women/policies/bills that would work towards improving women’s unequal status or would improve the situation of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.

²² UNIFEM note 19 supra.



For example, with regard to the Family Law Bill, Imrana Jalal, who was the Family Law Commissioner and some of the members of parliament (MPs) were against this. From her experience Ema knew that MPs could be very disruptive and many were in the habit of passing loud remarks and catcalls when they did not agree with what a speaker was saying in parliament.

She decided that instead of publicly confronting them, she would lobby them individually. She approached them individually during parliamentary breaks and after work. She felt this approach was effective as they would give Ema a chance to voice her opinions and not become confrontational.

Most MPs (male and female) generally have no formal gender training and male MPs tend to be fairly confrontational if they feel that certain issues or opinions are disturbing the patriarchal status quo.

ii) Applied her knowledge and experience

When making submissions she addressed the issue by explaining how it would affect people socio-economically, always speaking in terms of how it would affect the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and women and children.

Ema was complimented on her analytical skills and her ability to provide a holistic analysis of issues in interviews with Dr. Cokanisiga (acting leader of FAP) and by Ms. Houg Lee. In her submissions on the issue of the introduction of gaming machines she stated the effects of gambling on the family (especially women and children) and also on those in lower income groups.

Ema also undertook the initiative of conducting a gender audit of all government ministries in order find out how the budget allocation benefited individual ministries. She conducted this survey with the aim of using this knowledge in the planning of the budget the government would be preparing.

One of the major tasks allocated to Ema was to compile a list of government contracts awarded and look at government properties and find out what their needs were with regard to their maintenance. When doing these tasks she applied her knowledge and experience. As a teacher in rural schools she was aware of the conditions of rural schools and the infrastructure. She planned to have resources allocated to the improvement of rural infrastructure.

iii) Set an example

Ema did not compromise her beliefs while in Parliament and stood her ground on the issues she believed in and always endeavoured to set an example.



In her NGO background she had preached good governance and criticised government. Therefore she tried not to repeat the mistakes of her predecessors. For example Ema chose not to purchase a new car, despite most of her fellow MP's taking up preferential offers from car dealerships, as it was important to her that she remain the person she was before she became an MP.

This may seem minor, but Ema was determined to uphold a standard she had demanded of politicians as a women's'- rights activist. Her aim was to not repeat the 'bad behaviour' of past politicians.

Driving Forces

i) A Purpose

Ema's purpose was to meet the expectations of the people that had elected her. She felt that she had something to prove as a new MP and as a woman.

Ema's view is that in order to work towards eliminating discrimination against women; they need to become involved in politics. Ema thought that she had to utilise her position in every way possible to achieve her goal. She applied this in all the tasks that were allocated to her in accordance with the portfolio she held.

ii) Her identity and faith

Ema felt that her cultural heritage was a major driving force for her and though she was from a chiefly background she was also established in her own right. This provided her with a confidence that allowed her to negotiate her position within the political arena.

It allowed her to gain the respect of her peers and voters. Dr. Cokanisiga commented that Ema was not only from a chiefly background but also well qualified academically. Her family had no political ties and she achieved her position on her own merit.

Ema identified her deep faith in God again as a driving force for her and assisted in her remaining "grounded".

Restraining forces

i) Balancing interests

In government, Ema had to mediate between the interests of her party, the Coalition and also her own beliefs. She kept in mind the interests of her constituents and the promises she had made when campaigning.

On occasion the behaviour and conduct of MPs came into conflict with Ema's beliefs. For example, when an MP from the Labour Party attacked the



FWCC in a manner which Ema felt was inappropriate, Ema had to remain diplomatic so as to avoid criticisms of in-fighting.

Ema's experience illustrates certain realities of politics. A woman can get elected but how much influence she wields within the government depends on many factors including which political party she belongs to, how much power/influence the party has, and how much power the woman has within her party.

Ema was new to politics and her party was a minor partner in the Coalition government; therefore, she was forced to find innovative ways of pushing her agenda through.

ii) Party politics

Party politics was a major restraining force for Ema. After the FLP won the majority of the seats there were problems between the FLP and FAP, with regards to who was to be the Prime Minister. A lot of the discussions that took place were just between the party leaders of the two parties.

Within the FAP Ema felt that there were problems, eg, there was no consultation within the party to discuss which elected candidate was interested in which portfolio. Ema felt that it was wrong that no meeting was called to discuss the FAP options/nominations for the Senate or who would be allocated which portfolio. She draws a connection with these failures within the party politics and the conflict that arose later within FAP and the fact that some of the disgruntled members of FAP were implicated in the May 2000 coup.

Ema thinks that the party alienated the rural Fijian voters by not giving the rural MPs a ministerial portfolio. The three that received ministerial portfolios had all won urban seats. This lack of foresight by the FAP led to problems later.

iii) 'Culture of the civil service'

A challenge she constantly faced was working with a civil service that seemed to be biased. For any task to be effectively carried out the co-operation of the civil service was required. There was a certain level of resentment towards the Indo-Fijian Prime Minister from senior civil servants.

Ema's first task was to compile a list of government contracts. In carrying out this task she experienced a lack of co-operation from certain departments and those in charge became defensive. They felt that the Prime Minister was on a 'witch-hunt' and was planning to remove those he saw as being loyal to the past government. Additionally, her government had to work within the past



government's budget for at least six months. Requests that were not in the budget had to be turned down by ministries.

Ema learnt the lesson that the processes within government and the workings of the civil service could hinder the delivery of campaign promises. There was a lot of pressure from the community for results. However, the Coalition government had to work within a system that had inherited problems from the previous administration.

iv) Demand on time

The demands for Ema's time from her constituents, her Parliamentary duties, and the invitations that she received as an MP increased the challenge of her job.

Almost every day before and after work some of Ema's constituents came to her home. Some were unaware of the role she played and she had to explain. She felt that some had misguided expectations of her, requesting financial assistance.

Ema had a young family and while she had house help she missed spending time with her young children.

v) Political climate

The year Ema was in government was a difficult year as the government faced many obstacles and opposition due to people's perception of the FLP being an Indo-Fijian party. There was a view that the Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mr. Mahendra Chaudhary, was marginalising the interests of the indigenous Fijians and Ema experienced the non-cooperation of the civil service due to resentment towards the FLP and the Prime Minister.

On May 19 2000, a group of gunmen led by George Speight entered parliament and held the Prime Minister and his government hostage. Ema was in parliament at the time and she recalls a sense of disbelief at what was taking place. This incident led to the overthrow of the People's Coalition government.

The May 2000 coup occurred on the pretext of conserving the rights of the indigenous Fijians but the real picture is more complex. The reasons and possible reasons behind the May 2000 coup are beyond this paper. However, the 2000 coup showed that the issue of race was easily used in order to gain the support of certain sections of the community to disrupt the democratic process of government. Further, the coup, as with all identity-based politics, led to the sidelining of vital development issues such as women's rights.



Summary and conclusions

Emā learnt many things about herself and the political process in Fiji. Above all, Emā discovered that her background in NGOs gave her an advantage over her peers as she knew the issues that faced the electorate. Additionally, the skills she had learnt working for NGOs stood her in good stead in politics.

Practically Emā learnt that she was able to run a successful election campaign without large resources and without prior experience as a politician.

Emā attributes her success to many factors including her strong sense of identity, ethics, belief in equality, interest in politics and educational background provided to her as a result of her upbringing and her father's guidance. Emā's educational background with its strong emphasis on academic success and further study assisted her to grasp the complexities and issues that politics involves.

Emā learnt that an approach which targeted the most vulnerable sections of the community and the provision of workable alternatives assisted in her effective communication with her constituents. Emā's success in communicating with her constituents was also assisted by her ability and willingness to meet her constituents face to face and in turn was influenced through the confidence given by her academic background and work experience with NGOs. Emā's standing with her own people and her status as being from a chiefly background also assisted Emā as in many sections of the community her personal status assured that she would be treated with respect, listened to and trusted.

Although many factors influenced Emā's success and Emā herself possesses many innate qualities that make her a good candidate and politician, Emā was entirely new to politics and had no prior experience in running an election campaign. Therefore the support of the WIP was invaluable. This support helped in getting Emā over the universal hurdle for all women who enter politics, ie, the lack of assistance and training in campaigning and funding.²³

Emā's experience shows that an effective and sustainable programme to facilitate women's entry into politics should be established. In Emā's case the effectiveness of WIP faltered when the co-ordinator of the programme was not elected. Any future programme should ensure the sustainability and credibility of the programme. Some of the difficulties that would be expected

²³ Inter-Parliamentary Union. *Participation of women in political life: an assessment of developments in national parliaments, political parties, governments & inter-parliamentary unions, 5 years after the conference, 1999* pp. 44-46.



for women in politics were minimised by Ema's chiefly background and status in the Fiji context.

However, Ema's case study highlights that achieving political office is only half the battle. Some of the difficulties that she experienced while in office included the machinery of government, party politics, and demands on her time. They illustrate the need for support of women politicians by the women's movement while they are in power. The lack of contact and cooperation with public and women's organisations is generally cited as an obstacle for women in politics.²⁴

It is vital for women MP's to form a caucus within Parliament. This strategy has been used worldwide to provide logistical support for women during elections and act as a pressure group in Parliament.²⁵

Fiji's political system and culture is strongly patriarchal. Ema's strategies for coping and succeeding in this entrenched context provide valuable lessons. Ema herself did not engage in confrontational politics but lobbied on a personal level. This strategy proved to be effective for Ema and is a proven strategy for women politicians who have used moderate behaviour and targeted lobbying when presenting their opinions and positions so that they do not conflict with societies' traditions.²⁶

Fiji presents many political difficulties and obstacles for a woman politician. Among these are the cultural and traditional notions relating to women in decision making roles. The prevalence of identity based politics, ie, people organising themselves politically based on the 'sameness' of identity (in Fiji it is ethnicity)²⁷, is an added obstacle as it divides people along ethnic lines and sidelines issues of women's rights. Identity based politics has also led to three coups all within recent memory and which set back the progress made by women's organisations in highlighting equality and human rights issues.

This case study shows that, despite the numerous obstacles faced by women in Fiji, with the requisite skills and knowledge combined with the right approach and assistance from the women's movement, success is possible. The lessons of Ema's experience and approach provide invaluable lessons

²⁴ Shvedova, Nadezhda. "Obstacles to women's participation in parliament" In *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, 1998 p. 39.

²⁵ Lovenduski, Joni & Karma, Azza. "Women in Parliament: making a difference" In *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, 1998 p. 147.

²⁶ Abu-Zayd, Gehan. "In search of political power – women in parliament in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon" In *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*, 1998, p. 50.

²⁷ Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development (APWLD). 2003. *Gender and Identity-Based Politics: Workshop Organised by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development 30 July – 1 August 2002, Bali, Indonesia*. P. 7.



and pointers to women aspiring to public office. Ema's experience also shows that further work needs to be done to provide support for women in politics. In particular, there should be a sustainable and organised women's support network which will assist women before and after achieving office.

In the course of the research for this chapter Ema cited extremist political views dominated by issues like nationalism and race as the main threats to good political policy. The practise of politics dominated by men with agendas blinds gender issues and obscures the transfer of uncorrupted policy to the electorate. Breaking the agenda of entrenched politics presents the biggest hurdle for women to enter politics. Basking in the sun is not the goal of women activists. It is essential that women continue an organised and well planned battle against extremist political views and its effect of sidelining progressive issues for women's rights.

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INDIA: FROM SARI TO NATIONAL PURSUITS

By D. Geetha



Balabarathy

India is a country where democratic practices have been in place since its independence in 1947. Elections take place from national to the village level. In all these elections, women play their parts as voters and supporters. However, not many women are willing to enter politics in a more active manner, despite the fact that there are political parties headed by women. This chapter will focus on the active participation of Balabarathy in electoral politics and her rich experience as a State Legislator. Through her involvement and dedication, there are many lessons that one can learn in the struggle to ensure that women's voices are heard and issues raised at various decision-making levels.

History of Elections in India

The Government of India Act of 1919 introduced elections in India. Until then, the Presidency was governed by the Statutes of British Parliament. The power to legislate was in place prior to 1919; however, the government in power nominated the Council of Members. The elected Legislative Council was introduced only by the Act of 1919.

The Government of India Act of 1935 came up with wider legislative powers for elected members of the Legislatures. The Act provided for an All-India Federation. Its constituent units were the Governor's Provinces and the Indian States. The Federal Legislature consisted of two Houses, the House of Assembly called the Federal Assembly and the Council of States. The Federal Assembly had 375 members, 125 being representatives of the Indian States, nominated by the Rulers. The term of the Assembly was fixed at five years. The Council of States was a permanent body not subject to dissolution, but one-third of the members had to retire every three years. It had 260 members: 104 representatives of Indian States, 6 to be nominated by the Governor-General, 128 to be directly elected by territorial communal constituencies and 22 to be set apart for smaller minorities, women and depressed classes.



The Act established a bicameral Legislature in the Province of Madras, as it was then called. The Legislature consisted of the Governor and the two Chambers, called the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Council was a permanent body not subject to dissolution but with one-third of its members thereon retired every three years. It consisted of not less than 54 members. The Legislative Assembly consisted of 215 members of which, 146 were elected from general seats of which 30 seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes, 1 for Backward areas and tribes, 28 for Mohammedans, 2 for Anglo-Indians, 3 for Europeans, 8 for Indian Christians, 6 for representatives of commerce, industry, etc., 6 for landholders, 1 for university, 6 for representatives of labour, 8 for women of which 6 were general. These provisions made in the 1935 Act provided for reservation of seats for women in both the Union and State Legislatures.

Post Independence

After independence India chose to practice a constitutional democracy with a parliamentary system of government. The power was divided between the Parliament (or Legislature), the Executive and the Judiciary. The Parliament consists of the President and two Houses known as Council of States and the House of the People popularly known as Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha, respectively. India is a Federal State with a Union Government at the centre headed by the Parliament. The Country is divided into 28 States and 7 Union Territories headed by the Legislature. The Members of the House of People and Members of the State Legislatures are elected directly by the people. There is a third body of Government, namely, the Panchayat or the local body Governance, which is at the village, municipal and district level.

Electoral System

Elections to the Lok Sabha, the State Legislative Assemblies and the Local Bodies are carried out by an independent Election Commission. The Members to the Lok Sabha, State Legislature and the Local Body are directly elected by the people using the first-past-the-post electoral system.

The electoral system in India is based on the principle of universal adult suffrage; that any citizen over the age of 18 can vote in an election (before 1989 the minimum age was 21). The right to vote is irrespective of caste, creed, religion or gender. Those who are deemed unsound of mind and people convicted of certain criminal offences are not allowed to vote.

Any Indian citizen who is registered as a voter and is over 25 years of age is allowed to contest elections to the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies or the Local Body. For the Rajya Sabha the minimum age limit is 30 years.



Candidates for the Rajya Sabha and Vidhan Sabha should be a resident of the same state as the constituency from which they wish to contest.

Every candidate has to make a deposit of Rs. 10,000/- (about US\$ 220) for Lok Sabha election and 5,000/- (about US\$ 110) for Rajya Sabha or Vidhan Sabha elections, except for candidates from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who pay only half of these amounts. The deposit is returned if the candidate receives more than one-sixth of the total number of valid votes polled in the constituency. Nominations must be supported by at least one registered elector of the constituency, in the case of a candidate sponsored by a registered Party, and by ten registered electors from the constituency, in the case of other candidates.

India has a system of reservation enabling candidates from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes¹ to participate in the electoral system and have representation in the body of governance by reserving constituencies. People from these communities alone can contest elections from these constituencies. There are also two seats reserved for Anglo-Indian community, but with members nominated by the President of India.

Elections for the Lok Sabha and to every State Legislative Assembly and Local Body have to take place every five years, unless called earlier. The President can dissolve Lok Sabha or a State Legislature and call general elections before the five years is up, if the government can no longer command the confidence of the Lok Sabha or the Legislature and if there is no alternative government available to take over. Holding of regular elections can only be stopped by means of a constitutional amendment and in consultation with the Election Commission, and it is recognised that interruptions of regular elections are acceptable only in extraordinary circumstances.

Voting is by secret ballot. Polling stations are usually set up in public institutions, such as schools and community halls. To enable as many electors as possible to vote, the officials of the Election Commission try to ensure that there is a polling station within two kilometers of every voter, and that no polling stations should have to deal with more than 1,500 voters. Each polling station is open for at least eight hours on the day of the election.

¹ The Indian Community is divided by caste system, which has a system of hierarchy of upper and lower caste. Historically the lower caste people have been oppressed socially, economically and in education. In order to bring equality within the society, the Constitution provides for declaration of the lower castes in a Schedule and provides reservations for them in education, employment and elections into Parliament and Legislatures. A similar Schedule exists for certain tribes who are declared as socially backward.



Political Parties and Elections

Political parties are an established part of modern mass democracy. The conduct of elections in a democratic set-up depends on the representation by the political parties. Before independence, the people in the country were mobilised under the banner of the Indian National Congress (INC) which emerged as a nationwide political party. The INC also contested the elections held before independence. There was also the Communist Party of India at the National level and many other regional parties at the State level. The Communist Party later was split into the Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM). In the late 1970s the Janata Party emerged as an alternative to INC, with many regional parties and a few national leaders coming together. But the Janata Party could not sustain itself as a national party due to many differences among the party leaders. In the '80s the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) emerged. It became a national party later in the '90s.

Immediately after independence, the INC won the elections and formed the Government. In the first Lok Sabha elections there were 23 women elected (www.parliamentofindia.nic.in). In subsequent elections, the following numbers of women were elected: Second - 24; Third - 37; Fourth - 32; Fifth - 26; Sixth - 18; Seventh - 32; Eighth - 46; Ninth - 28; Tenth - data not available; Eleventh - 40; Twelfth - 44; Thirteenth - 46. All the elected women contested the elections as party nominated candidates. Except for a negligible few, no woman ran in elections as an independent candidate. One such exception was Maneka Gandhi, who is the daughter-in-law of Indira Gandhi.

At the State level the participation of women in the Legislative Assemblies is no better than their participation at the Parliament level. The participation of women in the electoral process in India has largely been dependent on the attitude of political parties. Although many candidates contested the elections as independent candidates, the winning candidates for Lok Sabha and the State Legislature usually are members of political parties. Opinion polls suggest that people tend to vote for a party rather than a particular candidate.

Political Parties in Tamil Nadu

Tamil Nadu was originally called the Madras Presidency consisting of five southern states in India. The INC was the popular political party after independence. It came to power immediately after elections were declared after 1952. The Communist Party of India had a presence also. Later the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) was formed and came into power in the 1967 elections. Later came a split in the DMK, and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) was formed. The two parties eventually ruled the State of Tamil Nadu. The INC and the Communist



parties contested elections in alliance with either of the parties. In the 1990s two more political parties emerged, the Pattali Makal Katchi and Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

The Candidate: Balabarathy

Balabarathy, originally known as Nagalakshmi², is a sitting Member of the Legislative Assembly of Tamil Nadu. She ran for the State Legislature twice. She lost in the first elections but was successful the second time. Her experience in electoral and parliamentary politics can give an understanding of women's participation in Indian national politics.

Biography

Her father is Kathiliappan, who was an active politician and a member of the INC. He was elected President of the Kothapulli Village Panchayat. He was murdered for his alliance with a political party. But the murder was made to appear as death by heart attack and neither the State nor the INC was able to catch the perpetrator. Balabarathy has one brother, who is married and has children. Currently, Balabarathy lives with her brother's family in Dindigul.

Balabarathy studied at K. Pudukottain High School up till 10th standard. Her higher secondary education was at Thambi Thottam Higher Secondary School. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree majoring in Chemistry from Ghandigram College. After her graduation she was employed as an organiser in Balwadi School at Reddiyar Chatram. Here she organised the workers in the school and formed the Reddiyar Chatram Workers Union.

Balabarathy is not married and is not interested in marrying. She believes that marriage will not permit her to carry on her public work. Coming from a traditional family background she never wanted to get herself tied down with family responsibilities.

Social Activitism

During 7th and 8th standard ³ in school in 1977 at the time of Indira Gandhi's emergency rule, her teacher introduced her to certain political books which were at that time banned. Her teacher assigned the children in her class

² Balabarathy is her pen name, which she used when writing for Tamil magazines and newspapers. She was also referred to as Bala Bharathy and Nagalakshmi, but more popularly known as Balabarathy. When she contested the elections in the year 1996, there was confusion in introducing her with two names. In order to avoid complications, she decided in the 2000 elections that she would identify herself by her pen name.

³ The Indian School system has children enter school at the age of 5 in 1st Standard. Schools have classes till 10th Standard, by which a child would be at the age of 15. 7th and 8th Standard shall be in the age groups of 12 and 13.



to find the origin of mountains, rivers, forests, etc. Balabarathy and her classmates started questioning the elders in the village about these assignments. This prompted her to read books on the science. She then understood the prevalence of superstitious beliefs among the people. She started to understand that religion, caste, temples were all developed by human beings for their own protection and to exploit each other. She saw how superstitious beliefs have spread in society and how they ruled the lives of ordinary people.

While employed as an organiser in Balwadi School at Reddiyar Chatram, Balabarathy was inspired by the Sri Lankan Tamil issue which was then a political issue being addressed by various groups. There were demonstrations and rallies happening all over the State. Then she came across the pamphlets circulated by the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), which impelled her to seek out the DYFI office and decided to join it in 1984. Though her father's murder frustrated her and made her cynical towards politics, she looked forward to involvement in the alternative political movement. DYFI's wall writings and speeches in street meetings inspired her to join DYFI. Afterwards she was introduced to the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), which she later became a member of and in 1988 she became the Dindigul District DYFI Coordinator. Both DYFI and AIDWA are wings of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM), a political party registered with the Election Commission. (Being a member of DYFI or AIDWA though does not mean that one is a member of the CPM.)

Before joining DYFI, Balabarathy was not keenly interested in women-specific issues. She was more interested in building a movement against the present political situation and for a better society. When she started participating in the activities of AIDWA and sat with its members, she got to know the issues that were being discussed and how the women dealt with them. Among the issues were domestic violence, dowry harassment and other issues at the domestic level which were the major concerns of women. Gradually she got involved in women's issues and realised how women could be caught up in their own world. She became conscious of how the society isolates women by keeping them occupied with issues concerning the day to day running of their households.

Balabarathy's more serious involvement and commitment to women's work happened after the murder of a woman doctor in Dindigul. The victim was Dr. Bhavani who was married to another doctor with whom she worked with. Her husband was alleged to have developed a relationship with another doctor, which Dr. Bhavani came to know about. It was also alleged that he was mentally unbalanced. The investigations after the murder revealed that



the husband had in his possession photographs of Dr. Bhavani with her head, hands and legs severed.

Balabarathy was at the scene of the murder. She saw to it that the police submitted the First Information Report and conducted a postmortem of the body. She was challenged by the fact that the police and state administration still had to be pressured to go through processes required by law. The press covered the entire incident, including the role played by Balabarathy and AIDWA. She led a demonstration to ensure that the police arrested the husband. However, due to the lack of evidence during the trial, the husband was acquitted. Even Dr. Bhavani's family did not cooperate during the trial. They refused to come to the trial and make a deposition in Court. Hence the efforts made by Balabarathy and AIDWA were futile.

There were a few other interventions by Balabarathy which caught the attention of the press and the public, who started viewing her as a women's rights activist. One such case was where a woman and her husband were taken to the police station. Inside the police station the husband was tortured, and the wife was assaulted physically and sexually. She escaped from the police station and was about to commit suicide. Through the intervention of AIDWA, she was taken to the hospital and a case was filed against the police. In another case, a woman died due to dowry harassment. The police reported the case as suicide. Through the efforts of Balabarathy and AIDWA, the police registered the case as dowry harassment and ensured that the investigations were done properly. In all these interventions Balabarathy rushed to the venue of occurrence upon receipt of the information, approached the police, and held demonstrations before the concerned offices, police stations, court, etc. Because the women's movement kept watch over the investigations, the police and other authorities had to do justice to the victims, not out of duty, but out of compulsion and pressure.

There was good media coverage about her activities dealing with issues relating to women. She also started looking at issues pertaining to women from a feminist perspective. By this time she has become very active in addressing women's issues. She was elected as the District Secretary of AIDWA in 1988. In 1991 she became a full member of Communist Party of India (Marxist). Her involvement in other public issues also prompted the party to look at her seriously.

Involvement in State Politics

The CPM nominated Balabarathy as its candidate from Dindigul Constituency to the Tamil Nadu State Assembly in the 1996 elections. The CPM was then in alliance with the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam. On the other hand, the DMK and Tamizh Manila Congress



(TMC), a breakaway party from the INC, formed an alliance. AIADMK was in alliance with BJP, a national party with Hindu fundamentalist ideology. That was her first experience as a candidate in an election. She lost by 11,000 votes to the DMK and TMC alliance candidate Mr. I. Periyasamy.

In the 2001 elections the party again nominated her as candidate for the Legislature. The CPM and six other political parties formed an alliance with AIADMK. The DMK formed an alliance with the BJP. She was the only woman candidate in her constituency and her main opponent was the DMK candidate, Mr. Basheer Ahmed. He was a popular candidate as he was the incumbent Chairman of the Dindigul Municipality, from a minority Muslim community and was recognised by the people as a good leader. Nevertheless, Balabarathy defeated him by 2,779 votes, having polled a total of 71,003 votes.

Table 1: Status: Results Declared for the Dindigul Constituency

No. of Electors		279,805	Total votes cast	149,977
No. of Contestants		6	Polling %	53.6
Candidates			Valid votes in AC	
SI No.	Name	Party	Number	%
1.	Balabarathy (name listed as Nagalakshimi, K. in original table)	CPM	71,003	47.37
2.	Basheer Ahmed, M.	DMK	68,224	45.52
3.	Selvaraj, L.	MDMK	4,662	3.11
5.	Manimaran, R.	IND	2,635	1.76
6.	Muruganandam, V.	IND	1,685	1.12
4.	Balasubramani, S. N.	TYMK	1,668	1.11
				100
Total valid votes			149,877	
Total rejected votes			100	
Total votes counted			149,977	
%age votes counted			100	
Lead margin			2,779	

Balabarathy was nominated both in 1996 and 2001 not because representation had to be granted to a woman, but because of her work and commitment. The Party nominated her in recognition of her active involvement in various issues. She received good press coverage, she was popular among her constituency and she was engaged fulltime in politics. Her gender was incidental. Though her Party supported in principle the reservation of seats for women in Parliament and Legislature, this was not the basis for her nomination.



Balabarathy's Election Campaign

Election campaign strategies are collectively decided in the CPM. It is not an individual decision. Campaign strategies and the issues to focus on are decided through a democratic process in which Balabarathy participates. Though the central focus of the campaign is decided by the Party centrally, the local issues and their focus are decided by the District level leaders. A candidate cannot deviate from the party's campaign strategies.

In India an election campaign starts when the Election Commission announces the date of elections. It also announces the dates for the filing of nominations, the withdrawal of nomination, scrutiny of the nominations by the Returning Officer, etc. Candidates are given a week to put forward their nominations. These are reviewed by the Returning Officers and if found not to be in order can be rejected after a summary hearing. Validly nominated candidates can withdraw within two days after the review of nominations. The official campaign period lasts at least two weeks from the drawing up of the list of nominated candidates, and officially ends 48 hours before polling closes.

During the election campaign the political parties and contesting candidates are expected to abide by a Model Code of Conduct evolved by the Election Commission on the basis of a consensus among political parties. The Code lays down broad guidelines as to how the political parties and candidates should conduct themselves during the election campaign. It aims to maintain election campaigns along healthy lines, prevent clashes and conflicts between political parties or their supporters, and ensure peace and order until the results are declared. The Code also prescribes guidelines for the ruling party either at the Centre or at the State level to ensure that a level playing field is maintained and that no cause is given for any complaint that the ruling party has used its incumbency to win elections.

Once an election has been called, parties issue manifestos detailing the programmes they wish to implement if elected to government, the strengths of their leaders and the weaknesses and failures of their opponents. Slogans are used to popularise and identify parties and issues. Pamphlets and posters are distributed to the electorate. Rallies and meetings, where the candidates try to persuade, cajole and enthuse supporters while denigrating opponents, are held throughout constituencies. Personal appeals and promises of reform are made, with candidates traveling the length and breadth of the constituency to try to influence as many potential supporters as possible. Party symbols abound, printed on posters and placards.

CPM and its allies also come up with manifestos. The candidates are expected to abide by their manifestos and also not to oppose the issues raised by their



allies. During the campaign Balabarathy is supported not only by her party but also by the party's allies. Hence her campaign strategies are also constrained to the extent of not attacking the ideologies of other parties.

In the 2001 election, the central focus of the campaign strategy of CPM was to attack the DMK and BJP alliance. The DMK was exposed as opportunistic by having an alliance with a religious fundamentalist party. CPM likewise addressed the issues of the consistently deteriorating situation of the working class due to globalisation and privatisation, unemployment and caste violence. The other strategy was to focus on the issues of her constituency. The then-burning issue was water scarcity in Dindigul. Women in Dindigul stored water in as many pots and utensils available. She promised that her party would ensure water supply once every two days. Listening to this, the women asked where and how to store the water and what to do with already stored water. There was a study undertaken by the Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board (TWAD Board) under the Kaveri Combined Water Supply Scheme. Balabarathy promised that she would take steps to implement the scheme based on the study and ensure sufficient supply of water to Dindigul.

Balabarathy mentioned that the campaign strategy of CPM differs from other major parties like AIADMK and DMK. She said that in the latter parties, the party leader gives instructions regarding the campaign and decides as to who will participate in carrying out the campaign strategies. According to her, she was not sure whether the candidate participates in deciding campaign strategies in the other parties.

Balabarathy received good support from the people during the campaign. It was very interesting for her to see the way people participated in the rural and urban areas. In the urban areas, women never came near the candidate even if the candidate was a woman. They all stood back in their houses or their balconies and watched the candidates. In the villages women approached the candidates and spoke to them. Some were very cynical saying that the men failed to do anything, so what could a woman do. Some though said that they would see what a woman could do. In some places, women would come to her angrily and ask her what she has done so far because nothing had changed since the last election. In some places women invited her affectionately to their village temple to offer prayers to their deity. They mentioned that all those who came to their village and prayed in the temple got elected. She fondly and laughingly narrated how this belief was told to all candidates. She said that though she did not believe in god and religion, it was fun to participate in the villagers' exercise of their superstitious beliefs. Imagine if all the candidates get to win with the help of the deities.



Free Campaign Time on State-Owned Electronic Media

All recognised National and State parties are allowed free access to the state-owned All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan television channel on an extensive scale for their election campaigns. The total free air time allocated extends over 122 hours. The allocation is done equitably by combining a base limit and additional time linked to the party's poll performance in recent elections.

Election Expenditure

CPM provides the necessary financial support for the campaign. Balabarathy did not spend any money from her pocket for the election. For one thing, she and her family do not have any personal income or property to incur such expenditures. According to her, other political parties choose their candidates based on their financial background, as the candidates are expected to bear poll expenditure from their personal finances.

There are tight legal limits on the amount of money a candidate can spend during the election campaign in India. Since December 1997, in most Lok Sabha constituencies the limit was Rs 15,00,000/-⁴, although in some States the limit is Rs 6,00,000/-. For State Legislative Assembly elections the highest limit is Rs 6,00,000/-, the lowest Rs 3,00,000/. A recent amendment in October 2003 has increased these limits. For Lok Sabha seats in bigger states is now Rs 25,00,000. In other states and Union Territories, it varies between Rs 10,00,000 to Rs 25,00,000. Similarly, for Assembly seats, in bigger states, it is now Rs 10,00,000, while in other states and Union Territories, it varies between Rs 5,00,000 to Rs 10,00,000. Although supporters of a candidate can spend as much as they like to help out with a campaign, they have to get written permission from the candidate, and whilst parties are allowed to spend as much money on campaigns as they want, recent Supreme Court judgments have ruled that, unless a political party can specifically account for money spent during the campaign, it will consider any activities as being funded by the candidates and counted as their election expenses. The accountability imposed on the candidates and parties has curtailed some of the more extravagant campaigning that was previously a part of Indian elections.

Restraining and Driving Factors

Though a large number of women have been participating in the local body elections viz., Panchayat, the Parliament and Legislature are still seen as a man's world. The candidates for the elections to the Parliament and

⁴ Currency conversion: Rs 45=US\$ 1



Legislature are decided by the whims and fancies of the political parties. Participation of women in the elections to Parliament and State Legislatures are negligible in number. The largest number of women elected to Parliament in India has been only 46 out of 543, in the 8th and 13th Lok Sabha elections. Though there are political parties headed by women, the participation of women even within these parties is abysmally low. Indira Gandhi headed the Indian National Congress since 1967. Ms. J. Jayalalitha, heads the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu since 1987. Ms. Mayavathi heads Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh. But their leadership has not effected the participation of women in electoral and parliamentary politics. They continue to be male dominated and the participation of women remains insignificant.

Social structure and social norms are often seen as barriers against women's participation in political processes. Equality of opportunity is guaranteed under the Constitution and discrimination on grounds of sex, language, religion, class or creed is prohibited. Yet, women's participation is restrained due to attitudinal, institutional, cultural and social restrictions. Balabarathy decided not to get married as family structure may inhibit her participation in public life. Other than the family and social norms in general, she herself has not felt any restraining forces to participate in the electoral process. Within her party she has been recognised as a political leader. Her individual contribution is recognised by the party. She is not under any pressure economically to spend for her election as her party takes care of her election expenditure. She is allowed to pursue her goals as she identifies herself with the party ideologies and they are not in contradiction.

A study by Forum for Democratic Reforms reveals that "the participation of women in politics has actually declined since the days of freedom movement, both in quantity and quality. Government and politics are more important factors in the economic, social, and power structures in India than in most other countries with stronger civil societies, and so, the effect of women's marginalisation in politics is even more detrimental here. The increasing violence, sexual harassment and victimisation of women at the ground level in many of our political parties have made their participation extremely hazardous now independent India, pervasive gender discrimination has resulted in sidelining even veteran women politicians. It is difficult for women to establish a foothold without patronage from powerful men in the party - that too through close personal relations, as wives, daughters and sisters."

The number of women contestants in parliamentary elections has been very minimal since independence. In the first Lok Sabha elections there were 23 women elected. The highest number of women elected has been 44 out of 544 in the year 1984. Political parties, even those headed by women, are



reluctant to field women candidates. The high cost of campaigning is another deterrent to women candidates. Tables 1 and 2 give a clear picture of this.

Table 2: Women's Representation in Parliament 1952-1998

Year	Lok Sabha			Rajya Sabha		
	Seats	Women MPs	% of Women MPs	Seats	Women MPs	% of Women MPs
1952	499	22	4.41	219	16	07.31
1957	500	27	5.40	237	18	07.59
1962	503	34	6.76	238	18	07.56
1967	523	31	5.93	240	20	08.33
1971	521	22	4.22	243	17	07.00
1977	544	19	3.49	244	25	10.25
1980	544	28	5.15	244	24	09.84
1984	544	44	8.09	244	28	11.48
1989	517	27	5.22	245	24	09.80
1991	544	39	7.17	245	38	15.51
1996	543	39	7.18	223	19	08.52
1998	543	43	7.92	245	15	06.12
Average	527	31	5.91	239	22	09.11

Vasuki, a women's rights activist and AIDWA Central Committee Member states that caste polarisation, patriarchal values, criminalisation of politics, corruption, non-sharing of domestic work, character assassination are some of the issues which discourage women from participating in National and State politics. She mused that to be a candidate even in one constituency is already a huge task; that caste considerations are very high and it is very difficult to stay above that; that money is always a problem. Cadre shortage is another problem. She stressed that electoral reforms are needed to overcome this situation.

What drove Balabarathy to participate in elections is her own urge to be in public life and to bring about changes in the society, whereby there will be no inequalities in general. Her own ideology and her commitment to her party are also reasons why she chose to participate in the electoral process. Vasuki points out that there are various reasons why women participate in elections - it may be personal or it may be according to the party's strategy to nominate a woman in a particular constituency. Balabarathy's nomination was due to the fact that CPM got the Dindugal Constituency and was in search of a suitable candidate. Balabarathy was one of the leading activists and so she was nominated. In alliance politics the nomination of a candidate can also be



determined by the seats allotted to a particular party. However, such was not what happened in the case of Balabarathy.

The election of Balabarathy is looked upon positively by women's groups. It is the general opinion that she is different from the usual elected representative. It is recognised that she has made an earnest effort to stand by her promises, that she tried to address the water scarcity in Dindugal and had done her best to implement the schemes designed in this regard. A woman activist from Dindugal observes that even the language of the political leaders changed after the election of Balabarathy. The exchanges of opinions are more dignified than in the past and credit goes to Balabarathy for that.

On one hand, statistics on the success rate of women candidates has always been higher than the male aspirants. On the other hand, the number of women elected to Lok Sabha has not been very impressive. Table 3 illustrates the gender advantage. It shows that the general public has put their confidence more on women candidates.

Table 3: The Gender Advantage

Years when contestant won election	No. of seats available	Total no. of contestants	Male			Female		
			Contested	elected	% won	Contested	elected	% won
1952	489	1,874						
1957	494	1,518	1,473	467	31.7	45	27	60.0
1962	494	1,985	1,915	459	24.0	70	35	50.0
1967	520	2,369	2,302	490	21.3	67	30	44.8
1971	520	2,784	2,698	499	18.5	86	21	24.4
1977	542	2,439	2,369	523	22.1	70	19	27.1
1980	542	4,620	4,478	514	11.5	142	28	19.7
1984	542	5,570	5,406	500	9.2	164	42	25.6
1989	529	6,160	5,962	502	8.5	198	27	13.6
1991	521	8,699	8,374	492	5.9	325	39	12.0
1996	543	13,952	13,353	504	3.8	599	39	6.7
1998	543	4,750	4,476	500	11.2	274	43	15.7
Total			52,806	5,450	10.3	2,040	350	17.16

Conclusion

Balabarathy is a member of Parliament who has experienced many trials in her career as a politician. She has suffered the loss of her father due to his political activism. Yet, Balabarathy became an active member of CPM and won the second election that she contested. While there are many obstacles



that lead to lesser number of women entering politics, the presence of women members of Parliament is important. Therefore, it is felt that reservation of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislatures along the lines of reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes will enhance the participation of women in electoral and parliamentary politics. The very nature of electoral politics keeps the women out of it because of the obstacles mentioned such as caste, money, power, social norms and various other forms of discrimination against women. Reservation for women will reform the general electoral politics and will pave the way for more participation by women. Today in India the Panchayats, which is the third tier of government at the Village and District level, makes it mandatory for women to participate as a result of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which reserves one third seats for women in the Panchayat Elections. The bill introduced for reservation of seats for women in Parliament and the Legislature is not passed yet due to objections from several parties. But it is certainly the need of the hour. Unless made mandatory, the political parties will not give women due share in the political arena. Balabarathy and her party support the reservation of one third seats for women in Parliament and the Legislature. Balabarathy goes one step further and states that there is a need to have an all-women political party which alone will advance the participation of women in National and State politics.

Note:

Tables are sourced from-

- a) Statistical reports of the Election Commission of India;
- b) “Enhancing Women’s Representation in Legislatures”, a report by Forum for Democratic Reforms; and
- c) Constitution of India.

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KOREA: SAVVY TACTICS

By Hong Chun Hee



Kim Hyen Mi

Introduction

Korea (South) is a country that has instituted an election system since 1948. Within the system, the country has experienced the simple majority, proportional representation as well as a mixed system. Women candidates have participated in the different election systems.

In this case study of the Republic of Korea (commonly known as South Korea), it traces the personal and professional road undertaken by a lawmaker¹ Kim Hyen Mi² (43 years old) who ran for the central committee of the Uri party. Kim Hyen Mi is a politician who became ‘the first university-graduate female party executive’ and, by coincidence, started to work in a political party. She became a lawmaker through the proportional representation after 18 years of activities in the party where she worked on strategising other people’s election campaigns. It was only in 2005 when she had the opportunity to plan her own election. Even if the proportional representation was made only within the party, it was very meaningful since it gave a chance to evaluate her 18-year-old political activities and reflect upon her vestige in history of Korean politics.

¹ In South Korea, a member of parliament is known as a lawmaker. This term will be used throughout this chapter.

² Korea has produced many female politicians with substantial development in women’s rights movement since 1990s. As this project is designed to reveal the dynamic relationship between female politicians and women’s right movement through election, it would be more appropriate to take an example from a lawmaker elected from a local constituency than a proportional representation system. However, a lawmaker who was suitable for the condition of this project couldn’t have an interview because of health problems. And Kim Hyen Mi who had been elected from a proportional representative system, and the main subject of this study, could do an interview. In the very nick of time, the Uri party was ahead of its central committee election and Kim was in the race. So Kim Hyen Mi’s case was used as it was also meaningful to introduce inner party election.



Korea's Socio-Economic and Political Status

Korea has developed its industry and democratic system for the past 60 years since it was liberated from Japanese imperialism. Even while confrontation between South and North Korea is still under way, democratisation has made progress; the opportunity for education has been expanded and women's rights were rapidly strengthened. However, pro-economic development policy gave birth to adverse effects such as widening disparities between the rich and the poor, and disseminating conflicts in generations and regions. Some of these adverse effects may have fueled the economic crisis in 1997.

The most remarkable change within Korean society in recent days is the substantial growth in individual freedom. Under military rule in the 1960s and 1970, individual freedom had shrunk, but it was rapidly expanded in the midst of democratisation of 1980s. In particular, the rights of women and labourers were outstandingly promoted. Women's social status was heightened with increased chances of advancement within society. Recently, importance on female human power is further emphasised with the rise of knowledge-information industry.

Korea, which has a population of 47.9 million, is now making efforts to achieve economic and political stability in the course of democratising the country. However, uncomfortable relationship between politics and economy is constantly revealed. Sayings such as 'Politics comes as a stumbling block in the road of economy' or 'Economic advancement is not made without high quality politics' reflect the uneasy relationship between political actors and economic entities. But those conflicts are often common in a transitional period towards lasting cooperation between the two sides.

The Election System

Korea proclaimed Statute 175, the election regulation for lawmakers, on March 17, 1948 under the rule of the US military administration and held a nationwide election on May 10 of the same year. Korea adopted a representational system that elects only one candidate who gets the highest number of votes in a small constituency in case of election for the National Assembly members and local assembly. An electoral district determines a vote in the National Assembly. That refers to the opinions of 'committee of election determination'. In case of a proportional representation system, a certain number of members are assigned to a party in proportion to the number of percentage votes it obtained in the local constituencies of general election. But this system was changed since it could be misinterpreted that voters support a party that includes a candidate who obtain the highest votes. From the 17th general election performed on April 15, 2004, a new system



was put in place. Each voter is allowed two votes, one for a candidate and the other for a party.

Since a present system of small constituency system can give rise to spoilt votes, it is not efficient to reflect public opinions, thus, undermining the advance of small parties or political beginners into the Assembly. At the same time it reduces a portion for a proportional representative at the cost of its original purpose, a vocational representation and secure in professionals. A proportional representation system that follows a party voting list in a big constituency is desirable in order to resolve the problems above and encourage the participation in politics from various groups within a society.

Kim Hyen Mi ran for the National Assembly in a proportional representation system because she thought it would be favorable for her since her long-time service as a party executive in a central party would not have much influence in a local constituency. She had planned to run in a local constituency in the next election where she would promote herself by using activities in the Assembly and as a party executive. To this end, she ran for the election to become a central committee member. The Uri party consists of four standing central committee members and 72 central committee members representing the public. The Uri party carries out four votes per person in the central committee election. The poll rate was 81%, which meant 1,932 representatives out of the total 2,387 voted and Kim Hyen Mi took the top post of Kyounggido committee by getting 736 votes and became a chairperson of women's affair committee which is usually taken by the one who gets the most polling scores among women candidates.

Since, unlike the general election, the central committee election is performed based on four votes per person, a number of variables should be considered in predicting a result. For example, voters will mark candidates in the order of preference excluding the least preferable ones and they are likely to choose male and female candidates alternatively. Therefore, even among female candidates, the one who gets high recognition from the party men is likely to succeed in getting higher votes.

Korea's Politics and Women's Participation in Politics

Women's participation in politics was discussed earnestly in 1991 with the resurrection of local autonomy system. It emerged as a major focus of the feminist movement in the country. However, the number of women in politics did not increase remarkably in the 1990s. Starting from the 17th General Election in 2004, women's involvement in politics was expanded³.

³ A number of female politicians made inroads into the National Assembly since the 17th general election. However, there were already many women lawmakers who had been



The quotas for women in the proportional representation system were increased to 50%, doubling the number of women lawmakers compared with that of the 16th General Election. Table 1 shows the present status of women lawmakers in the National Assembly.

Table 1: The Status of Women Lawmakers in National Assembly (1948-2004)

The National Assembly	The total number of lawmakers	The total number of female Lawmakers	The number of female lawmakers (direct election)	The number of female lawmakers (The national constituency)
1 st (1948)	200	1(0.5%)	1	-
2 nd (1950)	210	2(0.9%)	2	-
3 rd (1954)	203	1(0.5%)	1	-
4 th (1958)	233	3(1.3%)	3	-
5 th (1960)	233	1(0.4%)	1	-
6 th (1963)	175	2(1.1%)	1	1
7 th (1967)	175	3(1.7%)	1	2
8 th (1971)	204	5(2.5%)	0	5
9 th (1973, stage1)	219	11(5.8%)	2	9
(1973, stage 2)	(219)	8(3.7%)	(2)	6
10 th (1978)	231	8(3.5%)	1	7
11 th (1981)	276	9(3.3%)	1	8
12 th (1985)	276	8(2.9%)	2	6
13 th (1988)	299	6(2.0%)	0	6
14 th (1992)	299	8(2.7%)	1	7
15 th (1996)	299	10(3.0%)	3	7
16 th (2000)	273	16(5.9%)	5	11
17 th (2004)*	299	39(13%)	10	29
Total	4,323	139(3.2%)	35	104

Source: Kim Won Hong, 2002: 48. and author's field data, 2004.

engaged in women's right movement before. Lee Mi Kyoung, Han Myoung Sook who served as representatives of Korean Womenlink, Kim Hee Sun who was a representative of Korea Women's Hotline, Lee Kyoung Sook who held the post of Korean Womenlink from the 17th assembly, Son Bon Sook who established Korean Institute for Women & Politics, and Lee Gye Kyoung, ex-president of the Women's News. Women's circle has also been making its efforts to expand women's advancement into a political circle in a local scene as well as in a central government and female politicians are making brisk activities, in fact.



Since Korean women obtained suffrage in 1948⁴, their political rights were ensured legally; but their participation rate in the Assembly and local assembly is very slight. Even though their suffrage had been secured legally, women's right movement resisted the mainstream politics under the military rule. Under the circumstances, participating in politics was considered as damaging in the original meaning of women's right movement. The movement remained critical against incumbent political system (Oh-Chang Mi Kyoung, 2004: 260)

Due to the adverse notion against politics, women's interest in politics was small but the possibility of advancement into the political circle was expanded with the establishment of local autonomy. The local assembly is relatively easier to enter into than its central counterpart in terms of the election cost and the availability of seats. It was asserted that the environment was conducive to women's role as well (Kim Kyoung Ae, 2001: 5). Under these circumstances, a women's circle including various women's organisations formed a coalition to expand women's participation and penetration into the political arena even if each organisation has slightly different political positions and goals.

Table 2: Women Lawmakers in the Metropolitan and Local Assembly, (1995-2002)

Year		Metropolitan Assembly					Local Assembly		
		Total	Women			%	Total	Women	%
1995	Local constituency	972	875	56	13	5.8	4,541	71	1.6
	Proportional		97		43				
1998	Local	690	616	41	14	5.9	3,490	56	1.4
	Proportional		74		27				
2002	Local	682	609	63	14	9.2	3,485	77	2.2
	Proportional		73		49				

Source: Korean Womenlink 2002, 5.

The collective activities by women's organisations for the past 10 years fall into three major areas. First, there is the movement that encouraged a quota system in elections as a part of improvement of the system. Second, the establishment of 'Female Politics Network' and 'Women's Association for the 17th General Election' by the association of female politics organisations and research institutes. Third, the creation of 'Woman Power 2004', a network

⁴ Women were represented in the 10th General Election in 1948. However, it was not meaningful to women, in particular, or politics, in general. This is because the election was designed by the U.S. military administration to establish a government with rightists only while ostracising leftists and moderates (Lee Sung Hee, 1994: 182).



that supports female candidates who won the election (Kim Eun Kyoung, 2004: 283-286). Table 2 shows the percentage of women lawmakers at the Metropolitan and Local Assembly levels.

As a result of those efforts, party convention rules had been revised and a new clause that allocates female candidates to 30% among total candidates in a proportional representative system was made prior to the 16th General Election in 2000. Another revision in the convention rule that assigns 50% of metropolitan proportional representative candidacy to women was made before the 2002 local election. Then, the names of 101 female candidates were announced by political parties after recommendation, education and requests were made to each political party. Out of the total 101 candidates, 39 had won on the 17th General Election where 18 were recommended by 'Woman Power 2004' (Nam-Yun Insoon, 2004:18).

All those associations were made in order to strengthen women's political voices. Women's circle has made great efforts to consolidate women's voices by introducing a quota system, producing eligible candidates and debating on the problems of electoral district system (Hong Chun Hee, 2005: 4). Women's circle has made great contributions to expand women's participation in politics. However, it is also true that women politicians were generally found in some specific areas such as women's circle, the academic and the legal world. Most of the candidates of the National Assembly are active politicians or party men followed by legal professional and educators. But in case of women, not only the numbers of working politicians are small but their percentage compared to men in a party is very low. In particular, women's percentage in the central party is below 10%.

Table 3: The Percentage of Women in the Ruling and the Opposition Party in 2002

		The Grand National Party		The Democratic Party*	
The party leadership	Male	74	68	66	60
	Female		6 (8.1%)		6 (9.1%)
Executive member of a party	Male	45	43	102	92
	Female		2 (4.4%)		10 (9.8%)
Executive member of central party secretariat	Male	128	116	167	153
	Female		12 (9.4%)		14 (8.4%)
Total	Male	247	227	335	305
	Female		20 (8.1%)		30 (9.0%)

Source: Kim Jung Sook, 2003: 28.

* The Uri Party was formed by the reform-minded party members of the Democratic Party.



Active politicians and party members account for most of the candidates who won seats in the Assembly and women are very rare among them. This indicates the difficulty in finding and cultivating female politicians. Regarding this trend, it was natural for political parties to recruit well-known women from outside and women's circle responded to their demand. At present, that is the major path for women to enter into politics in Korea.

Case Study: Kim Hyen Mi

Childhood/Education

Kim Hyen Mi was born as the second daughter of eight children to a wealthy rural landlord in Jeongeup, North Cholla province in 1962. Thanks to the wealth of her family, she enjoyed a wholesome childhood with her siblings and went through formal schooling without economic difficulties. Kim's family adhered to Confucian custom that includes a notion of preferring a son to a daughter, an idea prevalent among rural people then. So they regarded education for girls as a means of finding a good spouse in the future. People thought that girls' destiny do not change with their marriage regardless of their level of education.

Kim Hyen Mi's family had keenly been interested in politics for many generations. Her grandfather was a lawmaker before the Korean War and her father was a chairman of the city council. But Kim's family started leaning increasingly towards conservative tendencies with the death of her grandfather during the Korean War. While growing up, Kim Hyen Mi always thought that she should be superior to men in many ways since she had undergone sexism growing up in the family. She did her best in whatever endeavors, in her studies as well as in social circle (including fighting with a boy when the situation called for it!). She was such a tomboy in her teens that she could not bear the school education system that emphasised femininity.

Kim went through an important incident in her life when she was a high school student. She was attending a Catholic boarding school and witnessed a protest by Catholic priests and nuns who went against the government's clampdown on laborers in Dong-il Textile. Shocked by the brutal crackdown on the religious leaders by the police, Kim thought that something was really wrong. That incident changed Kim Hyen Mi who had vaguely conceived by then that everybody should take status quo and be patient since the country was going through a difficult time.



Another decisive incident that had influenced Kim was the Gwangju Democratic Uprising⁵ in 1980. The chaotic situation in 1980 gave Kim an obscure but strong impression that the Korean society was moving in the wrong direction. After the incident, Kim entered Yonsei University in Seoul and joined a debating society and experienced a student movement. She wondered a lot then whether or not she would devote herself to a student movement or not. Kim's major was politics but she chose it not because she wanted to be a politician but because it was relatively easier for her to do two things: studying for the degree while at the same time being actively involved in student movements. It is quite interesting and ironic that Kim Hyen Mi became a politician; she used to have a very poor opinion of politics.

After graduating from Yonsei University, Kim was engaged in the labour movement. Her affirmation to activism was so firm that she just left a letter at home that she would not come back before South Korea and North Korea were reunified. Initially, she obtained a job at a fluorescent light bulb factory under a pseudonym. By the time she had worked in the factory for six months, she was found by her parents and was brought home by them. Since her parents wanted her to get married, Kim realised that she needed to find a full time position in order to stay away from home with her family approval. So she went to Seoul and was hired to work in the office of Kim Dae-jung. That was the turning point in her life.

Entrance into the Political Arena and Political Activities

Kim Hyen Mi worked as a publicist in Kim Dae-jung's office from 1987. Later Kim Dae-jung's office became known as the Democratic Constitution Research Centre which later became the Peace Democratic Party. With those structural changes, Kim Hyen Mi's found herself first working as a publicist, and then as a reporter of the party's paper. Even while working there, Kim Hyen Mi did not stop thinking of going back to work for the labour movement since she still distrusted politicians and harbored abhorrence against activities within the political arena. In 1987, she decided to focus on the labour movement after she finished covering the presidential election in

⁵ In the midst of mounting dissatisfaction against Park Jung Hee administration, President Park was killed. Then, General Chun Doo Hwan took over the regime through a military coup. People throughout the country protested against the military coup, calling for the removal of martial law, the release of democratic dissenters and the establishment of a democratic country. Unlike other places, Gwangju was brutally trampled by military. Not just protesters, the public was also suppressed by the military. A number of civilians in Gwangju fought against the military. But people in other places did not know that since roads to and from Gwangju were blocked and the press was prohibited from announcing the situation that occurred in Gwangju. This is referred to as 'Gwangju Democratic Uprising'.



December. But Kim Hyen Mi experienced two important incidents during a campaigning tour for Kim Dae-jung.

The first event occurred at Haei-do in Cholla Province, the birthplace of Kim Dae-jung. In the gathering and meetings with the people, Kim Dae-jung suggested many practical alternatives to solve the economic problems of Korea including debts in farming households. Kim Hyen Mi was deeply touched by the sincerity of the politician and felt that she had found a promising future with Kim Dae-jung.

The second important event was related to the assault inflicted by a rival party at the hotel in Pusan immediately after a campaign canvassing for votes. People from the Democratic Justice Party broke into the hotel room and attacked the Peace Democratic Party members by breaking furniture in the room. During this time, Kim Hyen Mi was also assaulted by the attackers. It was at this time that she felt that she reached the point of no return and decided to go with Kim Dae-jung for a change of regime. Through the two experiences, Kim Hyen Mi started as an opposition party executive member. The environment was new to her since her initial interest has always been with the labour movement. There were no female party leaders who graduated from higher education institutions then. Kim was the first female party executive with a university degree.

In 1991, the Peace Democratic Party cooperated with the United New Democratic Party. Among them was lawmaker Lee Woo Jung.⁶ She was the first person to ask Kim Hyen Mi to assist her since Kim knew the situation of the party well. So Kim Hyen Mi worked as a policy secretary of Lee Woo Jung between 1992 and 1995. Kim was quoted as saying that it was the first time for her to meet a person who is involved in feminist activity. Before that, Kim had not participated in any specific feminist activities or organisations except for the activity in women's affairs committee and women's department in the party. Working with Lee Woo Jung gave Kim Hyen Mi a chance to form a connection with 'Women Making Peace (WMP)'s Committee'. Now Kim Hyen Mi is providing direct support for the Director of the committee.

When Kim Hyen Mi first started working in a political party, it was just considered as a job to sustain her herself financially. However, she became an active member of the party leadership after witnessing incidents like those mentioned above. United New Democratic Party changed its name again and

⁶ Lee Woo Jung, born in 1923, graduated from Department of Theology in Korea Theology College. (presently the Hanshin University). She had been teaching there before she resigned in 1970 due to problems in the university and was engaged in human rights movement based on Christianity. She became the chairperson of Korea Women's Associations United in 1987 and played an active role in political arena as one of the supreme members of Democratic Party in 1991.



went through the presidential election in 1997 under the new name of The National Congress for New Politics. Then, Kim Hyen Mi took a position in the office of planning and coordination as the team leader of television monitoring analysis. That was suggested by then presidential candidate Kim Dae-jung saying that television reports related to the election should be closely watched. That was designed to supervise unfair press reports. So Kim Hyen Mi was responsible for watching and analysing press news at short intervals and sending the reports to 700 various organisations and people such as newspaper groups, scholars, civil organisations and labour unions on a weekly basis. That had never been tried before in the history of Korean politics. Thanks to the efforts, unfair press reports were prevented to a certain degree.

Kim Dae-jung was elected as the 15th president of Korea in 1997. After the election, Park Sun Sook, the Vice-Spokesperson of the party was chosen as the liaison for Cheong Wa Dae, the presidential place, and Kim Hyen Mi replaced Park's post in the party in January of 1998. Kim served as a spokesperson for five years i.e. until February of 2003. Through her job Kim Hyen Mi became well known.

Her days (and nights) were basically packed with news and press reports. She woke up with a wake-up call from evening paper reporters and fell a sleep listening to the ringing sound of the morning paper reporters' telephone for five years. Her sincere and diligent attitude and passion won confidence from reporters, impressing them 'Kim Hyen Mi never does the slip of the tongue'. In 2002 Kim assisted the presidential candidate Roh Moo Hyen on the 16th election retaining her post as a deputy spokesperson of the party. She was one of the major players who made an influence in the making of the 16th president by acting as an important spokesperson for Roh Moo Hyen. Kim Hyen Mi entered Cheong Wa Dae with President Roh Moo Hyen and played the role of a domestic press secretary and party policy secretary.

However, the supreme bureaucratic post was too heavy for Kim Hyen Mi who enjoys the much-freer atmosphere of the party. So she went back to the party on the occasion of the 17th General Election and assumed a position in public nomination for the election in the central election planning task group. It was after this position that Kim Hyen Mi became a lawmaker through proportional representation. There were two reasons why she could not run at the local constituency. First, she was too busy with the work at central election planning task group. Second, another candidate who ran in Kim Hyen Mi's hometown was a lawmaker who belonged to the same party. He is presently the Speaker of the National Assembly.

When Kim Hyen Mi was nominated for a candidate at the proportional representation, she obtained the highest points in the political area and was



recognised for being very competent. She came in third on the proportional representation list among women. After becoming a lawmaker, she carried out her task as a member of the National Assembly and the spokesperson of the party at the same time. Kim's career as a party member for a long period of time taught her the possibilities and limitations of the position. Therefore, she decided to become a legislator, believing that as a lawmaker she can accomplish more than just a rank-and-file party member.

Before the Election

Kim Hyen Mi is now a member of the National Policy Committee and Women's Affairs Committee in the National Assembly. She was chosen as an excellent lawmaker after the inspection of the government offices by civilian organisations in 2004. Kim Hyen Mi had known that lawmakers and the central committee of a party need to be in unity long before she even entered the National Assembly. She ran for the central committee and took the first place on the Uri party representative convention in Kyounggido on March 26th in 2005, unexpectedly overcoming her opponents who were second or third term male candidates. So Kim took the post of the chairperson of committee in Kyounggido and women's affair committee as well. The latter one is the post that is usually taken by whoever receives the most polling scores among women candidates.

Kim Hyen Mi had two goals. One was to run for the central committee of her party in order to enable the party and the Assembly to exchange views and opinions freely. And the other was to familiarise herself with Kyounggido in preparation for standing in the local constituency in next election.

Since Kim got a favorable position owing to her role as a spokesperson in the party, she also became a chairperson of women's affairs committee. Kim who had become a professional politician, did her best to collect votes from the floating class as well as supporters. It was clear that the representatives who had different positions with Kim Hyen Mi would never support her. Thus, she tried to muster support by appealing to floating voters at the same time.

Ahead of Kim Hyen Mi's visit to an electoral district in Kyounggido, her aides went to observe the public sentiment first. They tried to win support from voters by a showing humble attitude rather than pledging policies. Later, Kim Hyen Mi devised a suitable campaign for the region. Since it was an election within the party, the overall scale of the election was smaller than a nation-level one and it was effective for Kim Hyen Mi to gain support successfully from representatives by talking with them personally. Telephone stumping was successful as well. Her aides made effective publicity for Kim Hyen Mi by talking on the phone with representatives. It was more like a cursory election but her winning was attributed a lot to her aides since they



worked with such dedication. To her supporters she emphasised her image as a consistent and diligent pillar of the party especially as a competent vice-spokesperson. The total numbers of the representatives in Kyounggido were 2,387 and Kim got 736 votes and took the first place beating 11 candidates.

After the Election

Kim Hyen Mi never expected the top post of the Kyounggido committee. She ran to become the chairperson of women's affair committee and not the chairperson of the province committee. The unexpected result gave Kim Hyen Mi heavy responsibilities. She said that she had a difficult time falling asleep at night. Kyounggido is a huge province with a population of 11 million people, 31 cities and counties and 49 electoral districts. The supreme position of that big province demands heavy responsibilities. Since she had never even run for small elections, it was natural for her to feel overwhelmed and nervous.

The post had both positive and negative sides. It would be helpful for Kim Hyen Mi in that it would stimulate her to do a new and challenging job where tangible results could be expected if she is successful. When the post was filled by a nomination process, only lawmakers who are in their third-term (at least) would qualify. But after it had been changed to an elected post with the abolition of electoral district party chapter, the responsibility of the chair of the province committee was also expanded from coordinating to managing 49 electoral districts directly. Many tasks were added and its stature was consolidated accordingly.

When it comes to the negative side, Kim Hyen Mi says she was put on a test rather too soon. Kim Hyen Mi would compare politics to the growth of children saying that to become a good politician, one should take a step by step approach in order to maintain vitality and endurance. Otherwise, a political career would be fatally damaged sooner rather than later. Kim Hyen Mi's four-year schedule had already been booked with legislative activities. But it became more complicated and demanding with the undertaking of the important post.

"The best way to overcome this negative aspect is to know correctly where I am. Since I became a lawmaker, I should always be humble in the presence of colleague legislators or a nation. Otherwise my life as a politician would be finished soon", said Kim Hyen Mi. So she is trying to meet with other lawmakers who had been engaged in activities at the local constituencies and take their advice. Kim Hyen Mi pays more attention to establishing effective operation system for the Kyounggido committee than focusing on playing a minimalist role as a chairperson of the committee. At the same time, she tries to collect and embrace other people's opinions.



Conclusion

Lawmaker Kim Hyen Mi has grown with the history of Korean politics. Considering Korea's present situation where political parties recruit renowned females to the parties when they need to supplement quotas for female politicians, Kim Hyen Mi's 18-year-old career as a professional politician is worthwhile to notice. She is exceptional in terms of her experience with party politics as well as her knowledge of the media.

Kim Hyen Mi was brought up in a wealthy but conservative family. She learned about democracy and human rights while she was studying at the university. Considering her family background that is dominated by patriarchy and sexism, Kim's unusual interest and the path she has taken to become a politician is exemplary to aspiring female politicians.

Since Korea at large is still under the influence of Confucianism, girls cannot grow up entirely free from the old doctrines. Unlike the usual case, Kim seemed to take positive effects to foster her political orientation from it. Women who obtain good education and opportunities to work where their values their opinions and abilities are recognised have courage to fight absurdity and discrimination in the world.

By challenging a new area, women's right to have their voices heard in various parts of society can be expanded. As the 'first woman college-graduated party executive', Kim Hyen Mi showed the possibility for a woman to become a successful politician once she has exhibited her commitments to other women party executives. Kim Hyen Mi claims that her case would be a good model for women party executives as she witnessed most of the women politicians were identified from outside the party (outsourcing). Kim Hyen Mi was not 'the first woman spokesperson'. In her case, she consolidated her post and opened doors for other female politicians to enter.

Kim Hyen Mi had recognised her present position and planned her future with confidence, faith and with a profound insight on life. Kim Hyen Mi remained firm even when her future did not move forward as she had planned and found what she could do. When she faced the objection of her family against her willingness to work for the labour movement, she put it aside for a while but never gave up. In the same sense, she did not leave politics after she had plunged into it. This is because she had found what she hoped for and she believed that policies could be changed or improved through a change of regime.

Kim Hyen Mi did not display confidence and passion for a change of regime in a loud manner. Whenever her party was in trouble, Kim Hyen Mi displayed her true ability by producing appropriate policies and displaying her savvy abilities. When she won the position as the chairperson of Kyounggido



committee as a first-timer in the Assembly, she felt sorry for missing the gradual steps or learning process to become a good lawmaker. While she is appreciative of the fact that the voters put trust in her, she did not feel it was appropriate to celebrate her immediate success.

Kim Hyen Mi's case and feminism do seem to share common grounds. Kim Hyen Mi appears to put a certain distance between herself and 'feminist activity'. Instead, she believes that she is a beneficiary of feminism arguing that living in Korea as a woman and a female politician in a male-dominated political arena is a form of advancing the feminist movement itself. The reason why Kim Hyen Mi put a distance between herself and feminist activities relates to her thinking that her idea of feminism and her experience with it were rather different. If the term 'feminist activity' is defined as 'a movement or activity associated with women's organisations', Kim Hyen Mi has never been engaged in feminist activity because she does not belong to any women's organisations except the 'Peace-loving Women's Committee.' That engagement was actually on the recommendation of lawmaker Lee Woo Jung when Kim Hyen Mi served as her policy secretary. Kim Hyen Mi views her life as a process of promoting feminist ideals

Kim Hyen Mi's interview was conducted immediately after her party had finished the central committee election. Her top aides were interviewed together, allowing them to express their opinions on the election. Kim seemed to be nervous because it was her first election as a candidate, not a campaign manager. So Kim Hyen Mi's election workers made extra efforts in contacting and canvassing the representatives of the party. Some people from the party said Kim Hyen Mi's campaigning was too excessive and attributed to her winning to the system of four votes per person⁷. But Kim Hyen Mi's top aide claimed that Kim Hyen Mi's reputation and image as a politician was more convincing than the other candidates. Kim Hyen Mi has established her reputation as the one who would stand with the Uri party, remained firm whenever the party was in trouble and in pursuit of progressive politics rather than agreeing to status quo. Her efforts to come up with women's policies are included in her reformative and progressive political principles.

In an election, it is important to identify one's objectives and target voters. In Kim Hyen Mi's case, even though the total number of voters was very small compared to the general election, she was more successful than she had expected because she had delved into issues close to the heart of voters. Kim

⁷ According to "Four votes per one person" system, voters select four people out of all the candidates in order to elect a chairperson of committee. Many various situations can happen in this system. For example, a group of promising candidates including influential ones can emerge as strong contenders. Therefore, a highly-recognised candidate with clear political line may have an advantage in this system.



Hyen Mi revealed she would run in a local constituency next election and utilise similar tactics in campaigning, focusing on her supporters and floating voters. The main strategy is to focus on good politics and not anything else.

This study focuses on how would-be women politicians could learn from the experience of Kim Hyen Mi in establishing election strategies, raising fund and mobilising personnel necessary in election campaign. Furthermore, it highlights how an election and feminist activities are related to each other. In a sense, Kim Hyen Mi's case may not be suitable for the purpose because the election she participated in was at the central committee level, and not a general one. However, since this study comprises the expansion of women's participation, Kim Hyen Mi's case is meaningful because the actions taken by her and her team of assistants can be duplicated by other possible women political aspirants running under similar circumstances.

Lastly, it is noted that the number of women politicians has increased since the 2004 general election. Each of them may have taken different paths to enter the political circles. It is possible to consider that Korea can provide new models for female political participation. Kim Hyen Mi's case is one of them. It provides us with an unlimited imagination, encouraging us to turn the imagination into reality as she has done with her life.

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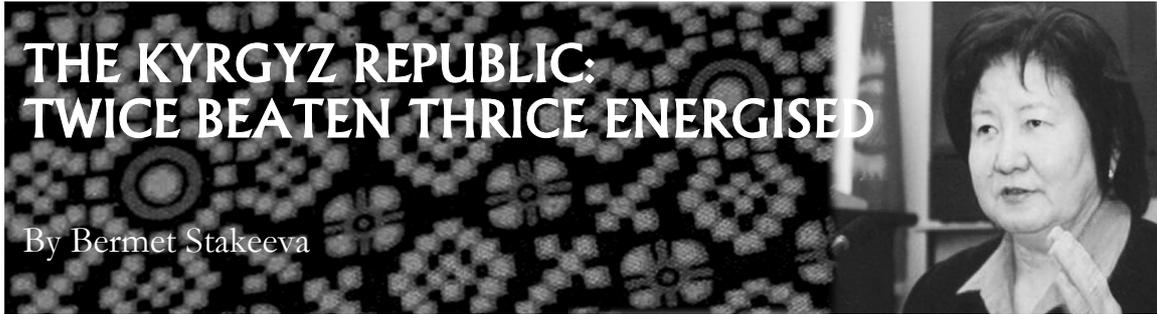
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THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC: TWICE BEATEN THRICE ENERGISED

By Bermet Stakeeva



Toktokan Borombaeva

Introduction

A dramatic decline in women's participation in political processes in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 parliamentary elections has shown the world the vulnerability of women's access to power structures and impermanence of previous gains. Women in Kyrgyzstan, as well as in Asia Pacific, are challenged by existing political structures and patriarchal stereotypes, which hinder women's political participation. Women themselves must and should be important actors in challenging and changing this existing political environment.

This case study is about Toktokan Borombaeva, who was a member of the Kyrgyzstan *Jogorku Kenesh* (National Parliament) for three years. Toktokan is a significant figure in the national women's movement having run as a candidate in the 1995, 2000 and 2005 national elections. In this research, data was gathered on the political, economic and cultural context of Kyrgyzstan, Toktokan's background, and details of her entrance into politics. The data gives a picture of women's access to and their role in political decision-making bodies. Strategies used by Toktokan to advance the cause of women's movement during elections and while in her term in parliament were also collated.

Toktokan's reflections of her experience (both positive and negative) in the electoral struggle, strategies used, relations with the women's movements, organisations and political parties, contributes as a collective political resource to be used both in and outside Kyrgyzstan. This experience is especially valuable for women from countries in transition. This case study also attempts to find out how women in Kyrgyzstan can strengthen their participation in the political processes and how, as parliamentarians, they can assist the women's movement realise their goals.

Identification of restraining forces and driving forces in pre-, during- and post-electoral campaigns; assessment of the strategies used by Toktokan to win and address women's needs in her parliamentary work is also included in



this case study. Additionally, a review of the country's legislation in relation to elections and political processes, as well as social factors that affect women's participation in political processes is integrated in this study.

Kyrgyzstan in transition

Kyrgyzstan, officially known as the Kyrgyz Republic since 1991, is a Central Asian country that is in the process of transition from socialism to capitalism. The Kyrgyzstan government practices a republic form of governance. The Republic has seven *oblasts* (provinces): Chui Oblasty, Jalal Abad Oblasty, Naryn Oblasty, Osh Oblasty, Talas Oblasty, Batken Oblasty and Ysyk-Kol Oblasty. Bishkek, the capital, is situated in the north of the country. Kyrgyzstan gained independence from the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) on 31 August 1991. The Constitution was adopted on 5 May 1993; with amendments adopted in 1994, 1996 (amendment proposed by President Askar Akaev and passed in a national referendum on 10 February 1996 significantly expanding the powers of the President at the expense of the legislature), 1998, and finally in 2003. In 2005 a Constitution Reform Council was formed to review the Constitution. The legal system is based on civil law, with 18 being the age of suffrage.

Executive branch

The head of state is the President (currently Kurmanbek Bakiev who is in office from 15 August 2005 - till next 2010 Presidential elections). The first and sole President for the last 14 years was Askar Akaev (28 October 1991 till official resignation on 4 April 2005). The head of government is the Prime Minister. The President is elected by popular vote for a five-year term and the Prime Minister is appointed by the President and approved by Parliament. From 1991 till 2004 the President, on the recommendation of the Prime Minister, appointed the Cabinet of Ministers. In December 1995, Akaev was re-elected with 75% of total votes. 2005 elections brought Bakiev to the presidency with a landslide victory by winning 85% of total votes counted.

Legislative and Judicial branch

Before 2005 there was a bicameral Supreme Council or *Jogorku Kenesh* (Parliament) consisting of the Assembly of People's Representatives (60 seats where members were elected by popular vote to serve a five-year term) and the Legislative Assembly (45 seats where members were elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms). However, according to the Election Code of 2003, Kyrgyzstan's Parliament had only one chamber after the 2005 parliamentary elections. As a result currently there are 75 members of Parliament in a one-chamber Parliament. The assembly meets twice a year.



The Judicial branch consists of a Supreme Court, Constitutional Court and High Court of Arbitration. In the Supreme Court, the Supreme Council appoints judges for 10-year terms upon recommendations from the President.

History of the electoral system

During the period of independence, Kyrgyzstan passed three forms of Parliament. The first form (1991 till 1995) was the Soviet Councils as the only form through which people exercised State power. These people's councils were the political basis of Kyrgyzstan before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Supreme Soviet (Supreme Council of the Republic) played the role of Parliament. Independent Kyrgyzstan adopted a new Constitution in 1993, which renamed the existing Supreme Council *Jogorku Kenesh* and continued its work as the legislative body of the country. In 2003 the Parliament declared its unicameral status, ending ten years of bicameral Parliament. Further, the 2003 Constitution did not adopt the proportional representative system. Instead, it established a majoritarian one.

The Election Code of 1999 changed both the elections procedures and electoral system. It *liquidated all quotas*, which negatively impacted on women's participation in parliament, since neither female candidates nor voters were ready for this. This resulted in a harsh reduction of women's representation in the Parliament of 1995. Out of 82 female candidates for this election, only five won. In the 2000 elections there was a further decrease in the number of women who ran as candidates and only seven women became members of Parliament: six in the Legislative Assembly and one in the Assembly of Peoples' Representatives. In the Constitution and Election Code amendments prior to 2005, no temporary measures for reaching gender equality were included. During these years Kyrgyzstan has signed and adopted various international documents for gender equality promotion, ratified CEDAW, signed the convention of political rights of women and made official declarations about the State's commitments to women's rights. In spite of these actions, international organisations were noting that the amendments did "meet international standards for elections and political processes".¹

2005 Parliamentary elections description

The unicameral parliamentary elections were held on 27 February 2005, based on the majoritarian electoral system. Members of the 75-seat *Jogorku Kenesh* were elected for a five-year term from 75 single-mandate constituencies from

¹ NDI commentary of proposed changes to legal framework for elections in the Kyrgyz republic. For additional information please look at http://www.ndi.org/NDI/library/1090_kg_electchgs.pdf#search='Parliament, electoral system Kyrgyzstan', p.2.



a population of five million people, of whom 2.6 million were eligible to vote. The political parties that secured seats in the new Parliament were *Alga Kyrgyzstan* (Forward, Kyrgyzstan) –10; *Ata-Jurt* (Fatherland Party) –1; and *Asaba* (Flag Party) –1.

According to the Central Election Commission, the turnout was 57% of eligible voters. Voting did not take place in the Tong district of the Issyk-Kul region because the electoral officials could not deliver ballots due to protests over the barring of an opposition leader. Voting was scheduled to take place in these areas in early March 2005. After the first round of elections, the opposition held demonstrations in central Bishkek and in the south of country to protest against electoral fraud.

Out of all the candidates only 31 received the absolute majority of votes required to be elected. Ten of them were members of the *Alga Kyrgyzstan* party. Two opposition members Muratbek Mukashev of *Ata-Jurt* party and Azimbek Beknazarov of *Asaba* party, both well-known critics of President Akayev, also won seats. Other successful candidates ran as independents although they were known to be pro-government. President Akayev's son, Aydar Akayev, won his seat, while the President's daughter, Bermet Akaeva, had gone through the second round (scheduled for 13 March). She won the elections with huge administrative support and by putting pressure on voters. After the March 2005 revolutionary events, elections results were revised in several districts. Two female members of Parliament lost their cases in court. Later, in the re-elections held in September 2005, the last woman member of Parliament, former President's daughter, Bermet left the Parliament too. Bermet's opponent, a man, won the elections thus resulting in zero women's representation in the Kyrgyz Parliament.

Looking at the *gender aspect*, there is an unprecedented failure of State's gender policy for women's empowerment. This of course was the logical and predicted result from the last changes in legislation. One can argue that the shift from the proportional-majoritarian electoral system to majoritarian may have created more barriers for women's participation in political processes. Besides the decrease in the number of seats in Parliament, heavy competition, lack of financial resources and support provided to women candidates and potential candidates and the absence of quotas were major reasons for the lack of women's representation in the current parliament.

Furthermore, the Election Code denies civil society organisations the right to nominate their representatives. During the last decade when women were already out of official political bodies, it was within the NGOs and other civil society organisations that women could and were applying their leadership capacity and skills. A number of women from NGOs would have run in the 2005 Parliamentary elections if political circumstances were different. NGOs



were not even able to work for female candidates legally. Among registered candidates, there were 427 men and only 41 women. In the first round of elections no woman received the majority of votes. However, in the next round of elections, three women were elected as members of the Parliament. Unfortunately, after the political crisis that occurred on 24 March 2005, all three women lost their seats.

A survey conducted by the National Statistical Committee on the Kyrgyz Republic (published in 1999) reports that 61% of women did not want to work in state or local governing bodies.² Indirectly, this indicates that the majority of women-respondents continue to be discouraged in having a political career. Democracy and equal participation of women in the decision-making process are two sides of one coin. The state data (in regards to gender balance) shows that men dominate all levels of decision-making positions. In comparison to men (67.1%), fewer women (32.9%) hold positions in high offices.³ In autumn of 2005 a new government was formed with only one-woman minister. There were no women out of the seven provincial governors.

Women in Parliament

Historically women in Kyrgyzstan were actively participating in political and social processes. This has been one of the priority issues within the context of gender inequality and imbalance that was addressed at the State level since the 1920s. One measure was the introduction of quotas, which existed till 1999. From 1980 to 1985 women comprised 36.2% of the Supreme Council.

In addressing the issue of Kyrgyzstan's transition from socialism to market economy, Nurgul Djanaeva states that, "the political process of the past has devaluated political rights of people. This political heritage in combination with social disappointment has its own impact. The Communist Party on behalf of the people made all major political decisions in the Soviet Past. During the transition period all political processes have not so far improved the life of people"⁴. In the past few years after the country entered the period of transition, women are facing a lot of challenges one of which is the disempowerment process. Table 1 illustrates the status of women in Parliament using statistical data and analysis.

² National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (1999) *Women and Men in the Kyrgyz Republic*. Bishkek, p. 66.

³ National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (1999) *Women and Men in the Kyrgyz Republic*. Bishkek, p.59.

⁴ Djanaeva, N. (2002) *Women in Transition*. Bishkek, p. 80.



Table 1: Women in Parliament

	2000	2005	2005
Registered candidates	455	427	427
Male	414	386	386
Female	41 (34 ⁵)	41	41
Total seats in Parliament	105: 60 (Legislative Assembly)+ 45 (People's Representatives Assembly)	75	75
Female MPs	7: 6+1	3	0
Percent of women among deputies	6.7	2.25	0
Political system	Majoritarian / Proportional	Majoritarian	Majoritarian

Djanaeva underlines the role of the political system, failure of the State and political parties to implement their commitment to women's empowerment: "There is a contradiction between political announcements and real political practice in relation to women's political participation. This was one of the reasons of the drastic losses of women during the last elections. And this was also a reason why a very small number of women participate in elections as candidates. It is not realised that there is a need in Kyrgyzstan of special programmes at state level to allow women to enter the political arena with equal opportunities and that it is one of the state's international obligations, after it has signed CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action, etc. Political parties are undermining the role of women. Political leaders are working and thinking from traditional male paradigms and they do not reflect very often".⁶

In 2000, out of the six female deputies of the Legislative Assembly of the National Parliament three were elected from the political party lists. Two of them were elected from the Women's Democratic Party, and one from the Party of Participants of War in Afghanistan and Other Local Conflicts. The other three women were elected from the single-mandate electoral district. The only woman-member of the Peoples' Representative Assembly was elected from a single-mandate district. Professional backgrounds of female members of Parliament were diverse. Among them are teachers, physicians, a businesswoman, a banker, a journalist, a NGO representative and a

⁵ Data from Genderstan (2004) Partnership between men and women for gender equality. Bishkek, p. 14

⁶ Djanaeva, N. (2002) *Women in transition*. Bishkek, p. 88-89.



representative of the trade unions. Two women were elected twice. In the Legislative Assembly of the previous Parliament there were 22 committees, three permanent commissions, and in the Peoples' Representative Assembly there were seven committees, majority of which were headed by men, while only two of them were chaired by women. In reflecting on the national laws of gender equality in decision-making, Djanaeva notes that even though the legal system of the Kyrgyz Republic, including Constitution, does not include open gender discriminatory clauses, it failed to provide and realise political opportunities for women. The low level of women's participation in political processes did become a concern to the government. The State has made efforts to advance women's participation in political processes by adopting several laws regarding women's equality: Law of the Kyrgyz Republic "On the Basics of the State Guarantees of Gender Equality" (adopted by the national Parliament on 31 January 2003) and the Law on Public Administration of 2002.

Although these efforts have not increased women's participation in the political process, both in number or in the terms of meeting women's gender needs, they gradually laid the foundation for public recognition of gender inequality. The foundation includes legal steps toward ensuring women's participation in decision-making. A matrix of measures on the implementation of the National Action Plan for gender equality was developed and adopted. However, this matrix does not include positive measures like quotas or affirmative action for the state institutions or political parties. "Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Basics of the State Guarantees of Gender Equality" is regarded as the first serious political step toward gender equality. As a single law it is weak; it does not have punitive mechanisms as part of its enforcement. However, Chapter II of the Law is wholly devoted to guaranteeing gender equality in the State government and civil services. It has declaratory clauses and does not have a concrete measurable target or means of reaching it. Chapter V "Gender Equality Enforcement Mechanism" provides minimal means of enforcing the law. Only once it mentions quota (article 23) - the national Parliament "shall appoint, on consideration of the representation, no more than seventy percent of persons of one and the same sex to offices of" judges of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court, members of the Central Commission on Elections and Referendums, and auditors of the Auditing Chamber of the Kyrgyz Republic. There are no clauses regarding guarantees of women's representation in such political institutions as national or local Parliaments and governments, except a statement that adopts temporal special measures on gender discrimination (Article 6 "Prohibition of Gender Discrimination" of the gender equality law). As a result of very vague and obscure provisions in this law, important documents such as the National Election Code, last amended on 24 January



2004 (which is **after** the adoption of the gender equality law), does not include any special measure to guarantee gender equality in political life. This fact indicates the weakness of the gender equality law and its minimal impact on women's political rights' realisation.

Thus, despite the declaration of international obligations and conventions in Kyrgyzstan, human rights approach is not realised. Numerous commitments of the State have not been fulfilled and no temporary measures, like quota or affirmative actions were introduced. In other words, CEDAW, BFPA, conventions on political rights and other conventions were not applied in practice.

Political crisis of 24 March 2005

Poverty, corruption and widespread disappointment with 2005 election results led to the activation and consolidation of the opposition, involving an attack on the "White House" leading towards the eventual loss of power by President Akaev. Political participation of the President's family created the feeling of resentment among the people. President Akayev's son, daughter and sisters-in-law ran in the parliamentary elections utilising huge administrative resources to mobilise support for the Akaev's political party "*Alga-Kyrgyzstan*" (led by Akaev's daughter - Bermet Akaeva). In February and March 2005, mass rallies and protests took place in many provinces of Kyrgyzstan. The peak of political turbulence was on 24 March. Destabilisation of social and political life put at risk all previous gains and at the same time gave new opportunities for new political players. Following the events of 24 March, when the opposition took over the government, political parties and civil society organisations started to work on implementing the slogans of democracy. There were major public disputes among members of the Parliament since a majority of the parliamentary seats were still held by Akaev's political party. In those districts where violations of candidates' rights were proven, new members of Parliament got their mandate. The Presidential elections scheduled for July 10, 2005 brought into power a leader of the opposition, Kurmanbek Bakiev. During the elections one of the six candidates was a woman (the only female presidential candidate), Toktaim Umetalieva, who is active in the civil society. She obtained only 0.5 % of the total votes. In the newly formed government, there is only one female minister.



Toktokan Borombaeva - the struggle to go on

Background

Toktokan Borombaeva has been a member of the Legislative Chamber of the Kyrgyz National Parliament from December 2002 till March 2005. She ran for Parliament in 1985, 1995, 2000 and 2005. Toktokan was born on 8 March 1950 in the village of Illichevka in Uzgen district of Osh Province in a family of farmers. She has attained three higher education degrees: from the School of Physics, Kyrgyz State University; Almaty Institute of Economics; and Prognosis Kyrgyz Agricultural Institute. She grew up in a family of nine children - five girls and four boys. Toktokan was the eldest in the family. Before her, her elder siblings died and her parents prayed that she would survive. If one were to translate her name, it means "Stop." Her parents wanted God to stop taking another child.

When Toktokan was three years old she lost her mother. Her father remarried. A caring relationship developed between Toktokan and her stepmother and they respected each other. Although Toktokan lived with her parents, it was her paternal grandmother who raised her. Her grandmother was a smart and wise woman. She was from a very prosperous family and had an excellent education. She brought up Toktokan with the best tradition of the southern region of her country. Her grandmother played a significant role in Toktokan's personal development. Her father worked in the cotton fields and was a collective brigadier. From a very young age, Toktokan knew the meaning of physical labour and her family culture respected all forms of labour. Although her father completed only four years of primary education, he had many opinions on issues and was well read in diverse literature, especially historical stories. It was her father who instilled in Toktokan the love for the history of her people. From early childhood Toktokan heard about female leaders of the Kyrgyz people - Janyl Myrza, Kurmanjan Datkha, and others. He always mentioned Bopo Karimova, who was the head of the city's Communist Party committee in various districts of the South. Karimova was a bright person, independent in many ways. According to her father strong women are always able to make right decisions and women should be supported in their effort to participate fully within the country's social and political life. (Here it should be noted that southern provinces are known to be impacted by Islam, thus having a stricter attitude towards women's participation in social and political processes.)

School years

Toktokan studied well in a school that used Russian as the medium of instruction. In her class she became a leader, actively taking part in all school



activities, and often was an initiator of many activities. School teachers supported Toktokan's ideas. In spite of the fact that many of her classmates wanted to become housewives, Toktokan planned to continue her studies. Traditional attitude in south Kyrgyzstan was to support boys in furthering their education and for girls to marry. But the State was promoting girls' education in universities. Her family decided to send Toktokan to the capital. Some male family members were skeptical. Toktokan passed successfully all admission exams and became a student of the School of Physics in the Kyrgyz State University. Gender imbalance in specialisations in science was common - only 30 percent of the students in the School of Physics were female. During her student years Toktokan showed great interest, courage and commitment in struggle for justice and gender equality and the fight against patriarchal attitudes toward women. In Kyrgyzstan there are cases of girls being kidnapped to foster marriages. These marriages without consent have led to many women living in an unhappy environment. When Toktokan heard about girls being kidnapped for marriage, she assisted them in resisting discriminatory social pressures. When one of the students from her faculty was kidnapped, Toktokan organised a team of friends to save her and they succeeded in their effort in spite of the family's resistance. After graduation Toktokan started working as a secondary school teacher in her village despite being offered a job in the capital. At the end of the first work year she received a certificate of honour in recognition for being an excellent teacher and organiser of extracurricular activities.

Marriage and family

Later on Toktokan married a veterinary doctor, Arstanbek Polotov. She fostered good relations with her in-laws. Her father-in-law was actively participating in village governance. As he held a progressive view on women, he became very influential in Toktokan's career. The same support came from her husband also. In fact, Toktokan planned to continue studies in a doctoral programme, but a great opportunity to start her political career changed her life. Her first reaction to an offer to take on a position as second secretary in the district Committee of Communist Union of Youth was rejected by Toktokan. This was interpreted by the State and Communist Party as a result of the family's circumstances. Her husband and parents-in-law were then called to a discussion at the district party office and through joint efforts they finally convinced Toktokan to take the offer.

Professional and political career

Toktokan entered the political arena in 1965. From 1965 till 1973 she was an active member of the Communist Union of Soviet Youth. In the Soviet period in Kyrgyzstan there was only one political party - the Communist



Party. After independence, the Kyrgyz people became more involved in forming political parties. In 1974 Toktokan became a candidate of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union till 1999. Toktokan worked as the Secretary of the Uzgen District Committee (1980-1990) and as a vice-chair of the District Council of the People's representatives (1990).

Her job as the Second Secretary of the Uzgen District Committee included supervision of the Party's programmes for youth and children. In this capacity Toktokan showed her leadership skills. In those days any event held by the Communist Party had a higher priority than any other. Toktokan managed to make youth issues in the region a priority issue. An example of her ability is illustrated here. In the district there was one building that served as a venue for all district level events. On one occasion, two events were scheduled at the same time: one organised by the Communist Party and the second by the Youth Communist Union. Toktokan pointed out that the youth group must be given priority. She convinced the State authorities to give the venue to the youth meeting. Of course it was a small change, but it showed the people that committed persons can change the status quo.

In December 1976 Toktokan became the Secretary of the District Committee of the Communist Union of Youth. There was a lot of work to be done. As an experienced professional in corn cultivation, she worked with her team to reach high crop capacities. Her report at the Agricultural Congress was mentioned as one of the best.

The next career step was as head of the Popularisation Department of the District Committee of the Communist Party. At that time there were only two women among such officials in Kyrgyzstan. In 1990 she became the Vice-Chairperson of the District Council of People's Deputies (local parliament). In this position Toktokan was in charge of women's issues in rural economies. Among her achievements was the decision to send a rural woman activist to Moscow to study in the Higher Communist Youth Union's School, one of the Communist Party's most prestigious higher educational institutions, with a lot of international students.

Second, she addressed the issue of women's unemployment. In the Soviet period many young women and girls from Osh province did not continue their studies after graduation from secondary schools. At the same time there were not many job opportunities. This need was addressed at various levels. Under Toktokan's leadership, the District Committee of the Communist Union of Youth initiated a discussion of hiring young women at the Osh textile factory. Once the discussion was concluded, this textile factory hired 80 young women.

Another example of Toktokan's concern with women's issues involved organisational activities such as the organisation of young women's brigades



at milk farms. Specifically, these farms were fulfilling the Soviet 5-year plans. South of Kyrgyzstan was specialising in the growth of tobacco where women comprised the highest number of workers in tobacco fields. Tobacco production is hard labour and has a very negative impact on women's reproductive health. In the tobacco industry of Uzgen, workers were working under undesirable conditions. Toktokan raised these issues and advocated for the protection of their health through provision of milk products, setting up field camps with hot lunches for women, and regular medical examinations.

At the same time, Toktokan was also organising meetings of milkmaids for discussion and finding solutions to problems in cattle-breeding farms. Meetings with the youth groups became a regular part of her activities in order to address issues of violence against women. Invited participants at such meetings were relatives of husbands of participating young women. All these activities were highly welcomed by the government.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Toktokan started working with the Knowledge Society in Osh, educating the local population. Transition from socialism to market economy was difficult, resulting in economic crisis in the whole country. At that time no funding was provided to such institutes. Her leadership capacity and creative approach enabled Toktokan to initiate tuition-based courses of foreign and Kyrgyz languages as well as courses in accounting. After the first appearance of international organisations and donors in Kyrgyzstan, Toktokan started raising funds for women's initiatives and projects. Her first project was the establishment of a sewing shop with financial support from Mercy Corps. In 1995 Toktokan registered an organisation known as "Knowledge Society".

Toktokan worked on women's issues and her political interest and will was exhibited in her membership and her personal activities as a member of political parties. She was concerned that women were only appointed at secondary responsibility levels in all decision-making bodies during the Socialist period despite the usage of slogans about gender equality.

Involvement in Political Parties

Communist Party of the USSR

Active participation in the Youth Union demonstrated her leadership capacity to the political leaders of the Communist Party. She became a visible politically active person. Toktokan had personal interest to work in the political sphere: she liked to work in public, to participate in community discussions and to raise issues that people were concerned about. But, it was not actually her own personal initiative to become a member of the Communist Party. The Province Committee of the Communist Party offered



Toktokan membership. According to Party rules, membership was awarded after one year of probation, which she successfully passed. From 1974 to 1999 she was a candidate and member of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, during which she held office of the Secretary of the Uzgen District Committee of the Communist Party and then as a vice-chair of the District Council of the People's Representatives.

The Communist Party was attractive to Toktokan because she shared all the ideas, approaches and ideology of this party. She continued to be a member of the Communist Party even after collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Party lost its pre-eminent position. It was fashionable for former members of the Communist Party after 1991 to make public announcements about decisions to leave Communist Party as a show, indicative of their being democratic. Despite being under social and political pressure, Toktokan did not betray their ideas and values, because she still believed in the communist ideologies. The Communist Party was promoting women's rights, gender equality, brotherhood of all people regardless of class, nationality, religion, or ethnicity.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Toktokan remained as an ordinary member of the Communist Party (1990-1999). Later, Toktokan cooperated with a women's party - Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan Women (1999-2000). She ran for elections under this Party's name and was placed on the party list. She was later nominated by the party to the Parliament. From 2002, Toktokan became the founder and leader of the political party known as "*El Muras*" (People Heritage). Some highlights of the political parties that played a significant role in the latter part of her political career include the following:

a. Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan Women

After joining the Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan Women in 1999, Toktokan became the party's representative when she won the elections in 2000. The goals and objectives of this party are concentrated around social justice and gender equality. The main goal is the activation of citizen's participation in social and political life of the country, wide involvement in governance of State and society, and the increase of their representation in elected bodies.

b. "*El Muras*"

In early 2002, representatives of various NGOs decided to create a political party to promote the realisation of political will. One of the rationales behind this was that the Election Code denied the right of any NGO to nominate a candidate in the national elections. Some NGOs wanted to lobby their ideas through this party.



Thus, “*El Muras*” was born. Toktokan was one of the founders and still remains its leader. Other founders include Lira Tantabaeva and Mairam Tilebalieva, prominent leaders of women’s groups. The party’s first Congress decided to elect Toktokan as its chairperson. Majority of its members (more than 6,000 are women) are from NGOs, schools and university teachers. “*El Muras*” goals and objectives are as follows:

‘protection of rights and freedom of people in the republic, development of realistic and socially oriented policy with consideration of country’s current political and economic situation; implementation of its policy through representative and executive bodies of power on the basis of the Constitution; formulation of public opinion in favor of ideas of social justice; political education and upbringing of citizens; attraction of civil society institutes in the preparation to implement the most significant State decisions and programmes; assistance to the process of development of the legal/lawful State, civil society, and assistance to democratic processes; active involvement of citizens to the public life and self-governance processes; and protection of family, motherhood and childhood, of cultural and historic heritage and values in the Kyrgyz Republic’.⁷

The Party sees the main form of participation in the State is through nomination of its candidates for national elections, presidential elections, States positions, and self-governance bodies, and forming fractions in representative bodies. From Toktokan’s view the most important is the principle of democratic unity, self-organisation and solidarity. Political party “*El Muras*” is set up on a territorial basis by organisation of its branches in all administrative districts of Kyrgyzstan. This party requires membership fees. Members of the party tried to address and avoid centralisation and bureaucracy in their work and formulated in their charter that interrelation between party forces is built not on the basis of directives, but on the solidarity and equal responsibility for the common cause. Minority views are respected in decision-making.

Work on women’s issues

Work in the political arena has showed Toktokan that gender is often a restraining factor for women. She experienced difficulties and saw many women being overloaded and not fairly treated not only within family circles but also in social life. She realised that women need more help and lack state and public support. Gender sensitivity grew from her student life, when she came across cases of violence against women. That was one of the factors

⁷ Political party “*El Muras*”, Charter.



that impacted Toktokan and made her to work on women's issues keeping in mind that rural provinces are under patriarchal stereotypes. From the very beginning of her political career Toktokan addressed gender inequality.

Certainly such an active approach was noted by the State and in 1997 they invited Toktokan to join the Osh province state administration. There, she was in charge of the department dealing with women's issues. Soon after that, provincial branches of the State Commission on the Family, Women and Youth Affairs was formed and Toktokan became the chair of the Commission. Because of the low priority of gender equality in the State's agenda, this commission received minimal funding. Toktokan had to rely on her fundraising skills in order to allow her to work for women's advancement at the State level.

The Osh province created centers of women's initiatives called "*Ayalzat*". Later, Toktokan participated in the transformation of these centres into an NGO under the name "*Ayalzat*". Actually "*Ayalzat*" was a programme initiated and administered by the State in its effort to realise the State's commitment to implement BPFA. In all provinces of Kyrgyzstan, the state created NGOs for implementing state programmes and they were known as Centers of Women's Initiatives. As the director of the Osh province centre Toktokan set up a school for women's leadership, gender studies, crisis center, and micro credit line for women. Her work was recognised by the State as the best within the NGO sector and she was awarded with a State certificate of honour and a prize.

Election Challenges and Strategies

Pre-elections: Personal Strategies

Toktokan ran for elections several times. During these campaigns, she gained experience and skills. But, the political and social context differed radically from election to election. For instance, strategies adequate during the Soviet rule did not apply during *perestroika*, or during transition. Unlike the single-party communist system, in the multiparty system, new strategies were needed. Majority and representative electoral systems also have demanded different strategic approaches.

In the 2000 elections, in order to become a candidate, Toktokan used the following two personal strategies: 1) affiliation with a political party; and 2) addressing women's needs and concerns by concentrating on women-constituents and cooperating with women's NGOs.

1) Affiliation with a political party

Previous work in a political party provided Toktokan with political skills and experience. As a result, when considering her strategy in elections, she chose



to affiliate with a political party. Although she had planned to be a candidate for a single member constituency, she chose to become a candidate for the Democracy Party of Women of Kyrgyzstan. The party Coordinator convinced Toktokan that she would be more successful if she affiliated with a party, than if she tried to compete in a single-member constituency. After examining the party's charter and activities, she agreed to cooperate. Toktokan was placed third on the party list.

2) Addressing women's needs and concerns by concentrating on women constituents and cooperating with women's NGOs

Toktokan realised that her previous personal experience of working in women's NGOs may become a strong resource for attracting voters and supporters. She was familiar with women's organisations, worked on women's issues, and knew women's problems in her district. Her programme clearly identified her as a member of the women's movement, as someone striving for gender equality. This programme became one of the campaign's main resources. To identify people's needs and to attract interest in her programme, a sociological survey was held among women and women's NGOs in the district. On the basis of this survey, her electoral programme was formed.

After the Women's Party's congress, Toktokan gathered her colleagues and activists of women's groups to discuss electoral strategies. An electoral campaign office was established, where the most active women from her supporters worked as a team. Key issues that were identified during the survey were analysed and steps to address them were determined. In general, her programme consisted of several parts - political, social, and economic. Special attention was given to the constructiveness of practical activities, and her commitment to the women's movements and to solving gender problems.

Toktokan with her team worked on the following electoral campaigning components. This involved first identifying women as her main audience, focusing on their needs, and developing a programme, image, and electoral materials in accordance. Next, she and her team disseminated her programme, and began fundraising and campaigning, through visual agitation and leaflets; "door to door" campaigning; team-building; coalition creation; work with focus-groups during campaign preparation and realisation; and advertising and publicising (television, newspapers, and other media formats).

a. Visual agitation and leaflets

Visual agitation and leaflets were made on the basis of her programme. Leaflets were used to state the main points of her platform, and were distributed among target groups - members of women's organisations and their partners, who included women homemakers. Surveys revealed that



visual agitation elicited significant interest among the populace. Administrative resources of one of the candidates were used to prepare visual materials and access to one of the best printing houses was granted. As well as the party's posters, Toktokan also issued her own leaflets, with her picture and a slogan that made her recognisable among other candidates. The main slogan of the electoral campaign was "Vote for Women's Party."

b. "Door to door" campaign

In the beginning of her election campaign, Toktokan held a meeting with leaders of women NGOs. She introduced her programme and platform. Representatives of women organisations expressed their recommendations about improving her programme. Toktokan used women NGO's potential for oral agitation and distribution of informational materials by the "door to door" method. This method gave her the opportunity to cover most of her constituency. Out of 60,000 voters in her district, her team members visited approximately 30,000 out of which 52 percent were women. Individual contact between a candidate and voter proved important. And, the mobilisation of women's organisations played a crucial role in the efficiency of this method.

c. Team building

An important factor in a candidate's success is the selection and inclusion of empowered persons. Toktokan invited women, respected among her constituents, to join her campaign. One such person was a well-known regional party leader, B. Karimova. She presented Toktokan's programme during meetings with constituencies, and also answered questions. Her participation in the electoral campaign noticeably influenced Toktokan's popularity. Toktokan facilitated the activities of team members through trainings.

d. Coalition creation

Toktokan and two candidates from the Women's Party founded a coalition to promote their candidacies. They jointly worked out a general strategic plan, with tactics and actions. Toktokan took part in meetings with constituencies not only in her own district, but also in other candidates' districts. For constituents, this was a sign of unity among candidates of the same party, eliciting some supplementary votes. For collaborative efforts, coalition members monitored and worked out recommendations for improving contact with constituents. Toktokan initiated the holding of informal meetings among women candidates, to strengthen relations and exchange information and experiences. This also assisted the promotion of candidates from the Women's Party.



e. Work with focus-groups during campaign preparation and realisation

Toktokan's team focused on the following: rural women activists; members of women organisations; women NGOs and their partners; and homemakers. Led by Toktokan, extra human resources were engaged from among women's organisations to work with focus groups. All work with focus groups involved explanatory sessions on the campaign and elections.

f. Mass media

Toktokan utilised the television and the printed media as vehicles for advancing her campaign. In the framework of election campaign, the government provided airtime for all candidates. Toktokan participated in television debates and roundtable discussions. With the help of party and administrative resources, candidates were able to present their election programmes in separate telecasts. Toktokan used the so-called method of "final rush." That is, her programme during the final days of the election campaign. This method enabled her to heighten interest and awareness among constituents. As for the printed media, Toktokan printed her platform in regional and district newspapers. During all campaigns, she regularly published her articles about vital themes.

Driving factors

Many factors encouraged Toktokan to run for elections. And, despite numerous obstacles, she became a member of Parliament. Her significant experience of working in various leadership and power positions built strong personal political confidence. She gained skills for working and negotiating with male politicians and male voters, and her capacity to deal with state representatives also helped in electoral campaign. Because of her links to the government, she was able to garner administrative support. This is extremely helpful in countries with powerful administrations. The Party chair was a well-known figure in the State administration. The State was able to provide venues, cars, telephones and human resources for Toktokan's campaign, for meeting with voters, for communication, and for disseminating resources. Cheap rates for printing electoral materials were also helpful.

Previous experience of running for elections gave Toktokan not only better electoral skills. She had not won all of her previous elections, but in the process, she had become a more experienced and a wiser political fighter. Experience working in and with women's NGOs helped Toktokan to understand and relate to local women's concerns, and to voice them, at the same time developing close relations with local women and garnering their support. The capacity of the women's movement of Kyrgyzstan is considerably strong, and the efforts of women's organisations have brought



about numerous positive results. These results in turn have encouraged the development of more women's organisations, and have helped women in general. But, regardless, the number of truly active NGOs remains low. During elections, NGOs mobilised their human resources and partners, but most NGOs have minimal experience with such efforts, particularly in providing support to women candidates. Unquestionably, it takes time and effort to acquire such knowledge and skills. During the 2000 elections, women's organisations did not play any significant role, as they did not in the 2005 campaign. Assistance from women's organisations certainly helped Toktokan, but this assistance was minimal, due to limited capacity.

Knowledge of female voters' problems in the district has assisted Toktokan and her team to address their needs directly, and to build her programme in accordance. Toktokan had lived in the province, where she ran for elections. She knew the critical issues facing women well: violence, poverty, unemployment, challenges of life in rural areas, and pressures from patriarchal norms. As discussed, she had significant experience addressing these issues, working both with the State and with society. As a result, she garnered a high number of votes. In fact, the Women's Democratic Party received most of the votes in her district, because of her positive image. Moreover, people voted along party lists and recognising names along the list guaranteed votes for her, as she has been a particularly prominent figure.

Many factors stimulated Toktokan to run for Parliament. Her struggles and successes encouraged her to register again as a candidate in 2005. Her will to run for Parliamentary elections was based not only on her desire to change society for the better and her love of politics, but also her intent to apply her collective knowledge and capacity. Among the factors driving Toktokan to participate in Parliament has been family support and encouragement. According to her husband, an active woman who wishes to make a career in politics should have the support of her family. Her immediate family played an important role in elaborating her election programme and platform, and they also mobilised more distant relatives and their friends, neighbours, and colleagues to support Toktokan.

Support from the leadership of the Women's Party provoked Toktokan to run for office. She had not been a member of the party, but agreed with and shared many of the party's principles and activities. The party's political council actively participated in elaborating the strategy and tactics for the election campaign, mobilising and uniting coalitions. Of particular importance was the administrative resource offered by the party, for meetings with constituencies. The leader of the party had powerful allies among high-ranking officials that enabled her to use administrative resources - for instance, cars were available for meetings with constituents, making



campaigning in general much easier. Interested in party members' progress, State officials also supported Toktokan and her team by organising mass meetings, and mobilising additional human resources to promote candidates' programmes.

The 2000 elections were held under the majoritarian/proportional system. The proportional electoral system has proven to be friendlier to women than the majoritarian system. This became clear in the 2005 elections, when Kyrgyzstan shifted to a majoritarian system and when actually all female candidates lost the much-needed victory. Indeed, one of the most important factors contributing to the success of women candidates was their inclusion in party lists. The party list system allowed for struggle for the maximum of amount of places in Parliament. Parties made lists out of the strongest candidates. The Women's Party list helped Toktokan to become a member of Parliament in 2000.

Restraining factors

Women of Kyrgyzstan face many restraining factors when entering or acting in the political arena. Social norms, customs and perceptions of traditional or religious practices play significant roles in opening or closing the doors to politics. In Kyrgyzstan, a low level of women in high offices has reinforced patriarchal prejudices against women politicians. Male chauvinism has led to the elimination of quotas for women. Although women have equal voting rights, in rural areas or villages many women do not enjoy these rights fully. Rather, male family members dominate family decision-making. Considering that the majority of citizens of Kyrgyzstan live in rural areas, this has serious repercussions for women in politics - when exercising their voting rights, or actively participating in politics. In general, the burden of poverty and domestic labour, the lack of possibility to gain leadership skills and experience, and the absence of special programmes for women's advancement in politics all weaken possibilities for women to pursue political careers.

There are no positive measures - like quotas - to strengthen women's participation in politics in Kyrgyzstan. This reverberates negatively on gender equality, as women are essentially excluded from politics in general and from State offices. This is true, despite the State's commitment to improve the status of women, as reflected in their adherence to the Beijing Platform for Action. The absence of such measures is a major obstacle to improvement of women's potential.

In spite of numerous and diverse women organisations, the population in general knows little about women's NGOs or their activities. The media pays



little attention to these organisations - or to women or gender issues. As a result, the idea of a woman participating in government is not taken seriously.

Patriarchal stereotypes are strong restraining factors on women entering the realm of decision-making at higher levels in Kyrgyzstan. Men and women alike tend to consider men to be the only realistic candidates or political actors. Surveys have indicated that both women and men tend to vote for men. Social attitudes, and especially in rural areas, give political preference to men. In light of the absence of state's programmes or positive measures in support of women and possible female political leaders (quotas, affirmative actions and specialised training for female candidates), overcoming social stereotypes is a huge barrier for women to overcome. Kinship relations also impact women's political participation negatively. Community's support to male candidates is much stronger in comparison to female ones, considering pervasiveness of patriarchal norms and the degree to which men and boys are privileged, particularly in public life. During elections, women often defer to their husbands or male relatives.

During interviews, participants at various conferences on women's participation in political processes stressed lack of financial resources as one of the big restraining factors. Women might use party funds, but these resources are typically limited. More often, women must draw on their own financial resources. Businesses rarely support parties, and particularly women candidates. The lack of money invested in elections has led to limited media coverage. Finally, to participate in elections, candidates must submit an electoral deposit in the State Bank. In 2000, this deposit for parliamentary elections was in the amount of 5000 soms, whereas that year the minimal salary was 300 soms. In 2005 this deposit was 30000 soms, equal to US\$ 600. The electoral campaign cost is much more than what women can afford.

Journalists were practically all gender insensitive. Publicity of gender equality by means of mass media is not enough because of journalist's gender insensitivity. Moreover, women organisation's reluctantly assist with mass media. Television also doesn't promote stories on women's issues. Few telecasts, few journal and newspaper articles give voters a model of a woman politician or a woman leader. Even during the elections mass media do not pay attention to women candidates. This is especially true in rural areas.

In the past decade Kyrgyzstan has brought a number of changes, which influenced rather negatively the position of women in the country's government. Electoral system, rules and procedures were limiting women's chances to win. For example, in 1995 a new "Elections Code" was adopted and, accordingly, the election procedure was changed. Considering the reduction of women in elected positions in the state after using this new



Code, it appears that neither the electorate, nor women candidates were prepared for such a downturn.

Post-electoral strategies

When she became a deputy, Toktokan developed a plan to promote women's issues in the Parliament. The main point of the plan was to lobby for gender laws. Previously, Toktokan had led a series of meetings with women's organisations to discuss laws on gender equality. Bringing forth additions and changes requested by women's NGOs to this draft law, Toktokan initiated a review of the law in a session of the Parliament. The "Law on the Basics of the State Guarantees of Gender Equality" was accepted. As well, Toktokan brought forth additions and changes to the Family Law, "Law on Violence," and others.

The main point of the strategy was to get and use connections with women's organisations. Women's NGOs proposed a diverse draft law connected with women's problems. Discussions of these draft laws with women's NGOs allowed Toktokan to bring forth specific additions in accepted laws. With several women's organisations, Toktokan participated in the creation of an alternate review of CEDAW, which was presented to the Committee on the Status of Women in New York.

Constant connection with international organisations that work in the field of promoting gender equality gave the possibility to take effectively international experience into parliamentary practice. With the help of these organisations, Toktokan led several roundtables with the participation of deputies, representatives of government bodies, and women's NGOs to discuss the promotion of gender equality. Toktokan received high ratings from international organisations for promoting women's questions in Parliament. In her work, Toktokan continued to attract attention of the Krygyz people to women's problems through mass media. Regular publication in periodicals received definite resonance among the people.

It is important to note what post-elections strategies worked for the success of promoting women's agenda at the state level. Toktokan used her existing links and also formed new linkages with women's groups. In spite of her efforts to do so, not much was reached for consolidated impact on Parliamentary decisions. For example, the election code did not reflect women's appeal on quotas. It is due to the limited experience of women's groups, lack of consolidation of women's groups on a political platform. Strategy to unite female members of the Parliament to form a women's caucus to focus on women's issues didn't work. Probably it happened because majority of female members of Parliament were not linked to the women's movement.



Engendering parliamentary agenda was the other strategy to mainstream women's issues. This was difficult to use effectively because of very few women in the Parliament and lack of women's caucus. Resistance to put women's issues on the parliamentary agenda was rooted in male perception of gender equality as a not serious problem; lack of members of Parliament capacity to see gender equality as a crosscutting issue. Despite this patriarchal resistance, Toktokan made women's issues visible and successfully lobbied several laws specifically addressing women's needs. Connection to international gender-sensitive groups was also a way to attract attention to women's challenges in Kyrgyzstan and to raise funds.

Our analysis shows that she was in fact the only member of Parliament who was constantly raising women's issues and concerns. This fact is definitely related to her previous engagement with women's organisations as well as previous long-term involvement in programmes addressing women's needs. In the Parliament where Toktokan served there were five other women, who were much less gender equality oriented. It shows the need for women's movement to work with female candidates prior to elections and the role of women's NGOs in raising gender consciousness and impacting on high level decision-making in the country.

Conclusion

Toktokan believes that Kyrgyzstan was on the path of democratic transformation since 1991. People had high hopes that the republic will prosper. But starting from 2000 the situation changed and regressed. Increased shadow (black/grey market) economy activities, the revision of human resources policy, frequent changes of heads of many state institutes (ministers, state agencies head, etc.), and growing corruption were the indicators of the regressive movement within the society. This led to people's impoverishment and obvious social stratification. Toktokan realises this. Through her work she made efforts to attract state attention to gender equality issues. Working in the state department and with women's groups Toktokan was raising concerns on violence against women, girls education, impact of religious stereotypes as well as patriarchal norms that were especially strong in South Kyrgyzstan, where she lived and worked. Her communist past permitted her to see the new danger of the growing influence of religion. She played a major role as a trainer among women of South Kyrgyzstan. Acting as a leader Toktokan was breaking political stereotypes on the role of women in society.

Women's political participation in Kyrgyzstan is challenged in many ways. But, despite these restraining forces, women do work and new forms, ways



and strategies of increasing women's participation are seen in the new context of transitional process.

1. Legalisation of women's political rights is not enough.
2. Women's organisation should assist in women's struggle for political seats.
3. It is in women's, men's and the State's agenda to foster inclusive models of development.
4. Without women's struggle it will take a very long time to have women's issues addressed and women's interests taken into serious consideration.
5. One of the main tactical questions is whether to use men's strategies or not.
6. Priorities for women's success are:
 - Addressing political barriers (non-friendly electoral system, lack of gender sensitivity of political parties, etc.);
 - Change social consciousness (voters' attitude, patriarchal stereotypes, etc.);
 - Involve more women's groups as participants during electoral process; and
 - Mainstream women's concerns into State's and civil society's agenda.

Toktokan Borombaeva has worked successfully for women's agenda. She has been promoting several laws that are aimed at the protection and advancement of women: laws on domestic violence and on state guarantees on gender equality. She has chosen to struggle for women's needs in the Parliament and many members of Parliament were telling that her name is associated with the word "gender". She has been working to improve legislation, to change male atmosphere of the Parliament, to include gender in meeting agendas, to bridge and link women's groups' messages to the *Jogorku Kenesh* (for example, gender issues into hearing on state budget), to change public stereotypes and cooperation with male colleagues. Her experience can be viewed as an enormous lesson in the effort to increase women's participation in politics.

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MALAYSIA: TRANSFORMATIVE NOT ALTERNATIVE

By Saliha Hassan



Zaitun Mohamed Kasim

Introduction

Malaysia's international reputation has been built traditionally upon the image of 'ethnic harmony' until the recent shift to a 'moderate Islamic state',¹ which is now being popularised by the incumbent ruling party as *Islam Hadhari*. Basically it means Malaysia is majority Muslim country pursuing moderate, progressive, non-militant and development focused policies towards a vision of a democratic, developed and open society. In the 1990s, Malaysia had undergone a period of economic success that have witnessed multi-faceted developments, not least the obvious increase in educated professional women. This has been responsible for their higher sense of efficacy in terms of involving themselves in public life and their increased ability to maximise opportunities offered by the fast paced development of Malaysian economy. The achievements of Malaysian women in the public sphere have been fairly-well documented under the Publications Sub-committee of the National Preparatory Committee for the Beijing Conference on Women, 1995.² The Malaysian government had formally adopted the National Policy for Women (NPW) at the end of 1989 which was to provide "guidelines and recommendations to the Government on how full and active participation of

¹ Ethnicity and Islam are the two givens that pervade practically all aspects of Malaysian life. Malays who mainly make up the the Bumiputra ethnic category are Muslims and claim historical political legitimacy to be first among equals. Hence, the continuity of the institution of the Malay sultanates, the special position of the Bumiputras in all government policies, Malay as the national language, Islam as the official religion and Malay culture and persona as the foundation of Malaysian national identity. The other major ethnic groups are Chinese and Indians while, Kadazans, Ibans and other indigenous groups are categorised together with the Malays as Bumiputras.

² The National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women and Development (NACIWID) proposed the idea of the publication, the Women's Affairs Division (Bahagian Hal Ehwal Wanita, HAWA), Ministry of National Unity and Social Development funded the project and Syamala Nagaraj of Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, "encapsulated the varied panorama of Malaysian women" (Nagaraj 1995).



women in development can be achieved” while its primary objectives are stated as (Nagaraj: 1995 14-15):

- a. to ensure equality in obtaining resources, information, opportunities in participation and development for both men and women. Equality objectives and equity must be based on development policy that is people-oriented, so that women (whose composition is about half of the total population) can contribute and achieve their highest potentials; and
- b. to integrate women in all sectors of national development in line with the ability and needs of women to improve the quality of life, eradicate poverty, abolish ignorance, illiteracy and to achieve a peaceful, prosperous and happy nation.

Since then, women’s achievements and contributions in Malaysia have been given fairly constant media coverage and public recognition by government, political and private sectors. However, the consensus is that Malaysian women still have a long way to go. Specific to the political arena, for example, since the country’s first federal election in 1955, the percentage of female elected representatives in Parliament had been an average of 5.07%. In 1990, the percentage was 6.11 and increased to 10.4% in 1999. The result of the 1999 general election allowed Malaysia to boast of a significant increase from 7.8% after the 1995 general election. However, it was still below the then Asian countries’ average of 14.1% with Vietnam reportedly having the highest percentage of women MPs in an Asian country with 26%. The result of the 2004 general election for the Malaysian legislative assembly, the *Dewan Rakyat* or the lower house of Malaysia’s bicameral parliament system, did not change the percentage much at 10.5%. In fact, with the increase in the number of parliamentary constituencies due to re-delineation exercises prior to 1999 and 2004 elections, the ratio of men to women members of parliament had gone down to a record low of 9:1 (Table 1).



Table 1: % of women in the Malaysian Parliament, the *Dewan Rakyat*

ELECTION YEAR	TOTAL SEATS	RATIO MEN: WOMEN	%
1955	53	51 : 1	2.00
1959	104	34 : 1	2.90
1964	104	34 : 1	2.90
1969	144	71 : 1	1.38
1974	154	30 : 1	3.25
1978	154	21 : 1	4.54
1982	154	18 : 1	5.19
1986	177	24 : 1	3.95
1990	180	15 : 1	6.11
1995	192	12 : 1	7.80
1999	193	9 : 1	10.4
2004	219	9 : 1	10.5

Sources: Rashila (2005: 217), Khoo B.T. (2005: 44)

Political setup

Against this background, Malaysian women are further defined by a general Asian gender construction that translates into complex religious, cultural, economic, social and political constraints and challenges in the context of their meaningful participation in the public sphere. These are even more pronounced for women politicians who believe that they can be of greater service to Malaysia if they are elected to the nation's legislative body.³ Some popular observations that have been made on Malaysian politics in this respect are that *firstly*, women form at least half of Malaysia's population and work force; *secondly*, women are politically conscious and motivated. This is

³ Election to this august body has been regularly held once every five years as stipulated in the nation's Constitution. Although Malaysia has a multi-party system, the *Barisan Nasional* (BN) has continued to dominate the political scene. BN is a coalition of 14 political parties having one dominant coalition partner, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). It was formed in 1974. However, before 1974 it was a coalition of just three of the currently senior coalition members, namely UMNO, Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) and the coalition was known as the Alliance Party or *Parti Perikatan*. Parti Perikatan was formed in conjunction with the country's first federal election under the guidance of the British administration, in 1955. After the country gained independence from the British in 1957, the first general election held as a sovereign democratic nation was in 1959.



amply substantiated by the fact that more Malaysian women than men take the trouble to register as voters, and more women than men turn out to cast their ballots. However, *thirdly*, women have not been selected as candidates in equal proportions or given cabinet positions likewise. Making up not less than 54% of the population, Malaysian women are decidedly under-represented. This, despite the Malaysian government's pronouncement that it is committed to promote women's equality by agreeing to the commitments set forth in the Beijing Platform for Action at the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women - to enhance the national machinery for women's advancement, increase women's participation in decision-making, safeguard women's rights to health, education and social well being, and remove legal obstacles and gender discriminatory practices.

In the last recent general elections, for example, there has been no lack of potential women candidates in all the political parties, of which the main ones were the Barisan Nasional (BN), Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), Parti Keadilan Nasional (KeADILan) and Democratic Action Party (DAP). DAP, with its ideology of social democracy and concept of Malaysian Malaysia (as opposed to Malay-based Malaysia that is the mainstream position), has maintained the best record among the parties in terms of fielding women candidates. The government party, BN, has always approached the seat allocation exercise from a win-win calculation both at the polls and within its coalition structure. It has maintained an increasing number of seat allocations for their women's wings which is also paralleled by increase in parliamentary seats achieved through governmental act of delineation of constituencies by the Election Commission. PAS, led by its *ulama* leadership, had for decades refused to allow its women to contest in the country's elections on the grounds that the existing practices in election campaigns threaten their personal safety and dignity and that the social responsibilities expected by constituencies of their *wakil rakyat* (elected representatives) are not for women. On the other hand, its Dewan Muslimat has maintained that they have been ready to field their candidates since the 1990 election and they did convince the party leadership to allow them to contest in a few constituencies in the 2004 general elections.

As such, it is a particularly daunting task to operationalise possible strategies for women candidates at the elections due to the complexity of the multi-ethnic population make up and the heterogeneity of religious orthodoxies, traditional values, political ideals, economic strengths, ethnic loyalties and demands of modern day living that come with it. For the Malaysian women, therefore, the challenges, constraints and opportunities to their participation in the process of winning seats in the country's legislature are a complex tapestry of these factors. For them, these factors can exist in any different combination. Thus, choosing and implementing strategies become a creative challenge. With these considerations in mind, a single case study may not



allow a credible generalisation for the Malaysian situation. However, Zaitun Mohamed Kasim's experiences as an independent woman candidate in the 1999 Malaysian general election may best provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved.

Zaitun Mohamed Kasim⁴

Zaitun Mohamed Kasim, or Toni as she is often popularly known as, is currently active in organising professional trainings on gender and sexuality issues, human rights, and women's rights for a range of community groups, for UN-sponsored programmes and for regional organisations. For Zaitun, all issues, from detention without trial or deaths in custody to rape and domestic violence to any humanitarian problems, all merit the same attention. She had also participated in fact-finding missions, worked at the regional level on advocacy as well as facilitating different groups in strategic planning for policy advancements in those areas that she is an advocate of. In 1999, Zaitun ran in the Malaysian general election as a parliamentary candidate aiming not primarily for a place in the country's highest legislative body, but to sound a wake up call to Malaysia on the critical need for a change in cultural perception of women's participation in politics. In Zaitun's words, "Given the realities of politics in Malaysia, we knew that it would have been a miracle to win. Our minimum was to make a splash on women's issues - to get a seat would have been the cream on the top of the cake - but our minimum was that we would sound the wake up call..."

Further, they also wanted to force other women to face up to the fact that women as politically efficacious individuals are able to initiate making the difference; to showcase the reality that it is possible to rise above partisan party politics by centering on societal issues that cut across heterogeneous Malaysian identities; and that by example, to prove that politics need not to be a dirty game as commonly assumed and accepted; and, above all, to recognise that the political participation of women at every level of decision-making is vital to advance and uphold the rights of women as well as to better represent their concerns. These were the principles and ideals on which WCI was founded.⁵ On the personal level, Zaitun's direct political participation has made her one of the most prominent women social activists who has sought to make inroad into partisan Malaysian politics on an independent platform by centering women's issues and amplifying public's concerns such as the

⁴ This section on Zaitun is based on a series of interviews with Zaitun Kasim (July 2005), and Zaitun (2004).

⁵ Interview with Saira Shameem on 21-08-2005 who also kindly made available her personal file on WCI.



environment and good governance. “This is what I am most passionate about and what I live for”, Zaitun says.

Biography

Zaitun was born on 31st December 1966 in the city of Ipoh, which is the administrative capital of one of the best developed states in Malaysia, Perak. She enjoyed the advantages of an urban middle class upbringing although her father died while she was young. Her father, a bank employee, died when he was 47 years old. Zaitun was later told by one of her late father’s friends that her father was a member of the Democratic Action Party (DAP) on whose ticket she made her 1999 debut as an independent woman candidate.⁶ Her mother was a nurse. She quit her nursing job to care for her three children. From then on she looked after them, and occasionally there was the family *kedai kopi* (coffee stall) which she managed, and later the small bookshop - “my mother was an avid reader”, Zaitun reminisced. From her Zaitun inherited family and humanitarian values while from both she learnt to be articulate and brave about her thoughts and opinions, sensitivity to her social environment and to develop public self-confidence. She had been previously married to an Australian and they had no children. She is currently occupied as a freelance trainer and facilitator in gender and human rights training programmes.

Her primary education in was in the Convent of the Holy Infant Jesus in Ipoh. Her secondary education was at the Main Convent, Malacca, the historical city that is also the administrative capital of Malacca state, the seat of the Malay Muslim Malacca sultanate that reigned supreme over the Malay Archipelago in the 15th century. In Malaysian education history, convent schools have been acknowledged as well-administered and with a high standard of education. After that she went back to Ipoh where she did her pre-university or matriculation course briefly at a government school, the Pusat Sains Matrikulasi, but she said “they were driving her bananas” and moved to a private college, the Kolej Sri Inai, before she left for Australia to continue with her university education in 1985. She graduated in 1988 with a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Economics and Computer Studies from Flinders University, Australia. By Malaysian standards her education route was a privileged one and has given her a good foundation in terms of academic achievement, service to society and social responsibility.

Her sojourn in Australia was a defining period in two areas of her life. *First* is in her personal development. Used to the racist undertone of Malaysia’s social

⁶ Zaitun says, her father was certainly very partial to DAP politics and had intended to run on a DAP ticket at one stage.



interactions whereby she was always made to feel inadequate, awkward and self-conscious about her Indian Muslim identity, in her new environment she was appreciated for her candid independent opinions and her dark beauty, smouldering brown eyes and thick jet black curly locks. She was admired for her articulate presentation, her reasoned and well-thought out opinions - traits which back home were generally considered unbecoming in a young woman. Whole new possibilities were opened up to her in terms of her self confidence to do her bits for causes beyond her university degree. *Second* is in her social activism. It was at Flinders that she started to volunteer for Community Aid Abroad (CAA), an Australian grassroots-development aid organisation that aimed at poverty eradication and strengthening civil society. After her graduation she worked for six years with CAA - “it was here that I learnt to recognise that social justice is not just about resources but the right to be able to access those resources” (Indramalar 2005).

Her formal education has been enriched by numerous other short courses and trainings, such as the Training Workshop for Trainers in Women, Gender and Development at Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), Amsterdam in June 1998; the Gender and Organisational Development that was organised by HIVOS (Netherlands) and Cenwor (Sri Lanka) in Sri Lanka in February 1999; and the Training for Senior Human Rights Trainers that was organised by Forum Asia (Thailand) in Bangkok in March 2003. Courses such as these have built her skills in conducting trainings at local, regional and international levels. Highlights of her curriculum vitae list a wide range of training, facilitation and research programmes that she conducts both in paid and voluntary capacities. In March and May 2005, Zaitun was employed by Asia Foundation as facilitator and resource person on behalf of Sisters in Islam for its South Asian Community Leaders Training-Construction of Sharia Laws in Malaysia. Participants were scholars, journalists and religious leaders from South Asia and Afghanistan. Earlier in October 2004, Zaitun was employed in the same capacity by Women Living Under Muslim Laws to conduct training on gender and the construction of Sharia Laws for women activists from Francophone West Africa under the organisation’s programme, Training for Francophone Africa Muslim Women Activists, Mali. In June-July 2005, Zaitun was employed by the International Institute for The Study of Islam In the Modern World (ISIM), Leiden University, Netherlands, as its lead trainer and member of the planning committee for human rights advocates from Yemen, Tanzania and Southeast Asia on Islam and women’s rights participating in its Rights At Home Advanced training project. Most recently, she has also done some work on skills required for community organising and rebuilding with Achenese women who have been affected by military operations as well as the Tsunami. The list goes on . . .



Zaitun's employers include a wide range of organisations, namely the International Labour Organisation ILO-ROAP, Sisters In Islam, Malaysian AIDS Council, All Women's Action Society, Community Aid Abroad (now Oxfam Australia) and Committee for Asian Women (Regional Network on Women Workers). She has done training and consultancies on social activism, reproductive and sexuality health and rights, gender and sexuality, gender-based violence, sexual harassment at work, gender awareness and related topics for the Asia Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women, Amnesty International, Malaysian National Union of Journalists, Pesticides Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN-AP), the Asia South Pacific Bureau on Adult Education (ASPBAE) and the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD).

Zaitun has, as well, presented papers and been published on topics related to her professional areas of focus: gender and sexuality, Islam, gender and human rights, capability building (training of trainers), organisational development, and social justice issues with emphasis on poverty and civil political rights. These include "Sexuality Under Attack: The Political Discourse on Sexuality in Malaysia" (2004), "Presentation on Participation in Political and Public life: The Experience of Running as an Independent Women's Candidate" (2004), and "The Experience of the Women's Candidacy Initiative in the 1999 Malaysian General Elections: Insights from a Unique Political Initiative" (2001).

Particularly significant among what she considers as her achievements was when she conducted a speaking tour in Australia on behalf of SUARAM on the impact of the Internal Security Act on the state of human rights in Malaysia. This tour included a briefing at Parliament House to a group of Parliamentarians (2003). She was also invited by the South Australian Government as a speaker at the Adelaide Festival of Ideas (2001). Earlier, in December 1999, Zaitun was named by journalist Reena Gurbaksh, writing in *The Star*, a leading Malaysian English daily as one of most significant women of 1999.⁷

Social Activism

Upon her return to Malaysia from Australia, Zaitun worked for a short stint on local government issues with UNDP in Kuala Lumpur. She then joined the All Women's Action Society, Malaysia (AWAM) where she served until 2000 when her foray into the nation's 1999 election process somehow had

⁷ The others were Sophie Rhys-Jones, Hillary Clinton, Cherry Blair, Jennifer Lopez, Coco Lee, Linor Abargil, Steffi Graf, Datin Seri Wan Azizah Ismail, Sheila Majid, Sharma Shukla, Siti Nurhaliza, Deanna Yusoff, Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir, Betty Chew, and Datuk Ng Yen Yen (Gurbaksh 1999: 9).



proved to be a liability of a sort to AWAM. Until then she served as vice-president of and key spokesperson for AWAM. While in AWAM, Zaitun honed her interest in women as well as environmental issues. She was also a member of the Sisters In Islam (SIS) since 1996 and is SIS's chief trainer on democracy, gender and Page: 99 rights of Muslim women in Sharia laws.⁸ In 1999 she joined as a human rights activist Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM) and is now on its Board of Directors. In 2000 she joined the Malaysian Amnesty International local chapter.⁹

Besides her professional services in those social issue areas close to her heart, Zaitun has also served in a voluntary capacity with the Southeast Asia Committee on Advocacy (SEACA), Sisters In Islam, Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM), Amnesty International Malaysia, Freedom Film Festival 2004 and Women's Candidacy Initiative (WCI). Zaitun was appointed member of NGO fact-finding missions to investigate impact of relocation on indigenous communities in Bakun, in the state of Sarawak, and impact of the deadly Nipah Virus in pig farms in Bukit Pelanduk, in the state of Negeri Sembilan. In 1996 Zaitun co-wrote an article on "Gender and Transport" with Paul A. Barter and she was one of the founding members of a fledgling group called Forum for Equitable and Environment-Friendly Transport (FEET).

By the time of her candidacy, Zaitun's blurb said that she had a total of ten years experience in social movements for poverty eradication, women's issues, human rights and sustainable development. She has also been involved in disabled people's issues and environmental issues including sustainable transportation.

Political Will

Zaitun describes her journey from social activism to political involvement, namely her participation in the election process as "reluctantly but inevitable". Her reluctance seemed to be due to a mixture of personal doubts of her own efficacy as a politician, the daunting challenge of money, machinery and manpower to launch and sustain an election campaign without a party organisation, and the acute debate of the perceived boundaries between civil society and partisan politics. However, it seemed to Zaitun that it was inevitable, given the marginalisation of civil society activism in general and women's voice in particular in the policy-making process of the country without its direct participation in the relevant policy-making bodies.

⁸ She was invited in by one of SIS's founder members, Salbiah (interview with Zaitun Kasim, 22-07-2005).

⁹ It is yet to be officially recognised by the Malaysian government.



Her final decision, it seemed, was neither made based on speculative soul searching alone nor on an impulse. She was inspired, walked through and backed up by Saira Shameem¹⁰, Zaitun said

“I remember the knot in my stomach the day I actually said yes to being fielded by the Women’s Candidacy Initiative (WCI) as ‘the first independent women’s candidate running on a women’s platform’. It was a manageable knot though, only because the person trying to convince me to run, Saira Shameem, made it so. She walked me through how we - WE - would run the campaign, and we discussed my fears and doubts. This was in February of 1999 sometime, the year of the elections.” (Zaitun 2004: 1).

Saira Shameem, Zaitun and a few other like-minded friends¹¹ actually moved among voters in especially identified parliamentary constituencies in Selangor state, namely the Pantai Dalam, Segambut and Selayang.¹² Months before the election was called, the WCI operated at the grassroots level to gauge the average voters’ reactions to an independent woman candidate. This was because although WCI was launched officially in September 1999, the idea of WCI had been mooted way back in 1998 when several people, the majority of them women activists, had gotten together to discuss how they would engage in the upcoming elections. Their original thought was to use the Women’s Agenda For Change (WAC), launched in May the same year as an advocacy and lobby tool (Tan B.H. & Ng 2003, Lai S.Y. 2003, Martinez 2003). Their particular terms of reference in WAC was the chapter on “women and participatory democracy” in WAC.¹³ Just before the 1999 election, WAC was in fact endorsed by the then newly appointed Malaysian Deputy Prime

¹⁰ Saira Shameem was one of the individuals who participated in the working committee that wrote the draft position papers of WAC with representatives from Women’s Development Collective (WDC), All Women’s Action Society (AWAM), and Sisters In Islam. The other individuals were Ivy Josiah, Carol Yong, Sri Husnaini and Patricia Martinez (Martinez 2003: 77).

¹¹ The group, WCI, numbered about 80 persons at the height of the election campaign period and its core members were between 10 to 20 persons (interview with Saira Shameem, 21-08-05).

¹² Selayang, where Zaitun later contested, has three state constituencies namely Paya Jaras, Selayang Baru and Rawang. The election constituencies are made up of different parliamentary constituencies within which there would be generally between two to three state constituencies.

¹³ Martinez (2003: 75) considers it “the most comprehensive document ever to articulate women’s issues in Malaysia, covering major areas of importance to the nation beyond the more women-oriented concerns that women NGOs have traditionally covered. The ambit of the WAC is beyond even the scope of the Memorandum on the National Policy on Women submitted by the National Council of Women’s Organisation in Malaysia (NCWO) in 1989, the Malaysian government’s subsequent National Policy on Women in 1995, and the Action Plan for Women in Development in 1997. ”



Minister (now the Prime Minister), Abdullah Badawi, and the then Deputy Minister of Youth and Sport, Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abd Jalil (Martinez 2003: 86). However, the general view remains that, despite the creation of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Affairs, there has been very little application of its contents.

Nonetheless, it seemed that many in WCI felt drawn to direct participation, namely running an independent women's parliamentary candidate on a women's manifesto in the Federal Election (Zaitun 2004:1). Securing a candidate was WCI's first hurdle since "finding someone who was suitable and willing to run on a women's ticket took time and a lot of convincing. Those initially approached were basically not keen to contest. This was not unexpected: the difficulties women face in entering formal politics are well known and enough to deter all but the politically ambitious." (Tan B.H. & Ng 2003: 115-6). After much deliberation a strategic decision was reached by WCI and Zaitun's candidacy was officially launched on 11th September 1999.¹⁴ The statement that accompanied the launch pledged that if elected, Zaitun would represent the voices of the women's movement in standing for justice, democracy and good governance for everyone and at the same time, place special focus on women and youth. Zaitun was quoted as saying "I don't like injustice. I don't see why my rights should be more than somebody else's, just as I don't appreciate someone having more rights than I do. And so, I have to work towards making sure that all of us have equal breaks in the world. In fact I get enraged about this. I want to be part of making it different. I don't think I can sleep at night if I was not doing something about it" (Indramalar 2005: 3). The WCI statement further stated that "the great hope for a better Malaysia is when all of us take seriously our responsibility and our rights to actively participate in political processes in the country. What we are launching here today is part of that hope". (<http://www.candidate.freeservers.com>). Fluent in English and Malay and adequately well versed in Tamil and Cantonese to hold up her end of a conversation, with admirable skills in process facilitation, public speaking, media, management, counseling, writing and other technical skills such as video production and computer skills, with an activist background that has guaranteed her a public persona status, Zaitun was a natural choice for WCI candidate. Zaitun's aspirations for society were seen as reflecting the ordinary people's aspirations.¹⁵

¹⁴ Saira Shameem was Zaitun's campaign manager, Irene Xavier from the NGO Persatuan Sahabat Wanita (Friend to Women) was her Election Agent and Sri Husnani Sofjan was her alternative candidate (interview with Saira Shemeem, 21-08-05).

¹⁵ According to Saira Shameem, Zaitun has such charisma when she speaks to the public that not only that Zaitun has a brilliant grasp of issues and the necessary languages to communicate with average voters, she could also concisely deconstruct and represent



One of Malaysian major opposition political parties, the Democratic Action Party (DAP)¹⁶ offered her the Selayang, the ethnically mixed parliamentary constituency in the economically developed Malaysian state of Selangor, that has been traditionally contested by DAP. Saira Shameem was quick to point out that this was achieved not without some hard-nosed negotiations. Ideologically, Zaitun's and the WCI's political aspirations were aligned with the opposition coalition front, the Alternative Front or the *Barisan Alternatif* (BA) of which DAP was a member. The other political parties were the socialist Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM), Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) and the newly formed Parti Keadilan Nasional (KeADILan) led by Datin Seri Wan Azizah bt Wan Ismail, the first woman to lead a political party in Malaysia. While Zaitun never became a member of DAP, or any other political party, and therefore not bound by party line, DAP was to support Zaitun with the necessary election machinery since WCI itself was limited in its resources to provide her with one. However, later Zaitun was to reflect that one of the toughest issues she had to deal with then, and to this day, why is an 'independent women's candidate, allied to the opposition front, running on the DAP ticket?'. This was probably in reference to DAP's identity as a Chinese party despite its multiracial ideology. The WCI's election strategy was to form an opposition "rainbow coalition" made up of not only alternative political parties of different ideologies but also of NGOs and concerned individuals.¹⁷

Election Candidate

Zaitun lost her bid for a seat in the Malaysian parliament. However, her participation was seen as the first small step towards women participating in the electoral process not under the patronage of a male dominant political party and breaking out of ethnic politics paradigm by centering on non-partisan public interest issues. WCI and Zaitun's participation have also been seen as a characteristic of the new politics¹⁸ that is generally expected to be

women's issues to the media and public. Besides being articulate, Zaitun is very credible as she is well known for her integrity and accountability. She is engaging and speaks to the hearts and minds of her audience such that she seems to almost physically take people's hearts in her hands (interview with Saira Shameem, 21-08-05).

¹⁶ DAP, a multi-racial but predominantly Chinese party, was founded in 1965. After Singapore's separation from Malaysia, the remnants of the People's Action Party in Malaysia reconstituted themselves as DAP. It appeals to the urban working class Chinese community and is a major opposition political party in Malaysia (NSTP Research & Information Services 1990: 21).

¹⁷ Interview with Saira Shameem on 21-08-2005.

¹⁸ "New politics" is a term that was coined in the late 1990s and popularly used as a concept in the analysis of 1999 and 2004 Malaysian general elections to explain particularly civil



the future. It was a challenge to the old party ways in Malaysian politics which to Zaitun “is primarily mired in Malay, Muslim, Male and Moneyed”.¹⁹ For the feminists and civil society activists, it also challenged traditional notions of women’s limited role in politics and that civil society is separate from election politics. WCI itself saw the initiative as a bridge between social activism through non-governmental organisations and partisan political participation. Most importantly for Zaitun and WCI, they have actually achieved what they set out to do and more.

Zaitun and WCI set out first of all to prove that women not only can participate significantly in a participatory democracy, advocate public issues and concerns that are not limited to women’s issues per se, but also to show especially the Malay Muslim women in the Parti Islam that it can happen without all the negative implications attached to it, while at the same time letting everyone see that women can and do run an honourable election campaign.²⁰ Zaitun’s candidacy fulfilled WCI’s objectives of increasing the awareness of the general public about women’s concerns and needs regarding more equitable attitudes, policies and laws, promoting the participation of the general public, especially women, in decision-making and electoral processes, and supporting women into decision-making positions and to hold office in the democratic process, in Parliament and in the Government. These were the central issues that make the backdrop of the current analysis of Zaitun’s election involvement.

i. Organisation and training

There are important constraints and challenges that can be identified with regard to women’s participation in the race for seats in the nation’s legislative body. These constraints and challenges had to be faced, addressed and overcome both by personal and organisational strengths. For WCI and Zaitun, it was tougher going since she had to depend on the goodwill of the election machinery of political parties that she was never a member of. She was and is keen to maintain her identity and credibility as a politically non-partisan social activist and continues to be independent of any political party.

Her WCI support group that launched her was seriously handicapped in the face of the political, financial, media and even governmental clout that her opponent and incumbent BN candidate, Chan Kong Choy, had.²¹

society participation, heightened gender awareness and public’s expectation of accountable leadership and good governance. (See, for example, Mohd Yusof & Azlan 2002, Loh & Saravanamuttu 2003).

¹⁹ Interview with Zaitun Kasim on 11-08-2005.

²⁰ Interviews with Zaitun Kasim on 11-08-2005 and Saira Shameem on 21-08-2005.

²¹ Zaitun polled 43 percent of the vote in the constituency, slashing the winning margin for the ruling coalition from 38,627 in the 1995 9th Malaysian General Election to 8,835. 73.94%



Consequently, Zaitun and her WCI sponsor very much relied on the internet for communication, information, information dissemination and decision-making.²²

Help from other politically involved NGOs in Malaysia was not expected to be significant since they are only a few and they did what they could both at the organisation and individual levels. These NGOs are more advocacy type with little active grassroots support and very much issue focused. (Saliha 2002, Weiss and Saliha 2003). As it was, even with what was said to be a new-found political awakening during this particular election period,²³ most NGOs that were involved with political or politically relevant issues had tried to remain outside direct involvement in the election process. However, WCI itself saw the initiative as a bridge between social activism through non-governmental organisations and political participation. And, in a country where elections have become synonymous with political parties as opposed to electoral politics, not only were Zaitun and WCI challenging traditional notions of women, but they were challenging traditional notions of political participation. The latter was in reference to direct involvement on no-political party actors in the election process (Zaitun 2004: 1).

Zaitun commented that no one person in WCI was a total expert on the “art of elections”. Much was learnt on the job although, according to Zaitun, earlier on, they had run a few sessions and trainings on the theory of running an election campaign. However, she found that it was not until one actually did it, lived it, breathed it, that one demystified it for oneself. Therefore, they quickly learnt to organise and run media committees, be on the negotiating team, do fundraising, be polling and counting agents, coordinate volunteers, leaflet, and coordinate campaign (Zaitun 2004: 9). Members were made clear of their objectives, roles and responsibilities and trained into being focused, assertive, firm in negotiations, communicative and having loads of team spirit. The experience had contributed to one of WCI’s objectives which were to create opportunities at various levels for more women to gain political experience and learn from it.

of 85,571 voters turned out to vote on polling day (Zaitun 2004: 1, Tan B.H. and Ng 2003: 121).

²² Zaitun credits her campaign manager, Saira Shameem, as having tremendous organizing skills and managed to pull together the necessary trainings for those who wanted to volunteer for the initiative, and know just how to maximise the skills and time that they offered.

²³ The 1999 Malaysian General Election took place against the backdrop of the political crisis of 1998 which saw the then deputy Prime Minister and deputy President of the powerful component of the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional, the United Malays National Organisation, Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, sacked and arrested (Funston 1999, Weiss 1999).



ii. Independent platform

Zaitun explained that WCI chose to face up to all organisational constraints and went ahead pretty much on faith, goodwill of political allies that are mostly in the opposition front, the Barisan Alternatif (BA), trust in themselves and the voters, and the relevance of their public issues. At the minimum they “would make a splash on women’s issues”. The WCI decided not to join a party for fear of being subsumed and subsequently lost in a party structure. WCI also wanted to be independent enough to be critical of the opposition BA as well as the government BN parties where women’s issues were concerned. WCI, however, aligned itself with the opposition BA because it felt that to give its candidate, Zaitun, a fighting chance in the elections, it needed to ally with BA; moreover, BA’s manifesto was generally in tandem with WCI’s political aspirations. Zaitun refers to this alliance as tactical and strategic based at the time on the notion of an election “rainbow alliance” or “rainbow coalition”, which means an alliance of NGOs and alternative parties of different ideologies and societal objectives. The rainbow coalition proposal was for a progressive front that comprised party candidates and non-party, social movement candidates from human rights, women, indigenous, environment and workers sectors (Zaitun 2004: 3).

iii. Other women’s organisations

According to Zaitun, the concept of “*Wanita NGO pakai baju parti?*” (NGO woman wearing a party jacket) caught on in her election constituency. However, WCI’s alliance with BA had its problems. For example, it then became difficult for various women’s organisations to support her candidacy due to the apparent partisan political leanings of the WCI. In the end, Zaitun and WCI decided to abandon the idea of getting endorsement from women’s groups but depended instead on getting support from individuals. Zaitun remarked that it was a little sad that there were members of women’s organisations who were unable to draw this distinction and in numerous ways, tried to distance themselves from the candidate. At the same time they were also those who would have preferred that Zaitun join and be a candidate for one of the political parties, in particular the PRM, since a number of women NGO activists were already its members. This actually led to some taking the decision not to support the initiative. Thus, according to Zaitun (2004: 3), whether it was a case of party allegiance, lack of confidence in the viability of the candidacy, something as petty as personality clashes or whatever else it might have been, the upshot was the volunteers and supporters had to decide where they would invest their energies.

However, perhaps of particular significance in relation to this experience is Zaitun’s comment that she actually found the nine months post-election harder than the nine months leading up to it. She found that her having run



in the elections all of a sudden became a concern for the organisation she was working for. This she found perplexing since she felt they had not had a problem with her candidacy leading up to the elections. In particular, she identified new concerns about her being in the Executive Committee or being the spokesperson for the organisation. Zaitun felt there was a 'fear' that the organisation would be thought of as 'aligned with the opposition'. This she found amusing considering it already had a long history and a number of members associated with opposition parties. Zaitun understood that the fact that she had *actually* ran became a concern and that it mattered little that WCI was independent and only tactically allied with the BA opposition coalition. As she put it, she felt stuck - she was no longer a candidate, but neither was she a party member. She saw herself as still a women's activist and wondered how long it would be before she was 'kosher' to run again for office in the organisation. Zaitun felt, or was made to feel, that she was a liability to the organisation, burdened with an identity that she was not going to be able to shake off. Consequently, she said she decided to spare the organisation, and most of all herself, any further aches, by resigning and going on to do freelance work, associating herself with other NGOs that did not seem to have a problem with her having run for the elections (Zaitun 2004: 8).

iv. Media

Zaitun and WCI were covered by both the mainstream and alternative newspapers in all the different languages, namely Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil newspapers that make up the sum of print media in Malaysia. The media keenly followed her candidacy from the day it was announced and it became one of the most watched races in the country. Zaitun commented that some friends from the media told her that had she run as an opposition *party* member, she would not have got as much coverage as she did. Zaitun and WCI provided a new take on elections and, being highly focused on women's issues, got good media coverage from this angle. As such one of WCI's and Zaitun's media achievements was to increase and intensify the public's awareness of women's issues and concerns.

However, Zaitun also made the critical observation that the scope of media coverage on women candidate tended to highlight the woman candidate's family. It also tended to focus on her 'success' in balancing family, career and politics. To Zaitun, these views translate women's role in political participation as a replication of their perceived gender role in the family and was hardly something that male candidates were expected to deal with.

"I often got asked what my husband thought of my running for office, and this grated on me because I was fairly sure these questions were not being asked of the male candidates. I would tell the journalists that I could answer



their questions if they could assure me that they asked male candidates the same questions” (Zaitun 2004: 7)

Without spontaneous access to the mainstream media, Zaitun really had to count on door-to-door canvassing and group gatherings.²⁴ Selayang, the parliamentary constituency that Zaitun contested in, has a large electorate in terms of both population and geography. Technically, campaign personnel have to reach 86,000 registered voters²⁵ in the eight days that the Malaysian Election Commission had decreed as the campaign period.

v. Opposition to WCI candidate

Zaitun and WCI expected the reactions of the ruling BN coalition - condescending, barely disguising its ridicule, and accusing Zaitun of being a ‘free-rider’ and an ‘opportunistic’ candidate. Then there was also the reluctance of decision-makers within the coalition BA parties to accommodate the initiative, prompting Zaitun to remark that WCI had gone from being part of the ‘rainbow’ to being a stone in the shoe. Zaitun noted that there were many individuals within parties who were supportive of WCI’s efforts but lacked the clout to help. The arguments against ‘giving’ WCI a seat were varied (Zaitun 2004: 3):

- Malaysians were not ready for issue-based candidates and would not understand. Let the ‘war be won first’, and then we can think about it.
- Party machinery could look after *those* issues.
- Women’s issues were not central to the “main” struggle for greater democracy and that WCI somehow was disrupting the process, confusing the issues and splitting the votes.
- The Islamic party in the BA coalition had at the time felt that women were not ready for the rough and tumble of Malaysian politics.²⁶

At the end of the BA electoral negotiation over constituencies, in which the agreed formula was to put up only one BA candidate against BN’s, DAP decided to offer the Selayang parliamentary constituency to Zaitun and WCI. DAP election strategists could have very well recognised the political mileage and the political necessity for such a move in the context of the party alignments and gender dynamics of the Election. DAP could gain political

²⁴ Political rallies have been outlawed under the Malaysian election rules.

²⁵ All Malaysians who are mentally healthy, not in prison and aged 21 and above are eligible to register as voters and to vote in elections.

²⁶ Although PAS held to the same view up to the 2004 Election, it did field women candidates in this Election on condition that the women ‘obtained’ the permission of their husbands before contesting’ (Zaitun 2004: 3).



pluses especially among urban voters where its traditional supporters are and where gender and civil society issues are taking roots. Therefore, supporting Zaitun, a woman candidate who was also an independent NGO candidate did offer some valuable electoral benefits. And, perhaps it may not be too broad an assumption to make the observation that it was not so easy even for DAP, noted for its more liberal attitude towards women's participation in politics, to find qualified women willing to be election candidate.

vi. Negotiating space and legitimacy

Zaitun used the phrase, 'negotiating space and legitimacy', to describe her campaign strategies and tactics. One of the situations that she related both during our interview and in her paper (Zaitun 2004: 4) was the incident that took place on nomination day itself when the WCI women and supporters refused to walk behind the men to the nomination centre. The BA party leaders, in particular those from PAS, the Islamic party, according to Zaitun had suggested "the following arrangement for the procession: candidates, religious leaders, followed by professionals, and then women! We argued against this, and in spite of agreeing to do away with the hierarchy, it still went ahead in that fashion. The WCI women became extremely unhappy, marched to the front through the crowd of men asking them to move aside, gesturing to other women to follow suit. We sang our songs, did our street theatre, and within half an hour, the 2,000 people from various parties were singing our song!" Zaitun and WCI in fact exposed the seasoned party campaigners to different forms of campaign tactics that highlighted their campaign issues, such as street theatre and end-of-day briefing sessions which to them seemed to be frivolous and "a tad too 'touchy-feely'. We weren't regimented enough and talking about our feelings weren't going to do us any good apparently!" To the WCI campaign team, the sessions not only allowed them to review progress and plan on how to maximise the short campaign days, they were also *re-energising* for the women.

In the end, however, Zaitun feels that their assertiveness, organisational pragmatism, principled commitment to their cause and voter-focused approach won them genuine recognition and admiration from both male and female seasoned party election campaigners.

vii. Personal challenges

The main personal issues that Zaitun had to deal with were her ethnicity, her public personal image as a muslim woman, gender biases of the public, and some concerns of her personal safety. Zaitun wrote (2004: 5) that it is not uncommon to read about how women candidates have a harder time with the 'image' issue, "but it is not till it hits you between the eyes that you realise how intrusive these comments, which ranged from questions about sexuality



to clothing and behaviour, can be.” She also recalled receiving “subtle and at times not-so-subtle remarks on how we should drop the NGO image ... that we needed a more polished, up market look, that the NGO image of slacks and blouses would not be able to win the crowd. Then, of course, the pressure to wear a headscarf to appeal to Muslim voters.” Zaitun resisted all the pressures with regard to her personal image and in retrospect, she decided that sticking to her guns was the best thing she ever did, not only because she and WCI remained true to their principles, but also she felt that on balance, fewer people, especially younger women, were intimidated by them. On the question of her being married to an Australian, Zaitun felt that it did not seem to matter especially since he seemed to be readily accepted by her voters as he was comfortable in the local culture,²⁷ readily observed Islamic prayer practices and spoke Malay, the local language. Zaitun related an incident with a voter who made this personal assessment of her which seemed to sum up her election profile: “you look Indian, so the Indians will vote for you, you are running under a Chinese party symbol, so we’ll have the Chinese votes, and you are Muslim - well, it would help if you wore a headscarf, but still . . . we’ll also have the Malay votes.” (Zaitun 2004: 6).

viii. Post-election review

Specifically reviewing her election result, Zaitun’s personal evaluation of challenges and major hurdles she had to deal with were *firstly* the fact that elections were privately funded. At RM5, 000.00 (US\$ 1, 317), the deposit to get into the running²⁸, plus another RM5000.00 for council deposit, making it a total of RM10,000.00 (US\$2, 634) just to get nominated, is amongst the highest of the Commonwealth countries; and, although by law, campaign costs were not to exceed RM50,000.00 (US\$13, 170), the actual amount spent on the ground by different candidates was obviously much more than that. Zaitun and WCI did not have that kind of financial luxury. They had to make do with basically a shoe string budget. *Secondly*, Zaitun’s further analysis is that as an aggregate, women in Malaysia earn approximately 50% of men’s income and therefore have far less access to resources, whether their own, or corporate backing/donors, than men do. It therefore follows, she argues, that the disposable wealth available to women is much less than that available to men so that even before women could get to ‘first base’, ie, nomination day,

²⁷ Zaitun was confident that even IF it was raised as an issue, their past experience was that he was usually well accepted because of the fact that he was comfortable with the local culture, etc.

²⁸ For the 2004 elections, the Malaysian Election Commission raised the election deposit for federal candidates to RM10,000.00 (USD2634) – “apparently in order to keep out frivolous and ‘mischievous’, publicity-seeking candidates” and a further RM5000.00 (USD1317) council deposit, making it a total of RM15,000.00 just to get nominated (Zaitun 2004: 7).



many are already out of the race simply because they cannot afford the RM10,000.00.

Thirdly, the short campaign period of eight days left opposition candidates, and a novice candidate such as Zaitun with her independent platform that was the first of its kind in Malaysia, very badly handicapped in terms of money, material and human resources compared not only to her government party opponent, but also to other candidates from among tactical allies. *Fourthly*, the main stream Malaysian media, both print and electronic, that has always been government controlled, overwhelmingly favoured the ruling party although Zaitun conceded that since she was a novelty in the election scene, she did enjoy greater media coverage compared to many opposition candidates. And *fifthly*, Malaysian electorate has been schooled in ethnic-based politics. Therefore, it was also an uphill climb to get them to think of issues and credibility of candidates instead of party loyalty²⁹ (Zaitun 2004: 2-7).

Challenges within the political environment

The majority of female Malaysian Chinese, Indian and other than Malay indigenous have indicated that they are “not interested in politics” (Rashila 1995, Saliha 1995, 1999 and 2004). Further probes show that it is basically because politics is perceived by women to be a very aggressive, often unethical and even violent kind of social sport where the winner takes all - that it does not appeal to women. There is a real sense of some femininity lost when women step out of the domestic sphere into the traditionally masculine arena of politics. Many qualified women also demurred from an active political career.³⁰ Many subscribe to the adage that behind a successful man there is a woman playing the supportive role, maintaining balance and harmony at home where her *rightful* place is.

i. Gender perspectives

Socially and culturally speaking, gender biased attitude that handicaps women candidates in Malaysian elections is found across all ethnic communities in

²⁹ Researchers of Malaysian elections are generally agreed that male and female voters in are influenced by similar dynamics and voted not based on a gendered choice but party loyalties, ethnic consideration, promises of a better economic future, gratefulness for past favours and perceived fulfillment of life’s expectation due to government development policies, and in some cases there was really genuine appreciation for some financial as well as physical help to get to the polling stations.

³⁰ As stated by Dr Siti Mariah Mahmud, a central committee member of Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) and current information chief of Dewan Muslimat “There are some women who feel that we don’t have to play such a big role. Since the men are doing it, why crack our heads? . . . some of them are quite happy being behind the men” (Joyce Tan <http://www.thesundaily.com/article>). This attitude is not only prevalent within PAS but is also found in the other political parties.



Malaysia. Furthermore, the fierce jockeying for election constituencies within political parties generally sidelines women. This results in women who are *acceptable* to party leadership and voters *may not* be women who will speak for women or *brave women* who are gender sensitive. This factor is further enforced by the general party structure and practices whereby the women's wings are formed *in support of* the parties' main agenda. Research by Roslina (2005: Table 5) that was done prior to the 2004 general election in Terengganu, an east coast state of Peninsular Malaysia which was then administered by PAS government but has in the last election been wrested by BN, illustrates the point. 56% of her male respondents disagreed that "there was a readiness among people in Terengganu to accept women holding positions at level of public decision-making" despite the fact that 74.4% agreed that "women's issues are well handled by women rather than men" and 66.3% agreed that "women should not be prevented to be candidates for the elections." What is clear is that *firstly*, one of the biggest obstacles to women's participation beyond being coffee makers and *perayu undi* or vote getters is men's own resistance. No doubt, sometimes with a little help from the women themselves, men have continued to perpetuate the stereotype that women are happiest in the private sphere - home and family first and "anyway, it's a man's world out there" perception. *Secondly*, men have not represented or made any attempt at serious representation of women's interests at the legislative level. In fact they are prone to trivialise or marginalise such issues.

ii. Ethnicity

Ethnic politics and party loyalty largely determine the votes of the majority at Malaysian general elections. Despite the non-ethnic ideological orientations of some of the political parties, both in the BN and BA coalitions, these parties have become dominated by single ethnic groups. Among the major ones are the Gerakan (Chinese), DAP (Chinese), KeADILan (Malays), and PRM (Malays). This characteristic of Malaysian political parties is also directly related to the country's ethnic oriented development policies thus prompting each political party to champion particular ethnic interests or play on the voters' ethnic sentiments.

iii. Local geo-politics

The characteristics of urban and rural voters differ. The first obvious feature is that rural voters are predominantly Malays. Being Malays, their main political choices are PAS, KeADILan and the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) which has been the dominant political party both within the BN government party coalition and in the Malaysian political scenario in general. In the urban areas, there are more sophisticated election issues being weighed such as which candidate would actually speak up for his/her constituency's interests, which party does a candidate represent, and



what are the candidates' parties' positions on various issues close to the voters' hearts, which party can 'deliver' certain development project; which party would actually act as a successful leverage to certain demands; and which candidate was a little more squeaky clean than the other alternatives, thus allowing non-Malay and opposition parties more opportunity at the polls. However, in general, it would appear that the majority of male and female urban voters did not vote based on a gender bias perspective but voted as they have always voted in previous elections – based on ethnic sentiments and party loyalties or preferences.

iv. Women issues

Since the 1990s and with the significant impact of globalisation, women issues are more commonly heard in election speeches. Nonetheless, they remain marginal except among urban professional middle class voters in general. In fact, other than Zaitun, there was no really significant debate on women issues by either female or male candidates nor was there obvious serious sensitivity to *women* issues among the general voters. As a matter of fact, most women candidates tended to be quite anxious to stress the fact that they represented their particular party's manifesto and would speak up on issues important to every individual in her constituency - that they were not on the women-for-women only track. Although some of the candidates were anxious that they should not be seen as neglecting women issues, they still made it clear that those were not necessarily their main focus in their quest to serve the people. As a matter of fact, some women politicians, Datuk Dr Ng Yen Yen, the Wanita Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) chief for example, was quoted in the print media as having categorically stated during the 2004 Malaysian General Election that there was no such divide as men's and women's issues - "women's issues are equivalent to men's". This contrasted with the 1999 General Election when women civil society activists launched WAC prior to the election, detailing the vision and mission of the Malaysian women in the nation's development. This was followed by the formation of the Women's Candidacy Initiative (WCI) that launched Zaitun Kasim as an independent women candidate who centered both gender and environmental issues in her campaign.³¹

³¹ In the 2004 election, however, **some individuals who were** prime movers of WAC and WCI **were involved in the formation of** the Women Monitoring Election Candidates (WoMEC) initiative. **WDC has been credited with its drafting.** Their intention was to monitor that all elected candidates would fulfill their election pledges. It was also these women civil society activists who practically forced the candidates and the media to address *women* issues such as focusing on stricter and harsher laws for rape offenders, PAS's conservative positions on women's rights and place in society and politics, various laws and



v. Enabling laws and policies

In Zaitun's case, as her platform was clearly civil society issues with women issues as one of her major concerns, various legislation and policy initiatives by the government actually gave her important leverage. These are a number of landmarks for Malaysian women movements—the 1989 Malaysian National Policy On Women which finally culminated in the implementation of Malaysian Action Plan For Women In Development in 1997 by the Women Affairs Department (at the time in the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development); the 1990 Malaysian Women Manifesto that deals with status and rights of women at work, legal discrimination and violence against women, negative impacts of development, and issues of health, corruption and human rights; the enactment of Domestic Violence Act in 1994; the Malaysian Government's endorsement (with reservations) in 1995 of the 1979 UN Convention To Eliminate All Forms Of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the Fourth UN Conference On Women and its parallel NGO Forum On Women in Beijing (1995); the 1998 Malaysian Reformasi movement; and, the launching of the 1999 Women's Agenda For Change as well as the Women Candidacy Initiative that launched Zaitun as a candidate.

However, Zaitun has a personal insight into the working of some election laws, in particular with regard to election 'offences'. Her perception is that election offences committed by the ruling BN party were rife throughout the nation, and Selayang, her constituency, was no exception. However, she found that filing election petitions was not only costly, but rarely generated any form of redress from the courts. Instead she found her party in court for not filing a statement of accounts on time. This, Zaitun considers "one of those traps for new players". Although they eventually sorted that out, it was still something that they had to deal with for almost three and a half years after the election (Zaitun 2004: 8).

vi. Changing perceptions

Zaitun and other like-minded women candidates may in the future benefit from more liberal gender construction that has slowly pervaded Malaysian society. There is an undercurrent of an increasingly liberal public's greater awareness of cultural gender construction and willingness to adjust to the fact that women can be capable leaders. A professional man based in the cosmopolitan Klang Valley better sums up this trend, "I don't care if they are men or women. What's important is that they do their jobs well!"

Just as significant is the changing perception among women themselves about their political efficacy. Zaitun and others like her are representatives of this

provisions that they saw as discriminatory to women, as well as laws for the protection of children.



new breed of women.³² They are well educated, have acquired experiences beyond Malaysian shores, have the necessary economic independence, have grassroots experience through civil society activism, and have had invaluable experience in various public leadership capacities. This combination of education, economic independence, leadership in social movements, professional experiences and public networking has promoted their high sense of political efficacy and confidence in their ability to effect change.

vii. Political opportunities

All political life is played out within parameters enforced by the state, whether or not they have been voluntarily agreed upon by citizens. Thus, official steps taken by the government give structure to evolving public trends. The 1989 Malaysian National Policy on Women (NPW) with its two main objectives being one of them. These objectives are *firstly*, to ensure an equitable sharing in the acquisition of resources, information, opportunities and benefits of development for men and women. It highlights that the objective of equality and justice must be made the essence of development policies which must be people-oriented so that women, who constitute half of the nation's population, can contribute and optimally realise their potential. *Secondly*, to integrate women in all sectors of development in accordance with their capabilities and needs, in order to enhance the quality of life, eradicate poverty, ignorance and illiteracy, and ensure a peaceful and prosperous nation. These objectives are translated into action plans in eight sectors: national machinery for policy of integrating women in development³³, health, education and training, legislation, employment, politics, media and religion.

In politics, the government undertakes to initiate legislation and enforcement to ensure that women are fully involved in the political life of the nation. *Firstly*, it shall take steps to increase the recruitment, the nomination and the appointment of women to decision- and policy-making bodies at the national, state and local levels until a just representation is achieved; and, *secondly*, it promises to support the emergence of more women representatives in policy-making and at the executive levels in Parliament, state legislative assemblies, local governments and other related agencies (HAWA 1995: 19-20). The idea of 30% parity as suggested by the 1995 Beijing Conference has been popularly bandied about. However, the NWP has been slow in its implementation and this has not become a common reference point for the

³² More than 50% in tertiary education are women. In 1983 only 48%, in 1993 66%. Literacy rate among women in Malaysia was 64% in 1989, 80% in 1991. Health care is good. Result: more women entering professional, administrative and management sectors.

³³ In conjunction with the 1975 UN Declaration of Decade for Women, Malaysia established the National Advisory Council for Integrating Women in Development on July 16, 1975.



Malaysian general public. Thus, while it could be an empowering factor for Zaitun in her campaigns, it has not become so.

WCI and Political Empowerment

The Women's Candidacy Initiative (WCI)³⁴ is towards promoting the participation of women in the political process. Its aim is to move women's voices from the periphery to the centre. Its philosophy is that "the seed of DEMOCRACY lies in the principle that the LEGITIMACY of the POWER to make decisions about PEOPLE'S LIVES, their SOCIETY and their COUNTRY should derive from a CHOICE by THOSE who will be AFFECTED". And, for the initiative the latter means WOMEN. It believes that participation in parliamentary politics is one of the means to increase participation of society, especially women in decision-making processes thus giving them a share of the power to make decisions that would affect them. The idea of its formation was mooted in August 1998.

Allying with the BA alternative front, it created history in Malaysia by running the first Malaysian independent women's candidate in the Tenth General elections held in November 1999. Polling 43% of valid votes, it slashed the winning margin for the incumbent candidate from the BN ruling coalition party but it did not win the Selayang parliamentary seat where its candidate, Zaitun, stood. However, WCI claimed "a resounding victory, though not in the conventional sense of the word!" for it believes that it had successfully created a bridge between political participation as party members and social activism through NGOs, created the space for women to participate in politics on their own terms, lessened fear of politics and shown it to be accessible enough to include a broad level of participation for women. In the context of Malaysian partisan ethnic politics, with its diverse racial background, WCI claimed yet another victory in the multi-racial cooperation sector. It received both national and international coverage.

WCI's core members were about twenty dedicated women and men while its supporters and volunteers came from all walks of life and diverse ethnic backgrounds. The majority of them were younger women with an average age of thirty-three. Several were activists who had been involved in women's rights activism for many years and more than half of the core members were also members of other women's groups. Most of them had full-time jobs as activist, journalist, programme coordinator, teacher, tutor, marketing personnel, masseur, engineer, homemaker and students. Their original idea was to consider the possibility of fielding a small coalition of independent women candidates in the future general elections, beginning with the 1999

³⁴ For detailed references used in this section, see WCI brochures, Tan B.H. & Ng 2003, Lai S.Y. 2003 and Martinez 2003.



Election. This women's coalition would be part of the Gagasan Demokrasi Rakyat, which was a broader coalition of NGOs and opposition parties. Its main thrust was to chart a fresh new path in Malaysian politics which they saw as inherently identified with race.

WCI addressed daily issues and concerns confronting women. It asked voters, especially women voters who form half of them, questions closest to women's hearts : For the same work why are women paid less than men? Why is there no decent child-care to help women and men? Why are some laws better for men than for women? Why is it that every day in Malaysia, there are about four women abused, raped or violated? WCI pointed out that women made up half of the workers employed in factories, in business and in the government, that women who worked at home were also workers who contribute to the nation's development and progress and that women do care about what is happening to the country and government. WCI campaign machinery highlighted the different laws and policies that discriminate against women, social and medical services that are being privatised and the inefficient and inadequate public transportation that are causing hardships to single mothers and low income groups. WCI's promise is that it would advance the status of women and put an end to discrimination against women. WCI wants women to be more involved in the running of Malaysia and in the making of its laws. Its humanist and feminist take on society's priorities made WCI's calls for "a society that respects every human being, regardless of gender, race, class and religion", "a more equal society for women" and "a government which can improve our children's lives" touched many sincere hearts.

Zaitun emphasized both in her campaigns and in her election manifesto (Appendix A) that to vote for Zaitun, the WCI's candidate, was to vote for what women were actually asking for: an open and transparent system that respects equal rights for women, fair and free judicial systems that respect the rights and needs of women, an end to all forms of discrimination, violence and abuse, equality in work opportunities and equal pay for equal work, social and medical services that are good and affordable for all women and most of all participation of women who prioritize women's concerns policy-making levels. DAP backed her position in one of the leaflets that it printed for her campaign by calling for "vote for change" and that voting for Zaitun meant bringing the people back to Parliament, voting for justice and equality, freedom from corruption and cronyism, an end to oppressive laws, an end to discrimination against women, sustainable development, just and equitable distribution of wealth, return of local council elections, and efficient-affordable basic amenities: housing, water, electricity, health and education.



With the 1999 election over, WCI continues to make itself relevant to the people. Therefore, it declares its objectives today are to increase the awareness of the general public about women's concerns and needs regarding more equitable attitudes, policies and laws, promote the participation of the general public, especially women, in decision-making and electoral processes, support women into decision-making positions and to hold office in the democratic process both in Parliament and in the Government. It plans to compile a manual based on its 1999 experience, "A Beginners Guide to Elections - How to Plan and Carry Out Your Own Campaign", convert its original e-mail discussion list for organising and planning the candidacy into a women's discussion list to encourage more discussion as well as for it to be a networking place for activists on women's issues in the country, conduct trainings and seminars on women and decision-making and on "knowing your rights" and set up a resource centre to house data base to be used in its next election campaign. In short, WCI is not over yet. Its members and supporters believe it to be relevant and needed to effect the changes that it envisages in the Malaysian gendered political scenario. It prefers, however, to remain un-institutionalised.³⁵

Although WCI and Zaitun found their direct participation in the 1999 election inspiring, enlightening and empowering, they did not, however, participate in the 2004 elections. There were various reasons for this, of which perhaps, not least, was the change in the political scenario whereby the BN coalition had consolidated its position *vis a vis* the unprecedented challenge from the BA alternative front in the 1999 elections. Besides its traditional development projects, the BN basically did this via people-friendly approach and image, especially towards young voters who had been identified as the mainstay of opposition and progressive forces. The WCI members and leadership were perhaps burnt out by the experience and needed more time to recuperate. Furthermore in order to participate, they must also have full coffers.

LESSONS LEARNT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In retrospect, there are many lessons learnt at various levels, i.e. the personal, organisational, legal, cultural and political levels. There are also many critical reflections and even harsh evaluation based on hind sights by WCI, Zaitun and other independent as well as not-so-independent analysts. Their offshoots are numerous recommendations and "how we/they could have

³⁵ In Malaysia any organisation has to register itself with the Registrar of Societies, declare itself a NGO or political society, and obtain an approval for its registration before it can function. After it does, it is subject to the rules and procedures of the Societies Act that gives a wide range of legal and discretionary power to the Registrar of Societies.



done it better” views being offered. In fairness, there would probably be more gains for future election endeavours if we are to consider their positive values.

Firstly, Zaitun can be said to represent the progressive and feminist persona of contemporary women leadership model in Malaysia. A growing trend that may prove to be a significant plus factor for candidates such as Zaitun - who has civil society activism as the foundation of her political career - is perhaps the notion encapsulated in the slogan that is being popularised by the young women’s wing of UMNO established in 2001, *Puteri UMNO*, “less politicking more social service”. That may speak of a trend to come. Nonetheless, zeroing in on the chances of success for women candidates in Malaysian elections, Zaitun prefers to highlight the need to challenge the current elections paradigm which is also inherently gendered. Otherwise, as candidates, women would be caught needing the same 3Ms as their male counterparts: money, machinery and media as well as having to contend with the built-in advantages of candidates from the deeply entrenched incumbent BN party.

In assessing whether she personally felt WCI had made an impact, Zaitun conceded that it would be difficult to gauge just how much of the 43% valid votes that she garnered had to do with WCI’s candidacy and how much it had to do with the 1999 national political mood of anti-BN led government following the 1998 Anwar Ibrahim reformasi episode (Funston 1999, Weiss 1999). She discerned that many votes were indeed protest votes. This was highly evident in the big losses suffered by the ruling coalition in many seats and that her Selayang seat had also reaped the gains of what seemed to be the wind of change in Malaysian politics. Nonetheless, Zaitun is certain also that WCI’s initiative was being noticed and appreciated (Zaitun 2004: 9):

- Many were in fact curious that we non-party members - “normal people” as several young women put it - were able to run [in the election], when they had thought that it was the sole preserve of political parties.
- Several people came up to us after the elections, gleeful that we had given the incumbent a run for his money and that he really had to get his hands dirty for a change!
- Many women were encouraged by seeing us participate and wanted to help. From the woman fish-vendor who insisted on putting our posters around her fish stall to encourage other women to vote, or the young women who said they were voting for the first time because they think a woman can understand another woman, or the ethnic Indian domestic helper who said she was willing to give up the party



she had voted for in so many years, to the women who spoke about women's issues, to the elderly men who told us about their daughters who were adamant that women should be voted in.

- One woman party member declared that it just hit her why we were running the way we were: we could actually sit at the negotiating table with the men - that's a big difference!
- Many who supported and volunteered to campaign for WCI candidacy say that the experience was one of the most empowering experiences of their lives.

Earlier in her post-election review Zaitun had highlighted other significant lessons learnt from her own experience ranging from the financial aspect to the existing voter attitude in casting their votes. In addition, there was also the impact of public exposure and media coverage on her personal life. Zaitun said that she started to become very conscious about not being seen in particular places, not hugging her male friends in public or having male friends visiting her in her home, and was anxious about who was watching her. By her reckoning, it took her a few years to rediscover HER rhythm (Zaitun 2004: 8). During the campaign period itself, the WCI members and supporters, in particular those "strong, passionate, caring" women, developed mutual support and experienced acute sense of camaraderie. "We fought, we got upset with each other, we hugged each other, had meals and tea with each other, confided in each other . . . Some altercations lasted way after the elections. But our friendships lasted even longer." Summing up the whole experience at the personal level, Zaitun observed that what was conventionally the domain of political parties became a source of pride and strength for individuals involved in WCI (Zaitun 2004:9).

In terms of recommendations, Zaitun is definitely of the opinion that the election process in Malaysia needs a radical overhaul. To her, as she made out in her post-election review earlier, there is a clear need to structure out the current gendered, privately-funded, and first-past-the-post election system. In order to achieve effective women participation and representation, the rules and boundaries that have previously been set by what she referred to as "the Malaysian state and all its machinery [that] seem to be largely male, Malay, Muslim and moneyed" must be replaced. With this in mind, WCI formulated a memorandum to the Government calling for several measures to be undertaken to remove discrimination against women and to actively encourage participation by

- Halting any further amendments to the election laws without fully studying the impact they will have on women



- To conduct a comprehensive study on how the current processes affect the participation of women
- Eliminate deposits for women candidates and set up special funds to support independent women candidates through the elections

Secondly, WCI itself has done some soul searching and self evaluation on its aims, limitations, strengths and opportunities. It hopes to set up a resource centre with the objective that it would be the base for the next election. The usefulness of an exhaustive data base on any constituency cannot be underestimated. Saira Shameem's evaluation notes on the WCI campaign was positive about progress: "next one year: set up a center; three years: help it grow; five years: run and win a parliamentary seat". However, Zaitun pointed out also the need to walk the talk in that given that women's rights to political participation cannot be advanced where there is a lack of basic freedoms to information, speech, association and assembly. These basic freedoms must be guaranteed and promoted through the abolition or repeal of acts that violate these fundamental rights. There should be the practice of more genuine democracy whereby the simple desire of those who are not into partisan politics or party involvement, but who want to be part of a participatory democracy, could be realised.

Thirdly, in the context of the larger Malaysian women's movement, there have been some critical evaluations of the WCI experiment and experience. For example, Tan Beng Hui and Cecilia Ng (2003), both well-known academics and respected women activists in Malaysia, while applauding the WCI election participation initiative, also highlighted a number of pertinent points in their analysis. Reflecting on the pluralism, complexities and tensions within the women's movement when it came to political strategies and direction, they noted a couple of trends and alignments, namely that WCI attracted support from the younger generation and individuals while its contemporary, WAC, was backed by established women's organisations and individuals (Tan & Ng 2003: 120-121) and that in contrast to WCI's innovative move to be directly involved in the electoral process, WAC, while finding it necessary to engage in a certain amount of lobbying and advocacy work with relevant official bodies and individuals, maintains the familiar strategy of remaining outside formal politics and resisting crossing over into the official sphere (Tan and Ng 2003: 119).

In reflecting upon lessons learnt from WCI's experience Tan and Ng (2003: 120-121) speculated at the possibility of greater success at the polls if WCI was "to seek formal backing by women's NGOs and the like". Although it is unclear as to the reasons why or what was meant by "seeking formal backing", in their opinion, had this happened, the probability that WCI might have had "a greater pool of resources to tap into, as well as increased



credibility” and more effective campaign by broadening their “support base”. Their recommendation is that the women’s movement needs to consolidate its own position by gaining strength through building more alliances with those who share its aspirations.³⁶ In reviewing the WCI’s experience, there were various positive outcomes. These include the more vigorous note of definite critical awareness among women’s groups in general to develop “a more critical stance on how to deal with the gender-biased positions of political parties” (Tan and Ng 2003: 123), keen awareness that the backing of a strong and vibrant women’s movement is necessary for future attempts by women to enter the formal political arena and function effectively in representing women’s interests; and, the significance of coordinated political directions and strategies, while respecting the plurality of differences within the movement.

CONCLUSION

Zaitun and WCI have without a doubt showed up some new dimensions and possibilities in terms of alternative ways to center and give high profile to women’s issues and concerns in representative politics. At the same time their alliance with seasoned campaigners from the political parties, especially DAP and PAS, had also impressed the latter about a different *modus operandi* that they have been used to. These include: women can be independent leaders and organisers at that level; a positive and engaged attitude towards problem solving; a minimum confrontational and more negotiable leadership style; and a general emphasis on a democratic and collective responsibility decision-making style.

At the individual level, for women who are qualified and prepared to contribute to society through the nation’s elected legislature based on an independent platform, such as Zaitun, there must be a more concerted effort at breaking down barriers to women empowerment with regard to clearing a path to legislative bodies. Towards this positive vision, Zaitun is proposing a refreshing concept of a Parliamentary Gender Caucus that cuts across ethnic and party politics to address and resolve some of the issues that have been

³⁶ Tan and Ng (2003: 122-23) are of the opinion that WCI’s election alliance with BA opposition coalition political parties, namely PAS, DAP, KeADILan, and PRM, sent out two confusing, if not actually conflicting, messages. In their view, the general public may not have been so clear or able to separate WCI’s tactical alliance with the BA opposition front and WCI’s role that is part of the larger women’s movement, as an independent critical voice of gender discrimination. As a matter of fact the media’s sensationalising of this political alliance, while tactical no doubt, also left women’s groups not in the most comfortable position. This point was made in the context of PAS’s generally closed attitude towards women leadership and participation in the public sphere and its outright rejection of their women members contesting in the elections.



highlighted through her own experience. In Zaitun's opinion, "this is one of many ideas on how we can improve the representation of women and ensure gender is on the agenda. Parliamentary Gender Caucuses do exist in other countries and we can learn a lot from those experiences." In fact Zaitun has started some ground work on this idea and floated it among some like-minded women social activists and politicians. At the same time she also calls attention to other ideas such as getting the Elections Commission to institute temporary special measures on increasing the participation of women.

Society and nation should not be denied committed and capable services of elected women representatives. Not least, in a political system with a strong government like Malaysia, the *government* itself must have the political will to ensure the implementations of various legal and political instruments that are already in place³⁷ in guaranteeing women's fair passage to equal participation in all sectors. It must, for example, conscientiously promote and implement gender-sensitive policies. Such initiatives from the government would create a more empowering environment for women keen to serve society and nation via the electoral process. The *media* must conscientiously and consciously promote gender sensitive values with fair portrayal of women's effectiveness in the public sphere. Community and national *opinion leaders*, from both within as well as outside political parties, must show disciplined commitment in inculcating recognition and appreciation for able, credible, responsible and accountable leadership regardless of sex.

Furthermore, there is a clear need to review and to restructure *party mechanisms* to ensure level playing fields for women to participate equally and to generate healthy politics truly committed to the betterment of women's interests and public good. In this context, the issue of quota usually comes up. However, as pointed out by Saira Shameem, the introduction of 30% parity quota that is much discussed and argued about, will only achieve gender mainstreaming. But if there is no structural change, the gender biased or patriarchal power relations will still remain. Lastly, gender education of the general *public* is an enormous task but must be addressed. After all, at the end of the day, everything that women's movements, social movements and political parties strive for are nothing less than the public good. It is only with such synergy between women and an empowering environment that will work towards the goals that Zaitun and WCI have set themselves to achieve. WCI can be said to have had fired the first salvo and, Zaitun, it's fodder, succinctly summarises

³⁷ Infected by the liberal spirit of the new millennium, the nation's constitution had been amended in 2003 to specifically guarantee non-discrimination based on sex with regard to law, appointment to jobs, ownership and dispensation of wealth, establishing and practicing any form of trade, business, profession, vocation or employment. The original provision only stated non-discrimination with regard to religion, race, ethnicity, and place of birth (Chapter II, Article 8).



what she represents: “I am about transformative politics, *not* alternative politics”.

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THE PHILIPPINES: WOMEN'S REPRESENTATIVE, PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENTARIAN

By Bernadette P. Libres

Liza Largoza-Maza

Elections are so frequent in the Philippines that Filipinos would jokingly announce there are three seasons in the Philippines: dry, wet and election seasons. Elections for various elective positions both at national and local levels are held every three years. In between, *the barangay*, or village-level election is conducted.

Filipinos welcome elections because it provides them a sense of participation in charting the country's future. For centuries, the people have been marginalised in the everyday politics of the nation that they regard election as an important political activity. Voter turnout in the national elections ranges from 70-80%, this, despite the fact that election results do not reflect the people's real choices because of widespread fraud. But Filipinos also view elections with both humour and cynicism. They regard elections as a break, a breather from the routine of daily survival. Election campaigns draw in movie stars, both as entertainers and as endorsers during the campaign or as political candidates themselves. Having lived through years of frustration with the government and its leaders, election gives the ordinary Filipino an opportunity to laugh at the politicians who vainly try to crack jokes, to sing and dance during campaign sorties or appear in popular comedy shows on television. Election campaign period, because of rampant vote buying, is also a time to make money.

In all this, the more important issues of the people - unemployment and starvation wages, negative impact of globalisation, the lack of basic services and issues concerning human rights, justice and peace - are expectedly relegated to the sidelines, if at all tackled during campaigns. Content analyses done by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism on the news coverage during the 1998 and 2004 elections "confirm the media's obsession with personality, 'winnability', and opinion polls. In both elections, there was scant coverage of issues and platforms".



Philippine politics and the electoral process

Economic Context

After the politicians' worn out trumpeting of "we-are-your-servants", the grim reality of the Philippine economy resurfaces — an economy that is "pre-industrial, agrarian and semi-feudal, afflicted by chronic budgetary and trade deficits and therefore ever vulnerable to foreign indebtedness and financial manipulation". (Sison. 2004. p. 7)

A majority of the people, especially the workers and peasants, face a day-to-day struggle to survive. Natural resources that could otherwise serve as a base for the country's own industrialisation are extracted by foreign corporations and exported raw or semi-processed and low-valued. What seem like highly urbanised cents are largely trading cents where imported goods and products are dumped for market consumption. Manufactures and industries are largely owned by transnational corporations or by local big business that make use of the country's cheap and suppressed labor. Transnational corporations, aided by local landlords and big business, dominate not just the rural landscape but the whole economy.

The disastrous impact of imperialist globalisation can no longer be covered up by the propaganda machinery of the government and the advocates of globalisation, who "never cease to sing the virtues of staying within the bounds of the economic, financial and trade policies dictated by the United States and such US-controlled multilateral agencies as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation (WTO)" (Sison. 2004. p. 8). The consequences of liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation are felt daily by the people - the rising cost of basic commodities, the lack of basic services, massive unemployment, slave wages, destruction of agriculture and local manufactures. The current administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is confronted by a fiscal crisis that reflects the financial and economic crisis the Philippines is reeling from. Burdened by debt (PhP 4.08 trillion or US\$ 75.41 billion as of end-February 2005) from both domestic and foreign creditors, the government allots the bulk of its fiscal budget to debt servicing. Likewise, the Arroyo administration proposes new tax measures purportedly to bail out the country from its present crisis. A new E-VAT Law took effect in July 2005. These new taxes will definitely add an additional burden to the already impoverished majority.



Political set-up

Form of Government

The Philippines has a presidential form of government. The President, elected at-large every six years for one term, heads the Executive branch. The President appropriates the tasks and functions of the Executive branch through various departments, headed by Cabinet members and through the elected local government officials. The President is also Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The Legislative Body is divided into the House of Representatives, (covering congressional districts and Party-list representation) and the Senate. Party-list representation, members of the Senate and the President are elected at-large through nationwide elections. The Judiciary is composed of the Supreme Court and the lower courts. Members of the Judiciary are appointed by the President.

Elections

The Philippine Constitution states that “sovereignty resides in the people and all government authority emanates from them”. Sovereignty, according to the Constitution, is expressed through elections. But in reality, elections are characterised by intense battle between those who have more (more gold, guns, goons and girls) and those who have less (less gold, guns, goons and girls). It is a battle among the ruling elite - the big landowners, big business and/or traditional politicians. The contest is best captured by the adage: “economic power begets political power; and political power begets more economic power”.

Seven major political parties vied for power in the 2004 elections. The leadership of these parties is monopolised by political clans made up of landowners, big business and bureaucrat capitalists. Those who have more would, in all probability, be the faction of the ruling elite who is in power; and those who have less would be the faction of the ruling elite which is temporarily dislodged and is attempting to take over the rein of power. To have more, one should also get the support of US imperialism. The Philippines is of such strategic importance to US imperialism’s economic and military interests in Asia that it puts premium on whom, among the local elites, holds the key to economic and political power. Any faction of the elite, to get or hold on to power, must have the blessing of the US. (Remollino, 2004)

Term Limit

The 1987 Philippine Constitution, which was formulated and ratified after the ouster of the Marcos dictatorship, sets a term limit for all elective positions -



from President to local government executives. The term limit is supposed to prevent the formation of political dynasties.

Both the President and the Senate have a six-year term. Members of Congress and local government executives have a term of three years up to a maximum of three terms. The term limit prohibits public officials from seeking elective position for the same public office after their term has expired. However, the term limit does not prevent the politicians from seeking another position in public office. When a senator for example reaches the term limit, he/she could easily run for provincial governor, congressional representative, or mayor of a major city. Thus, despite the term limit, regions, provinces, towns and cities are still most often identified through the traditionally dominant and/or warring political families in the locality. (Balana, 2004)

The composition for example of the 13th Congress proves that despite the term limit set by the Constitution, the great majority of members of Congress are from well known political clans who have been in politics through generations. Two out of three members of the 13th Congress are from such families. Most of the lawmakers are second and third generation politicians whose parents and grandparents once held public office. It is likely that they have other relatives who are currently holding elective posts. These political clans always have the edge over any ordinary Filipino interested in seeking an elective position. They have well-oiled political machines and a lot of wealth to win elections and maintain political power. (Balana, 2004)

Table 1: Congressmen and their kin

Representatives with Relatives in Elective Office*						
REPRESENTATIVES' RELATIVES WHO WERE OR ARE IN OFFICE...	9 TH HOUSE		10 TH HOUSE		11 TH HOUSE	
	No.	% of all Reps	No.	% of all Reps	No.	% of all Reps
Parents	60	30	66	30	71	31
Children	18	9	17	8	25	11
Spouses	16	8	25	11	22	10
Siblings	43	22	38	17	47	21
Other close relatives (uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, cousins)	56	28	64	29	60	26
In laws	30	15	32	15	31	14
Grandparents	35	18	40	18	41	18

Source: Coronel. 2004. p.49.

Such bid of political clans and politicians for perpetuity in power is also characterised by fraud and violence. Elections are never without accusations of fraud from the contending parties. Schemes like “*dagdag-bawas*” (*dagdag* is to



add votes or vote padding; *bawas* is to subtract votes or vote shaving) and disenfranchisement of voters through harassment, intimidation and fraud are common occurrences that have not been prevented nor curtailed.

The Party-List System

The Party List System is mandated in the 1987 Philippine Constitution. In 1995, eight years after the ratification of the Constitution, Congress passed the Party-List System Act or Republic Act No 7941. It is designed “to promote proportional representation in the election of representatives to the House of Representatives” and “to enable Filipino citizens belonging to the marginalised and underrepresented sectors, organisations and parties who lack well-defined constituencies but who could contribute to the formulation and enactment of appropriate legislations that will benefit the nation as a whole, to become members of the House of Representatives.” The other pertinent provisions of the Party-List System Act are:

- The party-list representatives shall constitute 20 per cent of the total number of the members of the House of Representatives.
- Parties, organisations and coalitions participating in the system shall obtain at least two percent of the total votes cast for the party-list system to be entitled to a party-list seat.
- Those who garner more than two percent of the votes shall have additional seats corresponding to a maximum of three seats.

Unlike the majority of the members of the House of Representatives who are elected individually by the constituencies in a particular congressional district, party-list organisations can gain a seat in the legislature by garnering at least 2% of total votes cast nationwide. Political parties and sectoral organisations from the marginalised sectors can run in the party-list system. The party-list organisation is voted upon. Seats won are occupied by the list of nominees pre-submitted to the Commission on Elections.

The party-list system offers an opening for the progressive movement and other marginalised sectors to have representatives in Congress. Without the party-list system it is quite impossible for the marginalised sectors and cause-oriented organisations to join in the electoral system where millions of pesos are needed to win. The organised strength, mass base and credibility of cause-oriented organisations offset the amount of money required to enter mainstream politics. However, traditional politicians find ways to dominate even the party-list system. They try to register their parties as marginalised ones or put their spouses, other family members or protégés as nominees of party-list groups. They join campaigns to discredit party-list groups that are



threats to their political power because of the formers' history of struggle against injustice, human rights violations, graft and corruption.

Table 2: Profile of representatives of the 13th Congress

House of Representatives		
Total members		236
<i>Representation</i>		
District	90%	212
Sectoral or Part- List	10%	24
<i>Term</i>		
1 st	35%	82
2 nd	36%	85
3 rd	29%	69

Source: www. congress.gov.ph

A closer look at the 13th Congress shows that traditional political parties still dominate the Congress. Those from the marginalised sectors that made it to the party-list system is a mere 10% of the total number of representatives compared to the 20% provided by law. In addition, more than half of the representatives (65%) are incumbents, either in their second or third term compared to the representatives elected for the first time (35%).

Women and Elections

Filipino women's right to vote was recognised in 1937. The 1935 Philippine Constitution stated that the right of suffrage would be extended to women if they were able to gather 300,000 women to vote in its favor in a national plebiscite. In the 1937 plebiscite 447,725 women voted yes.

Overall, women's participation in the electoral process as voters is very high. Over a period of 26 years (1978-2004), the numerical difference between male and female registered voters is insignificant. Likewise, the difference between the actual number of women and men who actually vote is small.

Nonetheless, women's participation in the elections does not necessarily mean a solid vote for those who are carrying the women's agenda. Most often voter preference is still on the side of the traditional politicians, mainly influenced by the candidates' high media visibility and name recall. (Hofilena, 2004) On the other hand, while there is no women's vote to speak of in the Philippines, the victory in the polls of the Gabriela Women's Party shows that there are women who vote for a women's political party. However, according to Cristina Palabay, Secretary General of the Gabriela Women's Party, "this vote should translate to a more vibrant and marked women's vote to change the general political landscape".



Despite two women presidents, politics in the Philippines is still male dominated. Historically, as shown in Table 3, the Philippine Congress is an exclusive men’s club. The 12th Congress (2001-04) has, so far, the highest number of women representatives since 1946. Of the 227 representatives in the 12th Congress, 40 were women legislators (18%). Five of the women representatives were from the 19 party-list organisations. In the current 13th Congress, however, the number of women representatives decreased to 37 or 15%. Four of the women representatives are among the 24 party-list representatives.

Table 3: A Male Bastion

Composition of the House of Representatives By Gender				
YEAR	Male		Female	
	No	%	No	%
1946	96	99	1	1
1957	101	99	1	1
1965	98	94	6	6
1992	178	89	21	11
1998	193	88	27	12
2001	187	82	40	18
2004*	199	84	37	16

Source: Coronel. 2004. p.8

*www.congress.gov.ph

As earlier stated, positions in public office revolve among members of political clans. However, when male members of a family are no longer qualified to run for public office, the female members -- the wife, mother, daughter, sister, mistress — come in handy as replacements. Female members of a political family or clan, however, are most often perceived as “dummies” of the older and male members of the family. In the 12th Congress (see Table 4) almost half of the 40 members of the women representatives or 45% were replacements of relatives previously in Congress.

Table 4: The Glass Ceiling

Women in the 12 th House of Representatives (HOR)		
Women Representatives Who are...	No	%
Replacement of relatives previously in HOR	18	45
Members of political families not previously in HOR	8	20
TOTAL MEMBERS OF POLITICAL CLANS	26	65
Party-List members	5	13
Others (non-family, non-party list)	9	22
TOTAL	40	100

Source: Coronel. 2004. p.9



GABRIELA Women’s Party Representative to the House of Representatives: Liza Largoza- Maza

Liza Largoza-Maza is 47 years old. She was born on September 8, 1957 in San Pablo City, Laguna, a province in the Southern Luzon region. Her family is Roman Catholic. A consistent honor student, Liza spent her elementary and high school years in an exclusive Catholic girls’ school.

Liza is generally described as “hardworking, persistent, creative and principled.” As a child her world revolved around the books she read, which were beyond the required school textbooks. She was, and still is, fascinated with books on history, philosophy and religion. Reading books helps her make sense of what is going on around her. Hooked on reading, Liza recalls that she didn’t speak until she was a few years old. But when she started talking, she found delight in debating.

Liza finished Business Economics at the University of the Philippines (UP), the state university. It was during this period that she became an activist. After college she worked as a researcher and teacher. It was during her stint as a researcher that Liza got involved in the women’s movement.

In 1983 Liza married Jaime Maza with whom she has two sons. Liza describes her sons Nico and AG, ages 20 and 14 respectively, as “independent” and who don’t mind cooking their own food. Liza also made sure that both sons grow to be respectful and aware of “every woman’s worth”.

History of Involvement in Politics

Liza’s interest in politics started when she was in high school. She intently followed current events. What caught her interest was the series of rallies held during the early 1970’s in what is now known in Philippine history as the “First Quarter Storm” or FQS.⁸⁵ Liza linked the events with what she learned from her readings. Also, the political climate at the time brought forth earlier questions she has been asking herself: “the meaning of life” she says. “I was also influenced by the prevailing free spirit attitude and anti-establishment atmosphere of the 60’s and 70’s”, Liza added. She foresaw herself as an activist. She wanted to enroll in UP, which was known to be a hotbed of activism.

In 1975, Liza enrolled in Business Economics to prepare for law school. But she abandoned the idea of being a lawyer when martial law was declared in

⁸⁵ FQS is a series of anti-Marcos demonstrations held from January-March 1970. This was led by the students and workers who stormed the Malacanang Palace where the deposed Pres. Marcos held office. Violent dispersals by military and police were a common occurrence during these rallies.



1972. She was convinced that it was useless to study law because, according to her, “No law was followed then except Marcos’s own laws”. She remained in UP for several years, unattached to any particular campus organisation. However, she caught the attention of campus activists when, as a resident in one of the women’s dormitories on campus, she stirred the other women residents to complain against their dormitory matron. This started her involvement in campus politics, although prior to this and even during her first year on campus, Liza joined rallies. She was in rallies which demanded the right of students to campus press freedom and to organise their councils. Liza recalls that when she made her vow to become an activist, she also promised she would ensure that rallies would not be “unruly”. Her attitude changed, however, when she joined a rally demanding the release of detained campus journalists. Liza, as she puts it, “had my first taste of fascism.” The rally was violently dispersed. It was then that she realised that “the violence does not come from the students.”

Until she joined the dormitory council, Liza describes her involvement in campus activism as “unsustained and mostly theoretical because I did not belong to any organisation.” Looking back, she describes the case against the dormitory matron as “more of a personal expression stuff which is part of my concept of free spirit”. And it has been a long way since. In her last years in college, Liza spent her weekends in urban poor communities, with people whom she met in rallies outside the campus. Her exposure to the lives of the urban poor deepened her understanding of Philippine realities and concretised what could have remained as socio-political theories she learned from books and in school.

Development of Feminist Ideas, Advancing Women’s Cause

Liza became involved in the women’s movement rather reluctantly. She grew up in a household of strong women. Her mother, as Liza describes, is a “hardworking woman, a survivor”. Liza sees her as intelligent and street-smart. While her mother plays the traditional role of a woman in the house who cooks and takes care of the children, she was not the type who depended too much on her husband. “She can do everything,” Liza says of her mother. Her sisters, eight among ten siblings, are all independent-minded, strong-willed women like their mother. Her early schooling was also in an exclusive women’s school from grade school to high school which was attended mostly by children from middle class families. Thus, Liza says, “you don’t really feel powerless in this kind of an environment”. She says she had “no concept of women’s oppression” and considered women’s issues as “soft” compared to the passion she feels for economics and politics.



Things changed however when in 1982 she conducted research among Filipino women who were working as domestic helpers in Hong Kong. There Liza heard all sorts of stories about violence against women. Liza could not forget the story of one woman who allowed her boss to have his way with her sexually for a fee. This was one way some of the women could earn additional income to send their families back home. Liza realised that the low economic status of women was a major factor in incidences of violence against women.

After college, Liza worked as a researcher in the Philippine Center for Asian Studies (PCAS) and in the Strategic Studies under the Office of the President of the UP System.

She also served as Executive Director of NEPA (National Economic Protection Association), an organisation of economists and local manufacturers. She taught economics at St. Scholastica's College, an exclusive women's school. In 1986, Liza became Executive Director of the Women's Center for Development and International Study (WCDIS), which joined GABRIELA. Also, Liza was one of the initiators of the first Women's International Solidarity Affair in the Philippines (WISAP). In 1987, she became the International Relations Officer of GABRIELA while still serving as the Executive Director of WCDIS. From this point on she never left GABRIELA. She eventually became GABRIELA's Deputy Secretary-General, then Secretary-General for several years. In the last GABRIELA Congress, Liza was elected its Vice-Chairperson.

During Liza's term as Secretary General, GABRIELA launched several successful campaigns to raise public awareness on women's issues. Among them were: the Purple Rose Campaign in support of the global campaign to expose and fight sex trafficking of Filipino women and children; and the campaign against the exploitation of women workers particularly those hired in department stores through contractualisation. There was also the campaign for justice for rape victims by powerful government officials such as former Congressman Romeo Jalosjos and former Calauag Mayor Antonio Sanchez, who, if not for GABRIELA's campaign, would have escaped conviction and imprisonment. GABRIELA at that time also ran a strong campaign against the U.S. military bases, anti-terrorism bill, national ID system, charter change and imperialist globalisation. To Liza, these activities "are not just campaigns but real life struggles from which you draw lessons and perspectives that would help develop the women's movement in the Philippines".

When Liza joined GABRIELA in 1987, her understanding of women's issues and concerns deepened especially when she got involved with issues of peasant women and women workers. And she has not stopped advocating and fighting for women's rights and interests since then. Aside from women's



issues, Liza Maza remains active in political and economic issues at national and international levels.

To Liza, the women's movement is a force for social change. First she says, "women should recognise their importance and their major role in social change". Liza believes women should realise their stakes in changing society's economic, political and socio-cultural situation. "Why are we fighting for land reform? For the right to own land, to work the land, to benefit from the fruits of land reform. Because we want to increase the economic capacity of women, thus empowering us economically." Liza stresses that "it is important for us women to understand the active role we have to play in changing society and changing our own lives. There can be no fundamental and long-lasting change without women taking an active role."

The Women's Movement and the Parliament

Liza never imagined that she would be in Congress. Since high school she had wanted to be an activist. She went through a process of concretising her "ideals" by immersing herself in the concrete conditions of the people. She was active in the social movement and in particular, the women's movement. Activism for Liza is a way to concretise her vision of changing society. This did not include being in Congress though. Going into parliamentary work entailed a lot of adjustment for her. "I needed to psych myself up." She did this by deepening her understanding of why GABRIELA should participate in the electoral process, an arena commonly perceived as that of the rich and powerful.

But the present strength and breadth reached by people's organisations like GABRIELA combined with the opportunity offered by the party-list system opens another avenue to pursue the advocacy for social change and women's emancipation. "The laws in the country are still very much influenced by the feudal-patriarchal nature of the society. These laws restrict the full participation of women," stressed Liza. It is in this arena that Liza hopes to make a dent as far as advancing the interest of women is concerned. "Working in Congress may also provide women the experience in governance and also a deeper understanding of how traditional politics works. We can use whatever insights and lessons we gain to pursue women's advocacy within Congress," adds Liza. But more than this, Liza emphasises that "As a progressive parliamentarian, my role is not only to make laws but to challenge the very foundation of traditional elitist politics".

Campaigning to Win Seats in Congress

When the women of GABRIELA decided to set up a party-list organisation, Gabriela Women's Party (GWP), Liza was the natural choice for its president



and number one nominee. As one of the most prominent women leaders in the country, Liza embodies the organisation's principles and advocacies. This, together with GABRIELA's track record and mass base, would ensure that GWP could make it to Congress.

The electoral campaign was difficult for Liza. As an activist, she is used to "integration" in communities i.e., staying for hours or days in one place to learn about the lives of women and men in the community. But, during the election campaign, she had to hop from one place to another, meeting hundreds of people, "all in an hour". She particularly was not comfortable with all the "forced smiles, handshakes" most voters expected from traditional politicians. But she could not do otherwise. The electoral campaign, which essentially covered the entire country, was only for a period of three months. "Eventually you understand its logic, and you just have to genuinely use the opportunity to touch base with as many groups, communities and organisations as you can and reach the broadest number of women and men alike," Liza explains.

But she stressed that this has to be done "not just to win votes but to make use of the campaign to inform the public of GWP's platform. We used the opportunity to learn about the people's situation and how our Party's programme and legislative agenda could respond to these needs." From the campaign, Liza learned new ideas, new perspectives on issues. "Later it became enjoyable, too," she smiled.

Personal Adjustments

"On the surface it didn't seem hard for me to adjust. I could deal with them (the traditional politicians) on a day-to-day basis," Liza describes her first few months in Congress. Her most "traumatic" experience so far is sitting for hours during committee meetings and plenary sessions, listening most often to the rhetoric of traditional politicians. "It's more of a psychological thing," describes Liza of her "session claustrophobia".

Nowadays, Liza has to get used also to her limited mobility. In her early days as congresswoman, she could still go by herself to public markets and bargain shops on weekends. But since leaders, members and supporters of progressive party-list organisations have become targets of killings and harassment, Liza is forced to travel with a security escort. On the other hand, her media appearances have doubled as she takes such opportunities to discuss women-specific and national issues and explain GWP's platform of action to a broader audience.



Advancing the Women’s Agenda in Congress

Women’s participation in traditional politics is limited. This is because traditional politics is “where reactionary forces are concentrated. Here, one experiences class-based discrimination as well as machismo. The influence of a feudal-patriarchal society is well ingrained.” Liza describes the participation of women in mainstream politics as “way below” women’s role in the social movement. As a rule, women in the people’s movement are given equal opportunities and responsibilities. Recognition of women’s rights is not merely being given lip service but is manifested in practice.

Philippine politics remains a man’s game—a run-away use of cash and naked show of power. It sets almost insurmountable odds for women. Running for an elective position is an expensive endeavor. “Only women who come from rich and influential families can play the game”, says Liza.

In traditional politics, even the basic right of women to be represented has to be fought for. “There is a need to increase the number of women in mainstream politics”, Liza stressed. “But it should not be merely a number’s game. The women in parliament should assert the women’s agenda and fight for women’s rights. While there should be more women, they should be genuine women’s representatives and not clones of macho men.” Liza underscored that “the feminist agenda to put more women in positions of governance should not end in having more women engaged in politics nor in putting more women in all levels of governance”. The other important question Liza adds “is whether these women truly carry the interests of women and the interests of Philippine society; whether these women are truly representatives of the majority of the poor Filipino women and men”.

The limitations posed on women in electoral politics was offset, in the case of Liza, by GABRIELA’s track record. Liza is also armed with lessons from her three-year stint in Congress as a representative of the Bayan Muna Party-List. In the 13th Congress, GWP and the women are represented through Liza. She is vice-chairperson of two congressional committees: Women, and Higher & Technical Education. She is a member of seven other committees (Globalisation and WTO, Human Rights, Justice, Health, Foreign Affairs, Suffrage & Electoral Reforms, Southern Tagalog Development).

And while she debates and pushes her arguments in Congress, Liza tries to cultivate and maintain personal relations with her colleagues. “Politics in the Philippines is personalistic, even patronage. One has to be aware of this and turn it to one’s advantage. Of course, not to the point of compromising principles.” To avoid making unprincipled compromises, Liza keeps in mind that her stint in Congress is not a personal agenda. “I carry with me the agenda of GWP and it has the support of GWP’s constituency”.



Within Congress, Liza believes she has to maintain a strong and tenacious link with the women's movement. Otherwise her stint in the legislature is useless. "I represent GWP. I am not just an individual here. I represent a Party with a definite programme and platform for women and that's the only reason why I am here." Liza also believes in maintaining personal discipline. "There is a lot of corruption in government. And they will try to corrupt you because you are from the progressive movement. And there are various ways of corrupting a person, even very subtle ones. Discipline is a must to keep one's commitment to the organisation or Party. The Party principles should be one's guiding principles. Once you succumb to the bribes and other forms of corruption no matter how petty, you no longer have a reason for being. You have betrayed the trust put upon you by the women, the people and the movement. I did not spend more than twenty years of my life in the progressive movement only to be corrupted," she stressed. Liza added that she always tells herself that "this is my last term", to avoid the "trap" of perpetuating oneself in power. Unlike traditional politicians, the parliament is just one arena for Liza and GWP where women's advocacy can be advanced. It is not an end in itself.

GABRIELA Women's Party and its Strategies

The Gabriela Women's Party⁸⁶, along with other progressive party-list organisations, reflects the present strength of the people's movement for change. It is a product of long years of painstaking education work, organising and mobilisation of the underprivileged majority.

People's Movement for Change

The Filipino people's struggle for independence and democracy is a long historical process dating back to colonial times - from the Spanish era to the American period of colonisation and Japanese occupation. The struggle continues until today even with the so-called Philippine independence. The people's movement for change aims for genuine independence, both economically and politically, from the domination of the United States government. The people's movement works for a genuine agrarian reform programme and for a government that protects the interest of the majority of the Filipinos and not that of foreign monopoly capitalists and the few local elites. There is an underground movement led by the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) which is waging a protracted people's war

⁸⁶ The first women's political party, KAIBA (Kababaihan para sa Inang Bayan or Women for the Motherland), was set up 1987, along with the formation of a multi-sectoral political party, Partido ng Bayan (People's Party - PNB). KAIBA won one seat in Congress. All of PNB's senatorial candidates lost.



against US imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism which it considers as the basic problems of Philippine society. One of the founding members of the NDFP is Makibaka (Patriotic Movement of New Women), a revolutionary organisation of women espousing armed struggle.

Aboveground, there is a strong democratic movement which tackles people's issues and concerns, asserts people's economic and political rights and campaigns against anti-people policies and the rampant graft and corruption in government. They hold rallies, marches and other mass actions, a movement that is popularly referred to as the *parliament of the streets*.

Women's Movement: The GABRIELA Experience

In 1984, GABRIELA⁸⁷ (General Assembly Binding Women for Reform, Integrity, Equality, Leadership and Action), a national alliance of women's organisations, was born amidst the people's unrest during the final years of the Marcos dictatorship. GABRIELA led thousands of women against the Marcos dictatorship. It led women in asserting *women's rights as human rights* and in the fight against prostitution, mail-order brides, sex trafficking/sex tourism and violence against women. GABRIELA actively campaigned against the presence of US military bases in the country and in the ouster of former Presidents Ferdinand Marcos and Joseph Estrada.

Currently, GABRIELA is visible in the people's campaign against imperialist globalisation (policies of liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation) and against global US military aggression. It monitors and protests against the presence of US military troops in different parts of the country under the guise of military exercises. It campaigns for increases in workers' wages and salaries of government employees. It is also part of the broad alliance against political repression sparked by the recent spate of killings of political activists and human rights defenders like lawyers, media people and priests. It is one of the leading organisations within the Gloria Step-Down Movement (GSM) pressuring President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo to resign, after evidences of graft and corruption through a numbers game by her husband, son and brother in law were exposed; and worse, a taped conversation of her was unearthed showing that she had cheated her way to the presidency in the last presidential election.

All these years, GABRIELA has been actively addressing the issues of grassroots women - women workers and peasant, indigenous and urban poor

⁸⁷GABRIELA is named after the heroine Gabriela Silang from Ilocos Sur, Northern Philippines. After her husband Diego, the leader of an uprising against the Spanish colonisers was killed, she took over and led the band of revolutionaries. She was captured and subsequently executed by the Spanish government.



women - who comprise the majority of its membership. It has very close ties with the other sectors in the Philippine people's movement.

Party-List Elections and GABRIELA

In 2000, along with other militant people's organisations, GABRIELA co-founded *Bayan Muna* (The People First) party-list. *Bayan Muna* (BM) is an alternative political party which sought representation in the House of Representatives under the party-list system in the 2001 elections. BM carries a comprehensive platform for social transformation and trumpets the call "politics for change" as opposed to traditional elite politics. It aims "to articulate in Congress the voice of the marginalised and the underrepresented majority of the population; to defend and assert the people's interests in a highly elite-dominated Congress" and also "to support and advance the broader people's struggle for freedom, democracy and justice".

A few months after BM was organised, the Gabriela Women's Party was established as an organised venue for women's participation in electoral politics. GWP however decided to postpone running in the party-list elections in 2001 to give full support to BM. The third seat among BM's nominees to Congress was given to Gabriela. BM won. It had the highest number of votes in the 2001 elections and was way ahead of the 2nd party-list winner. It got the most number of votes garnered by any party-list organisation since the law was enacted and implemented in 1998. The votes reflected the breadth of the organised forces and mass base of the people's movement, including that of GABRIELA's, from the countryside to the urban centers. BM got three seats in the House of Representatives. GABRIELA's then Secretary General, Liza Maza, was among BM's three representatives.

During the 12th Congress, Bayan Muna, through its three representatives, brought into the halls of Congress the same people's issues and concerns they have been advocating in the parliament of the streets. Many proposed bills and resolutions submitted by BM were on specific women's issues and concerns primarily authored by Rep. Liza Maza. She was one of the principal sponsors of the bill on Anti-Trafficking in Persons and actively pushed for its passage until it was eventually passed into law in 2003 after years of getting stuck in Congress. She also co-authored the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act.

In 2003, the Gabriela Women's Party (GWP) formally announced that it was contesting the 2004 party-list elections. There were two women's parties among the 66 party-list groups accredited in the 2004 elections: GWP and Abanse Pinay. A third women's party, Women Power, was not accredited because it failed twice (1998 and 2001 elections) in getting the 2% minimum vote requirement and was disqualified from running a 3rd time. Abanse Pinay



won a seat in the 1998 elections but was short of the 2% minimum in 2001. When BM protested and successfully got non-marginalised party-list groups from being accredited, the base figure was reduced which enabled Abanse Pinay to get the 2% needed for one seat. However, it failed to get a seat in the 2004 elections.

Other organisations from the people's movement formed their respective sectoral parties for the 2004 elections, namely: Anakpawis (Toiling Masses), Anak ng Bayan (Youth Party), Migrante Sectoral Party (for Migrants) and Suara Bangsa Moro (Moro People). BM maintained its number one position in the 2004 elections and got three seats in Congress. Anakpawis got two seats and GWP got one seat, missing a second seat by only 0.35%.

Setting up GWP

GWP's strength comes from GABRIELA's 20 years of service to Filipino women and its involvement in the people's movement for change. In the past two decades, GABRIELA broadened its mass base and influence by consistently advancing the rights and interests of Filipino women. It has more than 200 member organisations and more than 40,000 individual members nationwide. The majority of its members are from basic sectors: women workers, peasants, indigenous and urban poor women. It has a youth arm, GABRIELA Youth, and an association of women professionals, GABRIELA Network or GABNet. They all serve as the backbone of GWP's electoral campaign machinery.

Forming a women's political party is by no means an easy task. Women activists from GABRIELA, its member organisations and other women's associations got together to be GWP's initiators. As an initial step, these women pioneers drafted the GWP constitution and by-laws, declaration of principles and general plan of action. They began to recruit more members. On October 28, 2000 GWP was formally established through a general assembly held in an all-women's college. The general assembly ratified GWP's basic documents and elected its first board of directors and officers. With the decision not to contest the 2001 elections, GWP soft pedaled as an electoral party until the start of 2003, the year before the next party-list election. GWP then proceeded to get accreditation from the Commission on Elections (COMELEC). The process proved difficult as COMELEC suspiciously delayed accreditation of progressive party-list groups.

Meanwhile, GWP proceeded to recruit more members and set up local chapters and organising committees in different parts of the country, expectedly starting in areas where GABRIELA and its member organisations were strong. GWP had 7,480 members and 24 chapters by the time the official campaign period started on February 10, 2004. Membership had



grown to 23,065 individual members, 38 chapters and 4 adhoc formations by election day. Now, GWP has more than 90,000 members and almost 1,100 village-level chapters nationwide. Recruitment of volunteers to help in the National Party Headquarter operations was also done. To recruit men and gay men, GWP formed the Men in Purple and the Friends of GWP.

Preparation for GWP's second General Assembly, annual National Women's Council meeting and Convention was done simultaneously. GWP's Declaration of Principles and Platform of Action were drafted for ratification in the 2nd General Assembly. Formal announcement regarding GWP's participation in the 2004 elections was done at the national convention.

Election promotional materials were designed for use before and during the Convention. Examples are GWP's logo, letterhead, membership forms, brochure, different types of leaflets (introducing GWP, invitation for membership, popular version of the declaration of principles and platform of action, call to vote for GWP), brochures, posters, streamers, banners, stickers, umbrellas. Materials were both in English and Filipino. The GWP members in the regions translated these materials into the local dialects. The GWP theme song and a jingle were produced for the Convention and the delegates sang and danced with the GWP cultural group performing onstage. A few more jingles were made for the actual campaign period. Also well applauded in the convention was a video presentation showing well-known women personalities from grassroots leaders to women professionals, artists and government officials endorsing GWP. Among the video's highlights were statements of young girls who were named after Gabriela.

The GWP national convention was attended by more than 800 women and about 200 children. It was colourful, a big show of womenpower and great fun. The delegates listened to speeches, sang, danced, chanted slogans, cheered and applauded the elected GWP leaders and initial party-list nominees. Regional, provincial and city conventions were held based on the capability of the local chapters. The proclamation rally held months later was attended by more than 2000 women. The children were there again to celebrate with their mothers, grandmothers and sisters. It already felt like a victory party in the jampacked venue.

The Electorate

The electorate in the Philippines can be classified into what is called the "organised", the "alliance" and "market" voters. The organised voters for GWP were members and sympathisers of GWP, GABRIELA and other organisations in the national democratic movement. Alliance votes come from other candidates and traditional organisations which have committed



support to GWP. Market votes come from non-aligned voters and are those that a candidate or a party can garner through campaigning.

The organised votes are the base of GWP's electoral strength. These votes can be almost accurately estimated. Alliance votes, on the other hand, while they can also be estimated, are not completely reliable. Market votes are the target of name recall tactics and sweeping campaigns. The previously unaligned voter can decide later on to support a party-list group based on the latter's public projection and direct campaign reach. GWP had a strong base of organised voters and this ensured that it would get at least one seat.

That GWP got a big number of market votes only shows that GABRIELA's track record in fighting for women's rights and welfare has caught public attention especially of the women voters. While there is still no women's vote to speak of, the number of votes garnered showed that there are women who prefer a party they perceive as their own. Without the Arroyo administration's and the military's vicious campaign against GWP it could have easily won two seats in Congress.

The Election Campaign

Before the COMELEC-specified campaign period, GWP organisers and volunteers held education sessions and women's meetings to discuss the women's situation, highlights of the national situation and GWP's orientation and platform of action. In these venues, they invited women to be members of GWP. Those who were not ready yet to apply for membership were requested to support GWP in the coming elections. These education sessions continued all throughout the campaign but gave way to brisk campaigning for votes as the election date neared.

GWP members and volunteers conducted direct campaigns to voters by distributing campaign leaflets and sample ballots in public places like markets, church plazas, busy intersections and wherever people, especially women, congregate. Members were encouraged to hold street by street and house to house campaign visits in the neighbourhood where they live. They campaigned among their families, relatives, friends, neighbours, co-workers or officemates, current or former classmates, acquaintances and even strangers they happen to meet in public places. Mobile Propaganda Teams (MPTs) of at least three women were formed. They went around riding in borrowed or hired vehicles talking to the public through a public address system, playing the GWP jingles and stopping at places to hand out election campaign materials like leaflets, stickers and sample ballots. In some communities, GWP held medical missions to help alleviate the poor health condition of the residents. Campaigning through text messaging and e-mails were also resorted to, especially among the youth & students, workers and professionals. The



GWP nominees go on sorties by themselves and at times with other candidates with whom they have established tactical alliances based on common issue/s. In the campaign sorties, they deliver speeches on women's issues, listen to women's complaints or demands, absorb what they could of the situation in the community, shake hands and ask people to vote for GWP.

Campaign on Women's Issues

While GWP's electoral campaign was aimed at winning, it did not focus only on getting votes. The party continued its advocacy and education work among women, as well as men.

GWP together with GABRIELA and other allied organisations continued to tackle women's burning issues. A good example is GABRIELA's "Blow a Whistle", a campaign to fight violence against women. Its main feature is a metal whistle which women can blow to call attention and get help when they are being harassed or in danger of being attacked or subjected to any type of violence. The whistles are being sold at a discount or given free to women who cannot afford it. The campaign has an education component so the people can learn more about the root causes of violence against women and how they can be addressed.

Another campaign that caught the public's attention was against the "Kinse Anos" (literally 15 year-old) advertising billboards of a brandy. The advertisement had a copy that says, "Nakatikim ka na ba ng kinse anyos?" (literally, "have you tasted a 15-year old?). The advertisement played on sexual innuendos offending women and men alike. This highlighted the age-old problem of commodification of women. GWP and GABRIELA launched a signature campaign, along with a media and information drive that demanded the pull out of the advertisement from tri-media and the removal of its billboards. The campaign gathered the support of various sectors including those in the advertising industry. GWP considers the campaign successful. The advertisement was pulled out. But more than this, the success of the campaign is also measured in terms of the support it generated for non-sexist advertisements.

Media Campaign

That winning in Philippine elections depends more on name recall and fraud is a reflection of the state of democracy in the Philippines. There cannot be honest elections in a country that is dominated by US imperialism and its lackeys, the local ruling elite. In such a situation a media campaign, no matter how expensive, has to be part of the whole electoral campaign. The mass media play a vital role in reaching out to a wider section of the voting population. This complements the process of education and organising being



done at the grassroots level. The print media was the most widely used followed by radio and TV.

GWP, for its part, placed paid advertisements in two of the tabloid newspapers with the highest circulation. The entertainment page was selected since it was the most read section of the tabloid. The paid advertisement appeared three times a week, every two weeks prior to election day. Paid ads were also placed twice each in two major broadsheets the week before elections. An advertising agency of a GWP friend helped in choosing the page where the advertisement appeared. A 30-second radio plug was produced and aired daily for two weeks before elections. The radio plugs were not aired frequently enough because of the expensive radio time despite discounts given to GWP. GWP though got some media placements for free through alliance work. An all-women's advertising agency which helps GABRIELA in its campaign against violence on women came out with a paid ad in a broadsheet at its own expense. The GWP banner and poster were included in a television advertisement of a woman senatorial candidate whom GWP endorsed. Also, GWP and GABRIELA ensured multimedia coverage of their campaigns, women's mobilisations and propaganda actions. The GWP party-list nominees, especially Liza, and the GABRIELA leaders, who regularly guested on radio and TV talkshows even prior to the election period, also took the opportunity to talk about GWP and its platform.

Both organisations engaged in a tit-for-tat information campaign to counter the Arroyo-backed military's vilification campaign against GWP, BM and the four other progressive party-list organisations.

Finance and Logistics

The problem of finance and logistics was lessened through contributions and free service from members and supporters. There were also cash and material solicitations from family, relatives, friends, acquaintances and business enterprises especially those dealing with products used by women. GWP held fund-raising activities like benefit dinner where tickets cost P1,000 per plate. GWP also sold t-shirts, umbrellas, stickers and other souvenir items.

While very large amounts could not be raised, the financial constraint was overcome by the spirit of volunteerism and commitment of GWP's members and supporters. Various materials, supplies and other campaign needs did not have to be bought because people just brought things from their pantries and *bodegas* (junk rooms).



Against Election Fraud

GWP joined various alliances in their information and education campaign to prevent massive cheating and disenfranchisement of voters. Led by the church, the progressive movement invited international observers to come to the Philippines as part of the anti-fraud campaign.

GWP joined a composite poll-watch machinery composed of members of the six progressive party-list organisations. The poll-watch teams monitored the official counting and canvassing of votes. They documented and reported cases of fraud especially against the six party-list organisations. They also canvassed their own votes through their established network, chapters and members nationwide. There was a post-election anti-fraud campaign to ensure that votes were accurately counted and canvassed at all levels of the COMELEC.

Harassment and Vilification Campaign against GWP

There were several attempts by the government and the military, particularly through the office of the National Security Adviser, to rob GWP and the five other progressive party-list organisations (PPLOs) of their votes.

A motion was filed in the COMELEC to disqualify the six PPLOs. When it was denied, a government task force was created to keep an eye on the six party-list organisations and to gather evidence to support the disqualification case against them. The task force was composed of representatives of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, Philippine National Police and the Department of Justice. When it also failed, a disinformation campaign was launched a few days before election day announcing that the six PPLOs were disqualified; therefore, there was no need to vote for them.

The government, through the military and police, conducted a vicious propaganda campaign against the progressive parties in the mass media and through community meetings. They came out with a paid advertisement in at least two local papers referring to the six PPLOs as communist fronts. They used the radio to vilify them. Posters, streamers and slogans painted on walls accused the six party-list organisations of being terrorist organisations. Billboards and posters were set up in rural communities telling people not to vote for the six PPLOs. Mass meetings were held in rural villages telling the women not to vote for GWP. The military and police also threatened those who would vote for any of the other five PPLOs. They were ordered to tear down and/or confiscate posters, streamers and other campaign materials and paraphernalia of the six's party-lists. A caravan of supporters were blocked and prevented from campaigning. There had also been cases of raids or burning of party-list headquarters. During elections itself, there were military



operations or massive military deployment in known bailiwicks of the six PPLOs, especially those of BM. There were also cases of “hamletting” or containment of residents in certain areas. Voters were disenfranchised through the setting up of numerous military checkpoints. There were many reported cases of soldiers preventing the supporters of the six PPLOs from going to the precincts to vote. In the Moro areas, the polling centers were moved from the designated schools to military camps. There were ballot boxes burned. Worse, there were cases of arrests, assassination and assassination attempts on local coordinators and leading members of the progressive party-list groups. In fact, 50 BM and 2 GWP members were killed between the 2001 elections and March 2005.

What worked for GWP

Despite the difficulties, the GWP ended a winner with a total vote of 464,586 or 3.65% of the total votes cast in the party-list system. This is, so far, the biggest number of votes garnered by a women’s party-list organisation. It was among the 15 party-list organisations which won seats in Congress out of the 66 accredited. GWP could have easily won at least an additional seat if not for the government and the military’s vicious campaign against it and the other PPLOs.

GWP Secretary General Cristina Palabay points to the following factors which worked for GWP:

- GABRIELA’s track record of fighting for women’s and people’s causes for 20 years earned the public’s support, especially the women and, including media. Media regularly sought GWP and GABRIELA’s opinion on important issues, whether national or women-specific. This resulted to GWP’s high media visibility before and during the election campaign.
- Highly related to GWP/GABRIELA’s track record is its consistent pro-women and pro-people position on different issues which proved to be correct in almost all instances.
- The breadth and depth of GWP’s multi-sectoral and multi-class organisation nationwide was established and strengthened not only for and during the electoral campaign but was a product of the long process of educating, organising and mobilising women.
- GWP has close and strong links with the women’s movement for emancipation and the people’s movement for national freedom and democracy.



Post-Election Strategies to Advance Women's Agenda

GWP is currently represented by Liza Largoza-Maza in Congress. GWP's legislative agenda for the 13th Congress serves as a guide post for Liza. This was laid down right after elections and even before the start of the 13th Congress. The legislative agenda was a product of a series of consultations with women's organisations and institutions.

Now that Congress is in session, each part of the legislative agenda is still subject to verification through consultations, including with women legislators in local government units.

Much of the work though lies in following up Liza's proposed bills from the 12th Congress, when she was with Bayan Muna. Among the bills she either sponsored, authored or co-authored and awaiting legislative approval are those on reproductive rights of women, infidelity bill, bills against contractualisation of women workers and on granting maternity leave to unwed government employees. There is also a bill on raising workers' wages by PhP125 and on declaring November 25 as a National Consciousness Day on Violence Against Women (VAW). For the 13th Congress, aside from countering the government's new tax measures and pushing for the passage of a law that would legislate the much needed wage hike, GWP expects an uphill battle with regard to the Divorce Bill⁸⁸ authored by Liza. Liza's Divorce Bill is different from the versions earlier passed which excluded legal separation and annulment. Alternately dubbed as "divorce Pinoy style"⁸⁹ or Maza Bill, GWP expects controversy to surround the bill because of the Catholic Church's position against it, the Church's influence on many of the legislators and the macho attitude of the congressmen. She has also filed resolutions including the maximization of the use of the Gender & Development (GAD) budget of the local government units, and a resolution calling for the investigation of so-called escort services which are used as fronts for prostitution.

Aside from filing bills and resolutions, Liza's advocacy extends within the parliament through the Association of Lady Legislators in the House of Representatives. Liza co-chairs its Committee on Advocacy. The association is another venue where women legislators could achieve a certain level of unity on what pro-women bills to pass. This is where Liza got most of the support during the 12th Congress for her proposed bill which is now called

⁸⁸ The Philippines is one of the two remaining countries (the other one is Malta) without a divorce law.

⁸⁹ This bill presents divorce as one of the options, and not the only option, that a woman could take according to her religious belief and cultural identity.



the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003. However, not all pro-women legislations sponsored or co-authored by Liza get support from women legislators, most especially those bills perceived as “not along the lines of the Catholic Church.” GWP is now also reaching out to women legislators in the local government units as part of broadening the network of women legislators advocating the issues of women.

Beyond the work in Congress, Liza and those from other progressive partylist organisations have never ceased to be members of the parliament of the streets. They are still present during rallies, giving speeches.

INSIGHTS

Liza Maza is conscious that she represents GWP and the women’s movement inside the halls of Congress. As such, she is focused on the party’s platform, programme of action and legislative agenda for women.

It is worth repeating Liza’s earlier statement, I represent GWP. I am not just an individual here. I represent a Party with a definite programme and platform for women, and that’s the only reason why I am here.

Liza Maza’s statement provides the context of GWP’s current work in the House of Representatives. It is GWP that is in Congress. It is GWP’s programme and platform for the advance of women’s rights that is bannered in the halls of Congress through its representative Liza Maza. GWP’s programme and platform articulate the aspirations of GWP’s members and constituents who are part of the people’s movement for change. The GWP programme and platform stand and only its constituents may say otherwise. It is therefore Liza Maza’s role to follow through that these same aspirations are echoed in the halls of Congress.

The party-list system offers the possibility to progressives and marginalised sectors for representation in Congress. They are practically ‘banned’ from running for a seat in Congress through congressional district elections because of the millions of pesos needed for an election campaign. A district seat in the Philippine Congress costs some 20M–30M pesos up to 40M-50M pesos in highly contested districts. People’s movements in other countries should first work for the passage of a similar law if they intend to win seats in their parliaments. The party-list system is akin to the people’s movement. It is not personality-centered and gives more emphasis on the party’s performance and platform. Individual nominees can be replaced if they go astray of the people’s mandate expressed through the Party.

The people’s and women’s movements can form political parties to win seats in parliament only after they have reached a certain level of strength and influence. This organised strength ensures that the people’s perspective is



carried on through work in Congress as an additional venue of the people's struggle. In the case of GWP, the organised and influenced base of the women's movement led by GABRIELA provided the Gabriela Women's Party the machinery to recruit members and volunteers for the campaign during elections. It also provided the sure votes which, when multiplied by at least three (3) additional votes that each can bring, gave GWP its base of organised votes.

GWP benefited from GABRIELA's 20-year record of fighting for women's and people's causes and its consistent pro-women, pro-people and patriotic stand on issues. GABRIELA as a women's organisation is known by many. It is respected and trusted by people who know or have heard of it. It was a wise move to name the women's political party, Gabriela.

GWP maintains close links with grassroots women. Its platform, programme of action and legislative agenda reflect the situation and aspirations of women, specially the women workers and the peasant, indigenous and urban poor women. They are a product of consultations with the different sectors and classes, urban and rural communities nationwide. They are also the result of a long process of integration with these communities, sectors and classes.

GWP has gained experience from the 2001 elections and Liza's stint in the 12th Congress. The experience undergone and lessons learned in founding and campaigning for the Bayan Muna Party-List in the 2001 elections and in having Liza as one of the BM representatives in the 12th Congress prepared GWP for the 2004 elections and the 13th Congress. It was through this that Liza, in particular, had a first taste of how it was to be a people's parliamentarian.

Tactical alliances with other political parties and candidates are necessary. Such alliances are based on issues both parties agree to carry out during and after the campaign period. Through these tactical alliances GWP is endorsed to the constituencies of other political parties and candidates and therefore translated into additional votes. After the elections, such tactical alliances facilitate co-sponsorship of and support for bills and resolutions filed by Liza and the five other representatives of the PPLOs.

GWP won because while it "played the game" it introduced what the PPLOs called "politics for change". GWP's campaign tactics included "name recall", mass media projection, handshaking, and other methods traditionally used by candidates. At the same time, GWP exposed election fraud and the reactionary character of the Philippine elections and turned campaign sorties into a discussion of women's and people's issues.

One cannot underestimate the extent the state and its military will sink to prevent the progressives from entering parliament. GWP could have comfortably gained two seats in Congress and could even have a third seat if



not for the vicious campaign the military conducted against it and the other PPLOs. It included killing of local coordinators, harassment and intimidation of members, attempts at disqualification, vilification through mass media, mass meetings and postering.

GWP has a built-in mechanism to prevent being coopted by a corrupt government. In general, the women's and people's movements exercise guidance and supervision over their representatives in Congress. Liza's office in Congress is being run more like a women's collective than a government office. There is also close coordination among the representatives of the PPLOs. Policies and code of conduct defined by the Party are in place. A PPLO representative can be replaced for cause by the party anytime.

Electoral struggle and parliamentary work are new arenas of struggle that complement the mass movement. The mass movement takes priority over them. Parliament is an additional venue to discuss and popularise the movement's platform for change. But they are secondary in relation to the work that is being done all these years - awareness-raising, organising and mobilisation of the different sectors and classes in Philippine society. The effectiveness of GWP's work in Congress depends on the strength of the women's and people's movements in general, and the specific issue campaigns and mobilisations, in particular.

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CONCLUSION:

Seethings to Seatings: Reflection and Call to Action

Women, especially in Asia Pacific, are still a long way off from winning half the seats in Parliament and creating a critical mass of women politicians at the highest decision-making level of their national governments and parliaments. Feminists all over the world have been, and are still, struggling for equal rights and opportunities along with the other marginalised sectors of society like the workers, peasants, fisher folk, indigenous peoples and the urban poor. Although the struggle for voting rights, including the right to become representatives in Parliament, has seen tremendous results during the 20th century, there are still many substantial constraints for full and effective women's participation in electoral and parliamentary politics. In the 21st century some barriers are becoming stronger due to further erosion of democracy in many countries, superpower hegemony, religious extremism, racism, militarism and neo-liberal globalisation. Women still continue to suffer from all forms of discrimination due to patriarchy. The concept of equal political right and opportunities has not become a practiced principle in many countries.

How long will it take women, especially those living in Asia-Pacific, to widen real possibilities for women's leadership in society, whether it be the home, workplace, community or at regional and national levels? Although for many decades, women have held high government positions such as those in national parliaments, ministries and government agencies, they were few and often isolated from women's needs. Their participation in politics was more an exception rather than a political norm. For example, in 19th century there was a queen, named Kurmandjan Datkha who was the queen of Alaay, a famous valley in Kyrgyzstan. India's Queen of Jhansi was a leader in the 1857 Indian Mutiny who fought against the British colonisers. In the 20th century, the world became acquainted with Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Golda Meir, Corazon Aquino and Benazir Bhutto. Despite having such women leaders, these countries can hardly be commended for achievements in advancing women's rights and welfare or women's participation in political processes.



There are cases where the number of women in parliament has actually decreased. Also, male politicians have subverted the quota systems and other affirmative actions provided to women by getting their wives, daughters or sisters elected. There are extremely rare cases of women in the highest levels of state bodies coming from a women's movement platform. In this book, the women political leaders are not pioneer women politicians, but they are, by and large, the first women candidates running on a woman's platform. It is encouraging and inspiring to read that "Liza Maza is conscious that she represents the Gabriela Women's Party (GAP) and the women's movement inside the halls of Congress. In this capacity she is focused on the Party's Platform, programme of action and legislative agenda for women."

Countries covered by the research differ in political, economic, social and cultural contexts. Despite the diversities, women in Asia-Pacific have many common challenges to face in order to enjoy equal rights and opportunities for political careers. Though Fiji, India, Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia and the Philippines may be very different from one another, they have a lot in common in terms of women's participation in electoral and parliamentary politics, as can be seen in the case studies. Women in these countries face strong constraints, among which are patriarchal stereotypes about women's role in society, negative impact of religious norms, disadvantageous legislation and monopolisation of political leadership and power by political clans of landowners, big business and bureaucrat capitalists. Furthermore, women have to overcome the lack of resources, lack of political will of states and political parties to address women's issues and, in extreme instances, political repression by their government and its military and police forces. The state and the traditional political parties keep limiting opportunities for women's full and effective participation in political processes. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) is not fully implemented in most countries. Elections costs are so prohibitive that the higher the cost, the lower is women's representation. There are varying levels of women's political leadership skills development. Lack of training discourages women to run in elections. For example, in Kyrgyzstan and Malaysia, there are no specialised training opportunities for women who would like to be political leaders.

The individual stories of the women entering politics, raising women's issues, aligning with women's organisations also show the personal aspects of the six women leaders in our region. It is a good demonstration of how the personal becomes political. The other important side of this project is that the researchers come from the women's and/or the people's movements. This made the research rather focused on the cooperative potential of women leaders instead of a detached analysis of their political career development. The research is not a comparative one, but because of its multicultural nature, it shows very well the similarities of challenges and recommended strategies



for women. This research is a step in identifying best strategies for optimising women’s participation in the political process. It is valuable from several perspectives. It shows what women can do to win elections, and subsequently takes up women issues and the agenda of women and other marginalised sectors in the highest national decision-making bodies of their countries.

From our perspective, it is not enough to have women in national decision-making bodies. It is imperative to have women activists there: those who will not be co-opted by elitist and corrupt systems -- those who will continue to fight for the under-privileged, disadvantaged, vulnerable women, especially the women workers and the peasant, dalit, fisher folk, indigenous, migrant, elderly and differently-abled women.

Similar and Yet Different!

In the cases drawn from the six countries, there are diversities especially in terms of electoral systems. Table 1 depicts several characteristics associated with a candidate and the country she represents.

Table 1

Parliaments	Researched election year(s)	Involvement in political work	Election result	Electoral system	Personal previous work on women’s issues	Quota system
Fiji	2004	Since 1998	Elected	Parliamentary	Yes	Yes
India	2004	Since 1984	Elected	Parliamentary	Yes	Yes
Korea	2004	Since 1980	Elected	Presidential	Yes	Yes
Kyrgyzstan	2000	Since 1980	Not elected, but got in through part list	Presidential	Yes	No
Malaysia	1999, 2004	Since 1999	Not elected	Parliamentary	Yes	No
Philippines	2004	Since 1987	Elected through party list system	Presidential	Yes	No

There are substantial challenges in front of women requiring common strategies to address them. These are electoral attitude, electoral system and its constraints, as well as personal and organisational capacity of candidates.

Electorate attitude under the impact of traditional stereotypes with preference to male candidates was addressed in the case studies. The classification of electorates used by GAP is valuable for future use. Differentiate the voters, identify the “organised”, “alliance”, and “market” voters and create separate strategies for each - this is one of the positive lessons from the Philippines.



Bernadette Libres notes that “the organised votes are the base of GWP’s electoral strength”, and that these votes can be almost accurately estimated.

Voters do not vote automatically for women, even if a woman candidate is clearly much better than the man from all perspectives: intellectual, organisational, educational, professional, administrative, personal, etc. People are used to voting for a man as they were indoctrinated early in life that it is the place of men to lead, not the women. Efforts to change people’s “electoral mindset” have brought results. GWP organisers and volunteers hold education sessions and women’s meetings to discuss the women’s situation, to highlight the national situation and introduce GWP’s orientation and plan of action. It will be best to encourage wide application of this strategy in other countries than is currently being done. For example, in Kyrgyzstan lack of such a targeted educational and mobilisation campaign contributed to the loss of women’s seats in the national decision-making bodies, including the Parliament. Create special campaign components aimed at women-voters - this is a lesson that all cases lead us to. Certainly this component is part of the direct campaign to all voters. We need, of course, to convince the male community. But they are not yet our “organised” voters. GWP used mobile propaganda teams, going around communities calling for support for women’s issues and GWP. The GWP experience also shows that consistent advocacy for women’s issues create a long-term image of women caring about women that helped GWP to win.

The election campaign is a venue for women to show the public that the women’s agenda is their agenda, too. Sharing with women and men during the campaign sorties, enable them to see women’s issues from a different perspective, convincing them that problems can be solved. Teamwork helps to convince the electorate that voting for women candidates means voting not just for the individual but for the women’s joint program and platform, and in general for gender equality, justice, development and peace. History shows that it requires a lot of energy, commitment and time.

As in the case of Zaitun Kasim of Malaysia, her journey from social activism to political involvement was described as “reluctant but inevitable”. Her reluctance seemed to be due to a mixture of personal doubts of her own efficacy as a politician, the daunting challenge of money, machinery and manpower to launch and sustain an election campaign without a party organisation, and the acute debate on the perceived boundaries between political activism and partisan politics. However, it seemed to Zaitun that it was inevitable that she takes up the challenge as a woman candidate, given the marginalisation of social movements in general and women’s voice in particular in the policy-making process of the country. Such growing consolidation of women in the joint political platform as in Philippines is a



success strategy which is worth practicing in other countries. For example, Bermet Stakeeva shares that during elections in Kyrgyzstan, NGOs mobilised their human resources and partners, but most NGOs in 2000 had minimal experience in political campaigning, and particularly in providing support to women candidates. Unquestionably, it takes time and effort to acquire such knowledge and skills. During the 2000 elections, women's organisations in Kyrgyzstan did not play any significant role, and they were not allowed by the Election Code to participate in 2005 campaigns. Assistance from women's organisations certainly helped Toktokan Borombaeva, but this assistance was minimal, due to its limited capacity. Ema Tagicakibau, the former Fijian Member of Parliament, appreciates and tells what exactly helped in her electoral campaign.

In Korea, Fiji and the Philippines, women's organisations helped women in various forms and scale. Collective activities of women's organisations brought positive results. Except for a negligible few, no woman ran in elections as an independent candidate. In India, one exception was Maneka Gandhi, who was the daughter-in-law of Indira Gandhi. Hong Chun Hee from Korea classified assistance into three categories (lobbying, networking and training, and post-election support) that may be used by women's organisations in supporting women candidates. Korean women's organisations successfully lobbied for a clause that allotted 30% for female candidates in 2000. In 2002 the convention rule assigned 50% of metropolitan proportional representative candidacy for women. Korean women's organisations also set up education and training attended by 101 women candidates. Out of 39 women who won in the 2004 general elections in Korea, 18 were recommended by Women Power 2004. On the other hand, Zaitun and Toktokan both lost in elections. However, their running in elections is seen as "the first step towards women participating in the electoral process not under the patronage of male dominant political party and breaking ethnic politics paradigm by centering on non-partisan public interest issues".

Political parties can play a significant role in promoting women's participation in electoral and parliamentary politics. They have their leadership polygon, lobbying body and public relations machinery. All this can be used to the advantage of women. They provide effective venues for leadership development. The participation of women in the electoral process in India has largely been dependent on the attitude of political parties. Although many candidates contested the elections as independent candidates, the winning candidates for Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) and the State Legislatures usually are members of political parties. Opinion polls in India suggest that people tend to vote for a party rather than a particular candidate. Similar voting behaviour tends to be exhibited in Malaysia. Kim Hyen Mi



gained her experience in a political party, National Congress for New Politics. Such a party which is an alternative for the traditional one, as also Bayan Muna party-list in the Philippines where Liza started her stint as a legislator, can break stereotypes and attract new types of leaders.

On a larger scale, the *type of the electoral system* has its advantages and disadvantages for woman candidates. Electoral systems differ but they are all biased towards the powerful, the wealthy and the men. It is an observation of all researchers that the party-list system offers more opportunities and possibilities for women and other marginalised sectors in the electoral struggle. Proportional representation is preferable. Hong notes that even if the proportional representation was followed only in the party, it was very meaningful since it gave a chance to evaluate Kim Hyen Mi's 18 years of political involvement. Women in Kyrgyzstan lost in parliamentary elections and finally got zero seats in Parliament after a shift to pure majority electoral system in 2005. Women still need to push states to implement their commitments and obligations formulated in the BPFA, Beijing Plus Five Outcomes Document, CEDAW and to take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making. Women have to put pressure on states to take positive actions like introduction of quotas and affirmative action. In Korea the quotas for women in the proportional representation increased women's seats up to 50%, doubling the number of women in Parliament in comparison with 2000 elections. In Kyrgyzstan liquidation of quotas led to a decrease of six times in the number of women in the Parliament of 2005 in comparison with 2000 elections.

The state of an electoral system is linked to the state of democracy in a country. This is clearly shown in Fiji and the Philippines. While Ema won a seat in the national Parliament, her incumbency was cut short by a coup d'état. With the present set-up she does not see any future in running in another election as democracy has been curtailed in Fiji. Elections in the Philippines, where "elite democracy" and US domination prevail, have always been characterised by bribery, cheating, warlordism and even state terrorism. The ruling elite uses all the powers at its disposal against those who criticise and oppose its anti-people policies and programmes. Disinformation is used to malign women candidates.

Personal and organisational capacities are equally important for overcoming barriers and winning elections. Histories of our heroines attract attention to the high level of importance of close links of candidates to their constituency's needs and concerns. Knowledge of women voters' problems in her district assisted Toktokan and her team to address their needs directly, and to build her programme accordingly. Toktokan had lived in the province



where she ran for elections. Ema and Toktokan attribute their success to many factors including their personal knowledge and experience, strong sense of identity, belief in equality of women and men, political will, education, abilities and capacity to realise commitments. In the case of Balabarathy, her teacher introduced her to certain political books which were then banned in India. Early entrance into political work is an advantage. Practically all the women leaders who participated in this research actively took part in political activities from their youth. Early involvement in women's organisations, NGOs and the movement enabled them to build personal political vision and commitment. This gave the women greater strength to fight male chauvinism and overcome prejudices, discrimination and various constraints that limit her. Significant experiences of working in various leadership and power positions built strong personal political confidence among them. Personal strategies and those of the women's group, movement and political parties complemented one another. Zaitun and a few other like-minded friends actually moved among voters in especially identified parliamentary constituencies in the Selangor state, Malaysia. The case studies show the complexity and interrelationship of the various factors that can mean success or failure of women in electoral politics. In all the cases studied, women had access to education and the public sphere. Not all women though were ready and eager to participate in elections. Development of a personal vision and commitment to advance women's concerns through participation in the mainstream political processes is a long-term process and requires the involvement of young women. Ensuring women's participation in the political processes is the responsibility of the state, political parties and women's organisations. Thus, how much of a role does personal vision play in electoral victory? All the case studies show that the women had strong personal vision and desire to succeed in their chosen field.

Seethings to Seatings: The Need for Action

Long-term strategy to open space for women in the political sphere goes beyond education and mobilisation campaign strategies. It has several goals. Quality education for girls and young women is one of them. The other is women's access to public life and wide opportunities to work outside the domestic realm. Practically all the case studies show that good education and opportunities for work lay the grounds for the development of personal abilities and the "courage to fight absurdity and discrimination in the world".

Women's struggle to increase women's representation in state power structures and decision-making and integrate women's agenda into political programmes is growing all over the region. Women as individuals and their organisations are taking on more roles in the political scene. Since political players will not address women's concerns without women's pressure, only



proactive approaches by women will enable them to make gains in the political arena. The research shows that women themselves *have to struggle* to realise women's rights: study, think, plan, share, develop skills, join women's organisations, enter political parties, set up their women's political parties, lobby. Equality of opportunity if guaranteed under Constitutions, such as that of India and discrimination on grounds of sex, language, religion, class or creed is prohibited, however, women's participation is still restrained due to attitudinal, institutional, cultural and social restrictions. The research shows that in the Philippines and Kyrgyzstan there are women "who prefer a party they perceive as their own". In both countries and additionally in Korea women's political parties won seats in the national elections. Organised and consolidated efforts of women like in the Philippines, Korea and Fiji can break millennium-old male political domination. One such example is that during her election campaign, Balabarathy was supported not only by her party but also by the party's allies. Another example was when after tough negotiations with the opposition Democratic Action Party, Zaitun was offered Selayang, the ethnically-mixed parliamentary constituency in the economically developed Malaysian state of Selangor, that had been traditionally contested by the Democratic Action Party. In the Philippines, the women have to link up with the struggles of the other marginalised classes and sectors in society because equality among women and men, and among classes and races can be achieved only if a country's sovereignty is respected and there is justice, real democracy and respect for people's rights, especially those of the women.

Without seeing things from a broad perspective and without proactive approach from women's groups, it is hardly possible to reach in the near future the modest goal of 30% representation for women by women who advance women's interest and carry on women's agenda. One step is to make the matter both a political and a personal issue. In the situation of violence against women, private concern historically transforms into public concern; in the case of women's participation in political processes, public concern becomes personal. The women's movement should lend some of its women leaders to electoral and parliamentary politics to complement women's organising, education and mobilisation. To embark successfully on this journey, individual women need to have sustainable support from women's groups and the women's movement. The future success of women's participation in mainstream politics depends on a wide and long-term involvement of women's organisations in the national political struggle. They are the force that can break stereotypes about women's role in politics.



ANNEX 1: COUNTRY PROFILES



FIJI

Geography and People

Fiji consists 300 islands (100 are inhabited). The population is around 840,201. Fiji is a multi-racial society and “the indigenous Fijians” and the “Indo-Fijians” make up 54 percent and 38 percent of the population, respectively.

History

Fiji was a British colony from 1874-1970. The majority of the structures and systems of government are inherited from that colonial period. The indentured labour system (1879-1916) introduced workers from India.

Indigenous Fijians have dominated politics since independence. In 1987 there were 2 military coups led by Major Rabuka (as he was then) and the democratically elected Coalition government was removed from power. 1990 saw a new Constitution drafted heavily in favour of the indigenous Fijians. However, in 1997 a new Constitution for Fiji was adopted which favoured power-sharing and multi-ethnicity in government. The 1999 elections under the newly adopted voting system led to a victory for the People’s Coalition Government. In May 2000 failed Suva businessman George Speight led an unsuccessful coup which did, however, remove the elected government from power.

Culture and Religion

The major religions practised in Fiji are Christianity and Hinduism. The majority of indigenous Fijians are Christians and the majority of the Indo-Fijians are Hindu with a small percentage of Indo-Fijians being Muslims (approximately 8%). Other religions practised in Fiji include Confucianism and Sikhism. Religious fundamentalism in all religions has increased with all religions advocating the maintenance of gender roles to strengthen religious identity.

Socio-Economic Context

Fiji’s currency is the Fiji dollar. Fiji’s economy is larger and more developed than any other Pacific Island nation, with a per capita GDP of US\$2,300 in 1996. The economy is mainly dependent on tourism and sugar production.



Over 90 percent of adults are literate and there are no marked gender differences in school enrolments with girls comprising of 48.5 percent of primary school enrolment and 50 percent of secondary school enrolment.

Women remain more vulnerable to poverty and poorer households have a higher proportion of women as their heads. Cultural and other discrimination make women extremely vulnerable to poverty. Violence against women and girls is prevalent in Fiji. Approximately 66 percent of women who participated in a study conducted by the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre reported being hit by their partners.



INDIA

Geography and People

The subcontinent of India lies in south Asia, between Pakistan, China, Bangladesh and Nepal. To the north it is bordered by the world's highest mountain chain. Total land area is 3.1 million sq km (excluding Indian-administered Kashmir 100,569 sq km), which supports a population of 1.1 billion. Side by side with the country's staggering topographical variations is its cultural diversity, the result of the coexistence of a number of religions as well as local tradition.

History

The Indus Valley civilisation, one of the oldest in the world, dates back at least 5,000 years. Aryan tribes from the northwest invaded about 1500BC; their merger with the earlier Dravidian inhabitants created the classical Indian culture. Arab incursions started around the 8th century and Turkish and Moghul around the 12th were followed by those of European traders, beginning in the late 15th century. By the 19th century, Britain had assumed political control of virtually all Indian lands. Indian armed forces in the British army played a vital role in both World Wars. Non-violent resistance to British colonialism led primarily by Mohandas Gandhi brought independence in 1947. The subcontinent was divided into the secular Republic of India and the smaller Islamic Republic of Pakistan. A third war between the two countries in 1971 resulted in East Pakistan becoming the separate nation of Bangladesh.

Culture and Religion

English enjoys associate status but is widely used for national, political, and commercial communication. Hindi is the national language and primary tongue of 30% of the people and there are 14 other official languages.

Among the ethnic groups Indo-Aryan comprise 72% of the population, Dravidian 25%, Mongoloid and other 3%. India's history goes back to 3,200 BC when Hinduism (81.3% of the population today) was first founded. Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam all exist, to a greater or lesser degree, within the country today. (India, after Indonesia, has the world's second-largest Muslim population.)



Socio-Economic Context

Monetary unit of India is the Indian rupee which equals 100 paise. India's economy encompasses traditional village farming, modern agriculture, handicrafts, a wide range of modern industries, and a multitude of support services. Government controls have been reduced on foreign trade and investment, and privatisation of domestic output has proceeded slowly. The economy has posted an excellent average growth rate of 6.8% since 1994, reducing poverty by about 10%. India is capitalising on its large numbers of well-educated people skilled in the English language to become a major exporter of software services and software workers.

The huge and growing population is the fundamental social, economic, and environmental problem. Recent surveys have shown that life expectancy for men is 62 years and for women it is 65 years. In late December 2004, a major tsunami took at least 60,000 lives in southeastern India and caused massive destruction of property.

The world's largest democracy and second most populous country has emerged as a major power after a period of foreign rule and several decades during which its economy was recovering. A nuclear weapons state, it carried out a programme of tests in the late 1990s in defiance of world opinion. Despite impressive gains in economic investment and output, India faces pressing problems such as the ongoing dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir, massive overpopulation, environmental degradation, extensive poverty, and ethnic and religious strife.



KOREA

Geography and People

The Korean peninsula extends southward from the eastern end of the Asian continent with an area of 99,500 sq km and is populated by 47.9 million people. Ethnically, with the exception of a small Nationalist Chinese minority, the population is almost entirely of Korean descent. Mountains cover 70% of the territory, making it one of the most mountainous regions in the world. The 38th parallel divides the Korean peninsula into two parts, the democratic Republic of Korea in the south and communist North Korea in the north, with the demilitarised zone in between.

History

Korea was an independent kingdom under Chinese suzerainty for most of the past millennium. Following its victory in the Russo-Japanese War in 1905, Japan occupied Korea; five years later it formally annexed the entire peninsula. After World War II, a republic was set up in the southern half of the Korean Peninsula while a Communist-style government was installed in the north. During the Korean War (1950-53), US and UN forces intervened to defend South Korea from North Korean attacks supported by the Chinese. An armistice was signed in 1953, splitting the peninsula along a demilitarised zone at about the 38th parallel. In 1987, South Korean voters elected Roh Tae-woo to the presidency, ending 26 years of military dictatorships. South Korea today is a fully functioning modern democracy. In June 2000, a historic first North-South summit took place between the South's President Kim Tae-Chung and the North's leader Kim Jong II.

Culture and Religion

The nation uses vibrant colours for its festivities which is said to be due to Mongolian influences. Family ties are an important aspect of familial relations, not excluding relations involving business. Korean values spring from a large number of influences, including Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, ancestor worship, Buddhism, and more recently Christianity and authoritarianism. Although Korea is sometimes described as a Confucian society, this would be an over-simplification of the culture akin to describing the culture of China or Japan in the same terms. Korean is the official language.



Socio-Economic context

Since the early 1960s, South Korea has achieved an incredible record of growth and integration into the high-tech modern world economy. In 2004, it joined the trillion dollar club of world economies. Today its GDP per capita is 14 times North Korea's. This success through the late 1980s was achieved by a system of close government/business ties, including directed credit, import restrictions, sponsorship of specific industries, and a strong labour effort. The Asian financial crisis of 1997-99 exposed longstanding weaknesses in South Korea's development model, including high debt/equity ratios, massive foreign borrowing, and an undisciplined financial sector. Led by consumer spending and exports, growth in 2002 was an impressive 7.0%, despite anemic global growth. Economic growth fell in 2003 because of a downturn in consumer spending and recovered to an estimated 4.6% in 2004 on the strength of rapid export growth. The government plans to boost infrastructure spending in 2005. Moderate inflation, low unemployment, an export surplus, and fairly equal distribution of income characterise this solid economy.



KYRGYZSTAN

Geography and People

Formerly known as Kirghizia, the Central Asian landlocked republic of Kyrgyzstan has an area of 198,500 sq km. The origin of the Kyrgyz as a people continues to be debated. What is certain, however, is that as a people the Kyrgyz are close to the Kazakhs and that their movement, too, is tied to the westward march of the orders of Chingiz Khan. Today Kyrgyzstan has a population of 4,892,808 (75 percent Muslim), made up of 52.4% Kyrgyz, 18% Russian (50% in urban cents), 12.9 % Uzbek, 2.5% Ukrainian, and 2.4 % German.

History

Historically, the Kyrgyz, an ancient Turkic tribal people, were a major power along the Yenisei River. They developed a “runic” script and established an elaborate civilisation. Islamisation of the Kyrgyz could have occurred either after they settled in the Tien Shan region or, possibly, after the Mongol onslaught.

Kyrgyzstan was incorporated into the Russian Empire in 1876. This played a major part in the shaping of Soviet Kyrgyzstan. First, the Soviets crushed the Basmachi movement, a movement that advocated national independence and a return of the waqf (religious endowments) lands. Following that, the Kyrgyz were forced to abandon their nomadic lifestyle and settle in makeshift towns and villages. Things got even worse when, in 1937, after the completion of collectivisation of Kyrgyz agriculture, all the manifestations of the Kyrgyz past were dissolved.

Kyrgyzstan gained its independence from the Soviet Union on August 31, 1991 and has worked on privatisation, political freedom, and human rights issues.

Culture and Religion

Contemporary Kyrgyz culture is quite complex. It comprises ancient Kyrgyz myths and legends, especially about the time that the Kyrgyz had not become Islamised and their interaction with Muslim traders who, gradually, familiarised them with the culture of Islam. The majority of the Kyrgyz (75%) are Muslim. Of the rest, 20%, primarily Slavs, are Russian Orthodox, and 5% belong to Lutheranism (Germans), Buddhism (Chinese), and other religions.



Islam in Kyrgyzstan is influenced both by the conservatism of the Kazakhs and the extremism of the Tajiks.

Socio-Economic Context

Kyrgyz and Russian are Kyrgyzstan's official languages and nearly 97% of the population is literate. Life expectancy is 64 years for men and 72 years for women. About 55% of the citizens live below the poverty line. Since independence, the flow of the rural populations, attracted by market-oriented jobs, has been a constant.

The economy of Kyrgyzstan is predominantly agricultural. Only 7% of Kyrgyzstan is arable land, the remaining 93% is mountain and steppe, that the Kyrgyz use for grazing fine-fleece sheep, horse breeding, and dairy farming.

One of the major contributors to Kyrgyz economy is hydroelectric power generated by hydroelectric stations on the Naryn River. They produce not only most of the energy needs of the republic, but also much surplus energy for export to neighbouring countries. Kyrgyzstan's next promising economic sector is gold.

On December 20, 1991, Kyrgyzstan became the first among the Commonwealth of Independent States to transfer all its state-owned enterprises to the private sector. This played a substantial role in the country's economic recovery.

Kyrgyzstan's national currency is the som. The country's total exports in 2000 were estimated at \$504.5 million. In 1999, Kyrgyzstan's external debt was estimated at \$1.1 billion. In 1995, Kyrgyzstan received \$329.4 million in economic aid.



MALAYSIA

Geography and People

Its geographical position is slightly north of the Equator with the South China Sea between peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak states on Borneo island. Despite the intense economic developments and urbanisation that have taken place, the country maintains its lush green landscape, clean sandy beaches and jungle-covered mountains. Malaysia is buoyant and wealthy, and has moved towards a pluralist culture based on a vibrant and interesting fusion of Malay, Chinese, Indian and indigenous cultures and customs.

History

Malaysia was formed in 1963 through a federation of the former British colonies of Malaya and Singapore, including the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. Prior to that, the Malay peninsula gained its independence from the British in 1957. The first several years of the country's history were marred by Indonesian efforts to control Malaysia, Philippine claims to Sabah, and Singapore's secession from the federation in 1965. It consists of 13 states and 3 federal territories. Malaysia is now a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliamentary system. The Barisan Nasional, a dominant coalition party, has formed the government since its formation in 1974. Before that it was the Parti Perikatan which formed the original core of the Barisan Nasional. Since the first federal election in 1955, general elections, both at the state and federal levels, have been held regularly every five years.

Culture and Religion

Its population is about 24 million people from more than 30 ethnic groups. Of the total population, roughly about 56% bumiputras that are predominantly Malay Muslims, natives of Sabah and Sarawak and indigenous groups of Peninsular Malaysia; 34% Chinese; 9% Indians and other minor ethnic groups. The official religion is Islam and Malaysia was declared an Islamic state by the former Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad in 2001. Other religions are Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, animism and various other indigenous belief systems.

Socio-Economic Context

The population enjoys a literacy rate of above 85% while life expectancies for men is above seventy years and for women above eighty years.



In 2005 second quarter, the Malaysian GDP grew by 5.7%, its industrial production grew by 3.4% and its consumer-price inflation eased to 3.0% over the same period. Since 1997, in order to keep the country financially stable during the Asian financial crisis, the Malaysian ringgit was fixed at RM3.8 to USD1.0. In August 2005 it was unpegged and its current rate is at a stable RM3.7 to USD1.0.

Malaysia has thrived within the ASEAN concept of Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) and has a viable standing as an independent and sovereign state in the current era of globalisation. It especially garnered respect from the international community when it took a strong independent stand vis a vis the IMF and survived the global as well as Asian economic and financial crisis of the late 1990s. It participates actively in the UN, ASEAN, OIC, NAM, Commonwealth, and WTO. It thus considers itself an effective player on the international economic and political stages.



THE PHILIPPINES

Geography and People

The Philippines is made up of 7,107 islands covering a land area of 299,764 sq. km. with a total population of 75.33 million. The capital is Manila. From a long history of Western colonial rule, interspersed with the visits of merchants and traders, evolved a people of a unique blend of east and west, both in appearance and culture.

History

The Philippines is the third largest English speaking country in the world. It has a rich history combining Asian, European, and American influences. Prior to Spanish colonisation in 1521, the Filipinos had a rich culture and were trading with the Chinese and Japanese. In 1898, after 350 years and 300 rebellions, the Filipinos succeeded in winning their independence from Spain.

In 1898, the Philippines became the first and only colony of the United States. Following the Philippine-American War, the United States brought widespread education to the islands through the public school system, but this only intensified colonial domination of the people. The Philippines was granted its independence in 1946, but to the majority of the people, it is a bogus independence because the United States continues to date to have economic, political and cultural control over the country.

Elite democracy operates in the Philippines, and that's why the Filipinos, who are a freedom-loving people, have waged two bloodless people's uprisings against what were perceived as corrupt regimes.

Culture and Religion

The Filipino character is actually a little bit of all the cultures put together. The bayanihan or spirit of kinship and camaraderie that Filipinos are famous for is said to be taken from Malay forebears. The close family relations are said to have been inherited from the Chinese. The piousness comes from the Spaniards who introduced Christianity in the 16th century. The Filipinos are divided geographically and culturally into regions, and each group is recognisable by distinct traits and dialects. Ethnic groups include 91.5% Christian Malay, 4% Muslim Malay, 1.5% Chinese, and 3% other.

Some 80% of the population is Catholic, Spain's lasting legacy, and about 15% is Moslem. The rest of the population is made up mostly of smaller Christian denominations and Buddhist.



Socio-Economic Context

The Philippines monetary unit is the peso, divided into 100 centavos. Since the end of the Second World War, the Philippine economy has had a mixed history of growth and development. Over the years, the Philippines has gone from being one of the richest countries in Asia (following Japan) to being one of the poorest.

Important sectors of the Philippine economy include agriculture and industry, particularly food processing, textiles and garments, and electronics and automobile parts. Mining transnationals see the great potential in the Philippines, which possesses significant reserves of chromite, nickel, and copper. Significant natural-gas finds off the islands of Palawan have added to the country's substantial geothermal, hydro, and coal energy reserves.



ANNEX 2: MANIFESTOS



THE FIJIAN ASSOCIATION PARTY MANIFESTO¹

Some of the highlights of the manifesto are:

UNEMPLOYMENT

The Fijian Association is proposing several measures to alleviate the unemployment problem.

1. We will significantly increase funding for income generating projects particularly for women in rural and urban areas.
2. We will establish Youth Open Centers for training young people in basic trades such as carpentry, electrical and plumbing and they will assist in community projects, particularly village development.
3. We will increase technical and financial assistance to landowners to increase the commercial potential of their land, to create new jobs.
4. We will increase funding for small- to medium-size business particularly resource based projects involving landowning units.

EDUCATION

Many Fijian students are unable to complete their education because of financial difficulties. The Fijian Association is also concerned at the high failure rate of Fijian students, particularly Fijian Affairs Board Scholarship students.

1. The Fijian Association will provide financial assistance to families in need and provide for such things as uniforms, bus fares and books.
2. Apart from increased funding for primary and secondary schools, we will increase funding to support teacher training and retraining and offer incentives for qualified teachers to be posted to rural areas.
3. We will ensure that Fijian Affairs Board Scholarships are awarded to the best candidates and we will provide a counseling service for those students to ensure that they complete their courses.

¹ Excerpted from: http://www.undp.org.fj/elections/Elections/parties/fap_man.htm



HEALTH

The role of Government is to provide a health care system that is professional, caring and affordable.

1. The Fijian Association will establish, in co-operation with the Australian and New Zealand Governments, a special fund to ensure that children receive urgent medical treatment overseas as required.
2. We will reduce the cost of public health services to the poor, elderly citizens and the disadvantaged.
3. We will increase funding for preventive health care programmes.
4. We will increase funding of equipment and drugs to rural health centers.

YOUTH

1. The Fijian Association will also establish a National Youth Council to advise Government on Youth Policy Issues.

WOMEN

More needs to be done to enable women to participate more fully in the development of the nation.

1. The Fijian Association will promote the appointment of more women at all levels of decision making in government and the private sector.

I have spoken about more funding for income generating projects for women in rural and urban areas. The Fijian Association will also support stiffer penalties to deter domestic violence and sexual exploitation of women and children.

BUSINESS

1. The Fijian Association will create a new National Business Centre which will provide comprehensive advice on new business and potential local and overseas markets.
2. We will increase financial assistance for Joint Ventures where there is 51% Fijian Equity.
3. We will introduce programmes to develop the planning and commercial skills of Landowning Units.

FIJIAN ADMINISTRATION

The Fijian Association will need to look at the funding, quality of staff and delivery of services of the Fijian Provincial Offices. Fijian Administration



should be at the forefront of lifting the standard of living of our people and in enriching our cultural heritage.

1. The Fijian Association will use the \$20 Million loan to Fijian Holdings to build a Major Complex to promote Fijian Culture and to provide a permanent meeting house for the Great Council of Chiefs.
2. We will upgrade provincial Offices to include Business and Development units.
3. We will upgrade the qualifications of provincial staff particularly at the senior level.

SOCIAL SERVICES

The family

Many families are under stress through economic hardship or face problems of alcoholism, drug abuse and domestic violence.

1. The Fijian Association will increase family assistance through the poverty alleviation fund.
2. We will increase funding for Counseling Services.

The elderly

We need to care better for the elderly and encourage them to continue to lead active healthy lives in their retirement years.

1. The Fijian Association will provide special assistance to those elderly citizens who do not have an adequate income to provide for their own needs.
2. We will increase funding to improve the standards of Nursing Homes.

The disabled

Disabled people need our support to become active members of our community.

1. The Fijian Association will fund programmes to assist disabled people find employment opportunities.

LAND AND MARINE RESOURCES

The productive use of our land and other resources is the key to lifting the living standards of the Fijian people.



1. The Fijian Association will create a New Resources Utilisation Agency that will provide technical advice to landowners on maximising the commercial benefits of their resources.
2. We will increase funding to establish Eco-Tourism Projects to be developed by the landowners.
3. We will ensure that a resolution of ALTA² provides an Economic Return for landowners while at the same time giving tenants reasonable security of tenure.

² 1976 Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act



THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA'S MANIFESTO¹

The Communist Party of India (CPI) (M)'s manifesto reaffirms its anti-BJP stand, in which it holds the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) responsible for the coming general elections. "After the last general elections, the BJP-led alliance was nowhere near commanding a majority in the Lok Sabha. In spite of this, the BJP opportunistically formed a government under its leadership", it states.

Hitting out at the RSS, it says that the BJP "believes in Hindutva, and is committed to dismantling the secular-democratic values of the Indian Republic. It also lashes out at the BJP by describing its 13-month rule a disaster.

It accuses the BJP of "increasing authoritarianism", for it used the "draconian Article 356 - not once, but twice - to dismiss the elected Bihar state government. It is only the Rajya Sabha, which foiled this brazen attack on democracy".

It goes on further to attack BJP's stand on most of the issues ranging from Prasar Bharati to its economic policy and from Pokhran to Kargil.

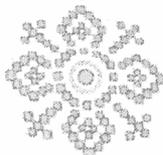
It also stresses that Congress is not the alternative and that it is a party bereft of the political and ideological will to rally all the secular and democratic forces to fight the menace of communalism.

The manifesto reinstates its stand on not compromising with communalism in any form. The Left parties stand for uniting all sections of the people in order to advance the struggle to bring in alternative policies opposed to liberalisation and communalism.

The CPI (M) Advocates:

- Legislation for separation of religion and politics in light of the Supreme Court judgement in the Bommai Case.
- Effective prohibition on the use of religious issues for electoral purposes.
- Implementation of the Protection of Places of Worship Act to see that no disputes on religious places arise.

¹ Excerpted from: www.indian-elections.com/partymanifestoes/



- The Ayodhya dispute to be referred to Supreme Court under Article 138(2) for a speedy judicial verdict.
- Special steps to prosecute all those found guilty by the Sri Krishna Commission for the Mumbai riots of 1993.
- Federalism for National Unity.

On Women's Rights

- The CPI (M) commits in policy and practice to fight for women's rights in every sphere at a time when women face the worst assault on their rights.
- While holding the NDA government squarely responsible for the shameful failure to pass the Women's Reservation Bill, the CPI (M) pledges to continue its firm support for one-third reservation for women in the legislatures and to work for its passage in the new parliament.
- It also supports the important amendments to the Domestic Violence Bill moved by women's organisations and will work for its passage. It will also work for the adoption of laws against sexual harassment and child abuse.
- The CPI (M) supports a huge expansion in employment opportunities for women in the organised sector and in rural areas with equal wages; it will fight all attempts to remove protective legislation for women in the name of labour reform; it supports legislation for unorganised sector workers including home-based workers and domestic workers.
- It demands implementation of joint pattas for women in all land distributed including housing plots given in urban areas by government and special schemes for female headed households.
- The state should provide credit at low rates of interest to self-help groups and assistance to market their products.
- Condemning female foeticide and the alarming decrease in sex ratios, the CPI (M) pledges to strengthen existing laws against female foeticide, implement them and support social campaigns in favour of the girl child. It will strongly oppose any coercive population control measures or the promotion of hazardous contraceptives for women.
- The CPI (M) advocates equal rights for women of all communities. It demands compulsory registration of marriages. Eradication of the practice of dowry as a national mission.
- It also stands for a comprehensive media policy to check the growing trend of commodification of women.



URI PARTY MANIFESTO¹

Heralds of a New Era: Fulfilling the Will of the People

The foundation of the Uri Party was the fruition of a popular aspiration for a different kind of politics, a political renaissance; for Korea must be reborn politically, economically, socially, and culturally, before it can advance into the future. Korea will seek both material and cultural prosperity, and the Uri Party will lead the way with the people of Korea.

Four Major Platforms for the Uri Party:

A Different Kind of Politics

A More Prosperous Nation

A Society that Cares

Peace on the Korean Peninsula

13 MAJOR POLICY GOALS FOR THE URI PARTY

1. Politics of maximum participation and integration
2. Quality government through reforms and decentralisation
3. Creation of a fair and free market economy
4. Equitable taxation and fiscal responsibility
5. Continued strengthening of growth potential
6. More prosperous farming and fishing communities
7. A caring society without discrimination, through the realisation of participatory social security apparatus
8. Healthy environment, healthier people
9. Intellectual and cultural advancement, and revamping of the education system
10. Real gender equality for women's happiness:
 - a. Introducing real gender equality
 - b. Expanding women's participation and leadership in policy making process

¹ Excerpted from: <http://www.eparty.or.kr/english/Platforms.htm>



- c. Supporting women's economic activities and practicing employment equality
 - d. Respecting value of family and making family culture of both sexes equality
 - e. Preventing violence to women and making unified network to protect civil rights
 - f. Expanding women's participation in peaceful unification and international cooperation
11. Mutual prosperity for the two Koreas and peaceful unification of the Korean peninsula
 12. Establishment of a foundation for true self defense and a leading role in regional security regimes
 13. Diplomatic efforts for the enhancement of Korea's international standing and economic progress



DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF WOMEN OF KYRGYZSTAN - “NOVAYA SILA” (NEW FORCE)

Charter

In view of the performance of some goals and charter tasks having become outdated in some provisions of the previous Charter and also with taking into account today's reality, interests of most of party members, Democratic Party of Women of Kyrgyzstan - “Novaya Sila” (DPWK) proclaims new programme goals and tasks for period of transition and makes changes and inserts additions into actual Charter.

1. General Provisions

- 1.1 Democratic Party of Women of Kyrgyzstan - “Novaya Sila” acting on territory of Kyrgyz Republic, uniting on voluntary basis citizens of Kyrgyz Republic with the object of creation a constitutional state on basis of human values, principles of political and economical freedom, gender equality of rights, equality and principle of equal representing of sexes in all authorities and jurisdictions.
- 1.2 DPWK - “Novaya Sila” bases its activity on principles of self-government and equality of all members, voluntarism and publicity. Party is realises its activity under the Constitutions and Laws of Kyrgyz Republic on basis of its programme document and present Charter. DPWK - “Novaya Sila” assists with other public organisations and political parties in republic and abroad standing on platform of democratic reforms and defending citizen's interests, and also with legislative bodies and executive settings.
- 1.3 Full name of the party - Democratic Party of Women of Kyrgyzstan - “Novaya Sila”. Abbreviation - DPWK - “Novaya Sila”. Name in Kyrgyz language - “Kyrgyzstan Ayaldardyn Demokratyalyk patiyasy - Jany Kuch”. Party status - Republican.
- 1.4 DPWK - “Novaya Sila” is a juridical person, has its own symbolism, stamp, balance, seal and publishing organy.
- 1.5 Superior body of initial organisation is general meeting and for republic organisation - congress. Meeting of initial organisation is authorised in participation of more then a half members of initial organisation or selected delegates.



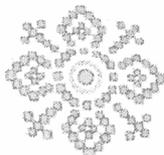
TOKTOKAN BOROMBAEVA'S PERSONAL MANIFESTO

What worries me:

1. Weak social protection of people;
2. Rapid increase in migration of population;
3. Disintegration of families and amplification of recession of morals;
4. Growth in the use of narcotics and increased alcoholism, corruption and the organised crime;
5. Low legal and political culture;
6. Decrease in birth rate;
7. Increase in infectious diseases;
8. Poverty of the population;
9. Irresponsibility of the state authorities for destiny of the country;
10. Absence of confidence in tomorrow; and
11. Indifference to destiny of youth on the part of the state and government.

Toktokan Borombaeva declared during her election campaign that her future programme will address current social policy. She shared that main points of her struggle will be the following:

1. Improvement of the legislation in interests of people of Kyrgyzstan;
2. Change of state's approach to human resources;
3. Transparency of the budget; gender budgeting;
4. Amplification of care of small cities and villages;
5. Increase in wages of teachers, doctors, pension to pensioners due to struggle against shadow economy;
6. Struggle against trafficking;
7. Protection of the rights of women and children;
8. Increase the responsibility of the state structures for solutions of problems, complaints and requests of citizens;
9. Increase role of local self-governance institutes;



10. The termination of privatisation of state and public objects and branches;
11. Public health care;
12. Protection of the rights of labour migrants; and
13. Overcoming poverty.



WOMEN'S CANDIDACY INITIATIVE (WCI) CANDIDATE ZAITUN MOHAMED KASIM'S MANIFESTO¹

1. To promote an awareness in all Malaysians, but especially women, of their rights and power in a democracy process of elections and parliamentary representation. To promote a minimum of 30% participation of women at all levels of political and policy-making processes.
2. To promote all causes of justice and democracy; and to incorporate the views, aspirations and participation of women in this process.
3. To work towards the abolition of the use of physical force or any form of violence in the family, within the community and by state institutions against all Malaysians but especially the most vulnerable - women and children - in any and all situations.
4. To work towards repealing laws which curtail the democratic rights of Malaysians, as well as revising all policies and laws which discriminate against or impact unfairly against women, including those of the Sharia Court system.
5. To work towards provisions that would ensure people are never forcefully evicted from their land or homes under any circumstances; and that alternative, quality housing and alternative land is provided to those who are deliberately relocated from their homes as a result of development for public interest.
6. To ensure that all development programmes are consultative and people-centered, and by "people" we mean all those who are directly affected by these development programmes.
7. To ensure that all decision - making and all business conducted by the government and its institutions are processes open to public scrutiny. To ensure also that the government and its institutions accept responsibility and are accountable for these decisions and their results. To ensure that local council elections are reinstated.
8. To ensure the just and equitable distribution of wealth of the nation so that it is not concentrated in the hands of a few but instead enjoyed by all

¹ WCI created its and Malaysia's history when it fielded the first independent women's candidate during the 10th General Elections in 1999.



Malaysians; to ensure also that women are involved in the process of decision-making in the distribution of national wealth and resources.

9. To ensure a safe, comfortable and quality standard of living for all, with the most vulnerable groups, especially single mothers, the elderly, children and the disabled in mind. To ensure that the basic social services needs of all are met.
10. To ensure that adequate and quality healthcare is available at reasonable cost to all Malaysians.



GABRIELA WOMEN'S PARTY'S PROGRAMME AND ACTION

Gabriela Women's Party is a sectoral party dedicated to promoting the rights and welfare of marginalised and under-represented Filipino women through participation in the country's electoral system and organs of governance. It is a sectoral party composed of women 18 years and above, having varied occupations, education, interests, ethnic origin, religious affiliation, and sexual orientation. The Gabriela Women's Party seeks to harness the potential, initiative, skills, and leadership of marginalised women towards empowerment, justice, and equality.

I. On Empowerment

1. To initiate, support and propose measures that would uplift the conditions of marginalised women in the economic, political, social and cultural fields.
2. To educate and organise marginalised women from various sectors towards actualising women's potential for leadership and action.
3. To tap the organised strength of marginalised women for action towards safeguarding national sovereignty and democracy as well as the people's welfare and well-being.
4. To work for a true land reform programme that recognises poor women's right to ownership of the land they till, ensure state provision for health, maternal and child care services for rural women as well as support for their technical skills, training and education.
5. To support campaigns for wage increase, improvement of maternity benefits, provision of child care services and elimination of sexual harassment in the workplace.
6. To push for the setting up and protection of local industries in order to generate employment and thus minimise the need for working women to leave their families and work abroad.
7. To initiate moves to stop labor-only contracting especially as it takes advantage of women's cheap labour and makes them vulnerable to abuse.
8. To encourage women's initiatives towards a sound and healthy environment, particularly against chemical and waste pollution, forest denudation and the depletion of marine and coral resources



II. On Justice

1. To initiate, encourage, or fight for measures that would strengthen
2. action particularly as regards sexual violence such as rape, prostitution, sex trafficking, pornography, wife battery, incest, etc.
3. To fight human rights violations against women in all its forms and conduct information and education campaigns to protect women from violence, abuse, humiliation, degradation and exploitation.
4. To urge a total stop to illegal recruitment and sex trafficking of women in the guise of employment or marriage.
5. To work for the freedom of all political prisoners, especially pregnant women, nursing mothers, the sick, the infirmed, heads of families or main breadwinners.
6. To facilitate legal assistance, crisis intervention and just compensation to women who are victims of violence, poverty, and environmental degradation.
7. To campaign for the right to health care and the free exercise by women of reproductive choices and the provision of services that will make this a reality.
8. To demand stricter sanctions and punishment for perpetrators of child prostitution, child labour and other forms of child abuse.

III. On Equality

1. To support and promote initiatives aimed at preventing unjust and discriminatory practices against Filipino women that deter their full development as persons.
2. To monitor the compliance and implementation by government of international statutes on equality and against the discrimination of women, to which it is a signatory.
3. To promote the equality of men and women not only before the law but in various professions, in the workplace and in the home.
4. To defend the right of lesbians and gays against discrimination.
5. To raise the consciousness not only of women, but also of men, on gender issues and gender-sensitivity.

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ANNEX 3: THE PHILIPPINES

A: Declaration of principles

B: Party List Legislation



A: DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

Declaration of Principles

1. Women have the right to a society where all forms of discrimination and violence against women have been banished;
2. Women have the right equal to men to the land they work on; as well as the right to full and gainful employment and living wages;
3. Women have the right to participate freely in all aspects of political debates, action and decision-making processes in the family, the community and the nation at large; as well as the right to fair and non-sexist representation in all social, political, economic and cultural spheres;
4. Women have the right to basic health care and services for all, especially reproductive and maternal health care;
5. Women have the right to a marriage founded on mutual consent and respect, with equality and dignity, and to adequate support for the rearing and caring of children;
6. Women have the right to fight for children's basic needs like proper care, nutrition, health, safety and play; protection from abuse and exploitation; access to a national, scientific and mass education which is non-sexist as well;
7. Women have the right to advocate for lesbian and gay rights and to insist that society not discriminate on the basis of sexual preference;
8. Women have the right to assert and protect their country's sovereignty and national patrimony;
9. Women have the right to a foreign policy that is independent and beneficial to our economy and security as a nation; and
10. Women have the right to a government that is truly democratic and representative of the majority.



B: PARTY LIST LEGISLATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

www.congress.gov.ph

LAWNUM: RA07941
DATE : 03/03/95
TITLE : AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE ELECTION OF PARTY-LIST REPRESENTATIVES THROUGH THE PARTY-LIST SYSTEM, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

TEXT :

H. No. 3043

S. No. 1913

Republic of the Philippines
Congress of the Philippines
Metro Manila

Third Regular Session

Begun and held in Metro Manila, on Monday, the twenty-fifth day of July, nineteen hundred and ninety-four.

[REPUBLIC ACT No. 07941]

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE ELECTION OF PARTY-LIST REPRESENTATIVES THROUGH THE PARTY-LIST SYSTEM, AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS THEREFOR

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

SECTION 1. Title. - This Act shall be known as the "Party-List System Act".

SEC. 2. Declaration of Policy. - The State shall promote proportional representation in the election of representatives to the House of Representatives through a party-list system of registered national, regional and sectoral parties or organizations or coalitions thereof, which will enable Filipino citizens belonging to marginalized and underrepresented sectors, organizations and parties, and who lack well-defined political constituencies but who could contribute to the formulation and enactment of appropriate legislation that will benefit the nation as a whole, to become members of the House of Representatives. Towards this end, the State shall develop and guarantee a full, free and open party system in order to attain the broadest possible



representation of party, sectoral or group interests in the House of Representatives by enhancing their chances to compete for and win seats in the legislature, and shall provide the simplest scheme possible.

SEC. 3. Definition of Terms. - (a) The party-list system is a mechanism of proportional representation in the election of representatives to the House of Representatives from national, regional and sectoral parties or organizations or coalitions thereof registered with the Commission on Elections (COMELEC). Component parties or organizations of a coalition may participate independently provided the coalition of which they form part does not participate in the party-list system.

(b) A party means either a political party or a sectoral party or a coalition of parties.

(c) A political party refers to an organized group of citizens advocating an ideology or platform, principles and policies for the general conduct of government and which, as the most immediate means of securing their adoption, regularly nominates and supports certain of its leaders and members as candidates for public office.

It is a national party when its constituency is spread over the geographical territory of at least a majority of the regions. It is a regional party when its constituency is spread over the geographical territory of at least a majority of the cities and provinces comprising the region.

(d) A sectoral party refers to an organized group of citizens belonging to any of the sectors enumerated in Section 5 hereof whose principal advocacy pertains to the special interest and concerns of their sector.

(e) A sectoral organization refers to a group of citizens or a coalition of groups of citizens who share similar physical attributes or characteristics, employment, interests or concerns.

(f) A coalition refers to an aggrupation of duly registered national, regional, sectoral parties or organizations for political and/or election purposes.

SEC. 4. Manifestation to Participate in the Party-List System. -Any party, organization, or coalition already registered with the Commission need not register anew. However, such party, organization, or coalition shall file with the Commission, not later than ninety (90) days before the election, a manifestation of its desire to participate in the party-list system.

SEC. 5. Registration. - Any organized group of persons may



register as a party, organization or coalition for purposes of the party-list system by filing with the COMELEC not later than ninety (90) days before the election a petition verified by its president or secretary stating its desire to participate in the party-list system as a national, regional or sectoral party or organization or a coalition of such parties or organizations, attaching thereto its constitution, by-laws, platform or program of government, list of officers, coalition agreement and other relevant information as the COMELEC may require: Provided, That the sectors shall include labor, peasant, fisherfolk, urban poor, indigenous cultural communities, elderly, handicapped, women, youth, veterans, overseas workers, and professionals.

The COMELEC shall publish the petition in at least two (2) national newspapers of general circulation.

The COMELEC shall, after due notice and hearing, resolve the petition within fifteen (15) days from the date it was submitted for decision but in no case not later than sixty (60) days before election.

SEC. 6. Refusal and/or Cancellation of Registration. - The COMELEC may, motu proprio or upon verified complaint of any interested party, refuse or cancel, after due notice and hearing, the registration of any national, regional or sectoral party, organization or coalition on any of the following grounds:

- (1) It is a religious sect or denomination, organization or association organized for religious purposes;
- (2) It advocates violence or unlawful means to seek its goal;
- (3) It is a foreign party or organization;
- (4) It is receiving support from any foreign government, foreign political party, foundation, organization, whether directly or through any of its officers or members or indirectly through third parties for partisan election purposes;
- (5) It violates or fails to comply with laws, rules or regulations relating to elections;
- (6) It declares untruthful statements in its petition;
- (7) It has ceased to exist for at least one (1) year; or
- (8) It fails to participate in the last two (2) preceding elections or fails to obtain at least two percentum (2%) of the votes cast under the party-list system in the two (2) preceding elections for the constituency in which it has



registered.

SEC. 7. Certified List of Registered Parties. - The COMELEC shall, not later than sixty (60) days before election, prepare a certified list of national, regional, or sectoral parties, organizations or coalitions which have applied or who have manifested their desire to participate under the party-list system and distribute copies thereof to all precincts for posting in the polling places on election day. The names of the party-list nominees shall not be shown on the certified list.

SEC. 8. Nomination of Party-List Representatives. - Each registered party, organization or coalition shall submit to the COMELEC not later than forty-five (45) days before the election a list of names, not less than five (5), from which party-list representatives shall be chosen in case it obtains the required number of votes.

A person may be nominated in one (1) list only. Only persons who have given their consent in writing may be named in the list. The list shall not include any candidate for any elective office or a person who has lost his bid for an elective office in the immediately preceding election. No change of names or alteration of the order of nominees shall be allowed after the same shall have been submitted to the COMELEC except in cases where the nominee dies, or withdraws in writing his nomination, becomes incapacitated in which case the name of the substitute nominee shall be placed last in the list. Incumbent sectoral representatives in the House of Representatives who are nominated in the party-list system shall not be considered resigned.

SEC. 9. Qualifications of Party-List Nominees. - No person shall be nominated as party-list representative unless he is a natural-born citizen of the Philippines, a registered voter, a resident of the Philippines for a period of not less than one (1) year immediately preceding the day of the election, able to read and write, a bona fide member of the party or organization which he seeks to represent for at least ninety (90) days preceding the day of the election, and is at least twenty-five (25) years of age on the day of the election.

In case of a nominee of the youth sector, he must at least be twenty-five (25) but not more than thirty (30) years of age on the day of the election. Any youth sectoral representative who attains the age of thirty (30) during his term shall be allowed to continue in office until the expiration of his term.

SEC. 10. Manner of Voting. - Every voter shall be entitled to two (2) votes: the first is a vote for candidate for member of the House of Representatives in his legislative



district, and the second, a vote for the party, organization, or coalition he wants represented in the House of Representatives: Provided, That a vote cast for a party, sectoral organization, or coalition not entitled to be voted for shall not be counted: Provided, finally, That the first election under the party-list system shall be held in May 1998.

The COMELEC shall undertake the necessary information campaign for purposes of educating the electorate on the matter of the party-list system.

SEC. 11. Number of Party-List Representatives. - The party-list representatives shall constitute twenty percentum (20%) of the total number of the members of the House of Representatives including those under the party-list.

For purposes of the May 1998 elections, the first five (5) major political parties on the basis of party representation in the House of Representatives at the start of the Tenth Congress of the Philippines shall not be entitled to participate in the party-list system.

In determining the allocation of seats for the second vote, the following procedure shall be observed:

(a) The parties, organizations, and coalitions shall be ranked from the highest to the lowest based on the number of votes they garnered during the elections.

(b) The parties, organizations, and coalitions receiving at least two percent (2%) of the total votes cast for the party-list system shall be entitled to one seat each: Provided, That those garnering more than two percent (2%) of the votes shall be entitled to additional seats in proportion to their total number of votes: Provided, finally, That each party, organization, or coalition shall be entitled to not more than three (3) seats.

SEC. 12. Procedure in Allocating Seats for Party-List Representatives. - The COMELEC shall tally all the votes for the parties, organizations, or coalitions on a nationwide basis, rank them according to the number of votes received and allocate party-list representatives proportionately according to the percentage of votes obtained by each party, organization, or coalition as against the total nationwide votes cast for the party-list system.

SEC. 13. How Party-List Representatives are Chosen. - Party-list representatives shall be proclaimed by the COMELEC based on the list of names submitted by the respective parties, organizations, or coalitions to the COMELEC according to their ranking in said list.



SEC. 14. Term of Office. - Party-list representatives shall be elected for a term of three (3) years which shall begin, unless otherwise provided by law, at noon on the thirtieth day of June next following their election, No party-list representatives shall serve for more than three (3) consecutive terms. Voluntary renunciation of the office for any length of time shall not be considered as an interruption in the continuity of his service for the full term for which he was elected.

SEC. 15. Change of Affiliation; Effect. - Any elected party-list representative who changes his political party or sectoral affiliation during his term of office shall forfeit his seat: Provided, That if he changes his political party or sectoral affiliation within six (6) months before an election, he shall not be eligible for nomination as party-list representative under his new party or organization.

SEC. 16. Vacancy. - In case of vacancy in the seats reserved for party-list representatives, the vacancy shall be automatically filled by the next representative from the list of nominees in the order submitted to the COMELEC by the same party, organization, or coalition, who shall serve for the unexpired term. If the list is exhausted, the party, organization, or coalition concerned shall submit additional nominees.

SEC. 17. Rights of Party-List Representatives. - Party-list representatives shall be entitled to the same salaries and emoluments as regular members of the House of Representatives.

SEC. 18. Rules and Regulations. - The COMELEC shall promulgate the necessary rules and regulations as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this Act.

SEC. 19. Appropriations. - The amount necessary for the implementation of this Act shall be provided in the regular appropriations for the Commission on Elections starting fiscal year 1996 under the General Appropriations Act.

Starting 1995, the COMELEC is hereby authorized to utilize savings and other available funds for purposes of its information campaign on the party-list system.

SEC. 20. Separability Clause. - If any part of this Act is held invalid or unconstitutional, the other parts or provisions thereof shall remain valid and effective.

SEC. 21. Repealing Clause. - All laws, decrees, executive orders, rules and regulations, or parts thereof, inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed.



SEC. 22. Effectivity. - This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days after its publication in a newspaper of general circulation.

Approved,

EDGARDO J. ANGARA
President of the Senate

JOSE DE VENECIA, JR.
Speaker of the House
of Representatives

This Act, which is a consolidation of House Bill No. 3043 and Senate Bill No. 1913, was finally passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate on February 28, 1995.

EDGARDO E. TUMANGAN
Secretary of the Senate

CAMILO L. SABIO
Secretary General
House of Representatives

Approved: March 3, 1995

FIDEL V. RAMOS
President of the Philippines

