

TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY

by

Rounaq Jahan

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

“It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it...Even though we don't know what will happen it is right that we take part in this struggle...If you ask whether we shall achieve democracy...here is what I shall say: Don't think about whether or not these things will happen...one's responsibility is to do the right thing...”

We have entered this struggle for democracy because we believe that we can win...we still have great struggles ahead of us...and not merely for months. Even if...the forces of democracy win...we still have to continue...Democracy is something one must nourish all one's life, if it is to remain alive and strong...if each of you keeps in mind all your life that you have a responsibility for the welfare of your country, then we shall have no reason to worry that our country's health will deteriorate...we want to work hand in hand with everyone working for democracy. I don't mean working together half-heartedly--we want to work together heart and soul” ...

[Aung San Suo Kyi, *Freedom from Fear: And other writings*, London Penguin, 1991, pp 180, 218-219.]

At the dawn of the new millennium people all over the world hope for a new beginning. This yearning for a fresh start does not mean we want to negate everything that was done before. Indeed, the world has witnessed tremendous progress on many fronts in the 20th century and we want to build on these achievements. But at the same time we have become increasingly aware of many of the failures and mistakes of the last century. We know that in the latter half of the 20th century people all around the world have gained in terms of education, health and income. Life expectancy at birth and literacy and school enrollment rates have increased significantly. Greater numbers of people--between two-thirds and three-quarters in developing countries--live under relatively pluralist and democratic regimes.¹ But we also know that the disparities between the rich and the poor--globally and within nations--are increasing fast. The fifth of the world's people living in the highest income countries have 86 percent of the world's GDP and the bottom fifth's share is just 1 percent.² And though many more people live under democracies and participate in regular, free elections, they have little real choice in terms of alternatives in the elections. Money and mafia dominate the political process. Public office is routinely abused for personal gains in many of the democracies. And side by side with movements for self-governance and democracy we find increasing incidence of ethnic conflict and inter-communal violence brought on by identity politics.

¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 1999, p. 22

² *Ibid*, p. 3

The vast majority of average citizens want to reverse these processes of inequalities and injustices. We know that if the globalization processes are allowed to proceed without stronger governance, there will be greater inequities and insecurities, and poor people and poor countries will be pushed to the margin in this new “proprietary regime controlling the world’s knowledge.”³ Already the assets of the top three billionaires are more than the combined GNP of all least developed countries and their 600 million people.⁴ Unfortunately many of the governments in our region cannot see clearly a way as to how best to take advantage of the new opportunities created by the globalization processes for the betterment of the majority of their citizens. Many of our leaders are too engrossed in protecting the interests of their regimes and dominant constituencies to think about the excluded groups. In many countries, the leaders are using the ethnic -religious difference of their citizens to fuel communal conflict.

However, the disenfranchised are no longer willing to put up with such “business as usual” politics. They are looking for a very different kind of politics and governance. And they want a very different kind of leadership. A discussion on transformative leadership and transformative politics is, thus, very timely at this critical moment in our history.

But what do we mean by “transformative leadership” and “transformative politics”? How will we recognize transformative leaders? What are the qualities of transformative politics? Why and what role should women play in transforming politics and governance? And what specific actions women parliamentarians from our region can take in facilitating the processes of transformation? These are a few questions this paper will attempt to address.

The paper is divided in seven parts. Following the introduction, section 2 provides a framework to illuminate the concept of transformative leadership. Section 3 highlights the qualities of transformative politics. Section 4 presents arguments as to why we need women’s leadership and what roles they can play in transforming politics and governance. Section 5 describes the obstacles to transformation. Section 6 suggests a few concrete actions by the women parliamentarians. The concluding section summarizes the challenges and prospects for transformative leadership.

Transformative Leadership: An Analytical Framework

What is meant by “transformative leadership?” How can transformative leaders be identified? Two terms are critical to illuminate the concept e.g. “transformation” and “leadership”. Transformation implies a fundamental change. The Webster’s dictionary defines transformation as changing the “form”, “condition”, “character”, or “function”.⁵ Leadership is defined in different ways but the elements commonly emphasized are to “guide”, “direct” and “influence”. Leadership, thus, connotes not simply having power or authority but having a vision and a sense of purpose. Who, then, are the transformative leaders? A transformative leader, simply defined, is a person who can guide, direct, and influence others to bring about a fundamental change, change not only of the external world, but also of internal processes.

Transformative leaders can be found at different levels (e.g. community, national, global), and in various sectors (e.g. society, economy, politics). This paper primarily focuses on women leaders-- actual and potential-- capable of ushering in fundamental changes.

³ Ibid, p. 6

⁴ Ibid, p. 3

⁵ *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, Simon and Schuster, 1982, p. 794

What kinds of fundamental changes are envisaged in leadership? Grounded on the visions and practices of women’s movements and organizations, we present below some of the qualities of transformative leadership.

TABLE 1: QUALITIES OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP

A. Vision and Commitment	B. Institutional Behavior
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality • Equity • Empowerment • Human rights • Peace • Sustainability • Shared power, responsibility, well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory • Egalitarian • Responsive • Transparent • Accountable • Non-corrupt • Consensus-oriented • Empowering

Up to now leadership paradigm has been generally based on “male” models, as men tend to dominate decision-making positions all over the world.⁶ The attributes, often associated with such models, are “power”, “domination”, “competition”, “being on top” and so on. An alternative model, based on the writings of feminists and the practices of women’s organizations have highlighted different set of attributes such as the capacity to “empower” and “service” others, “co-operation”, “consultation”, “sharing”, “consensus-building”, and so on. Increasingly we have come to realize that the model of leadership, envisioned by the feminists and women’s organizations, is more suitable to bring about a transformation in politics and governance.

To move toward a fundamental change, we need leaders with a different kind of vision and commitments. These leaders must demonstrate a strong commitment in the principles of equality, equity and empowerment, particularly gender equality and equity and women’s empowerment. They need to be committed to use power not as an instrument of domination and exclusion but as an instrument of liberation, inclusion and equality. The globalization process is creating new opportunities for enhancing knowledge and making money, but only the more endowed are able to have access to these opportunities and they are disproportionately benefiting from this process. What is needed from leaders-- global, national, and local-- is a strong commitment in the principle of social justice and concrete policies and actions to create conditions enabling the poor and the marginalized groups to have equal access to the new knowledge and opportunities. Individuals and communities need to be empowered to negotiate better terms of competition in the global market. The government has a role to play in empowering citizens and communities.

The leaders also need to demonstrate a commitment to human rights and peace. Both principles should be envisioned in a holistic manner: human rights to encompass political, economic, and social rights, and equal rights of all groups--women, minorities, indigenous people and so on--peace to include elimination of all forms of violence--war, colonization, nuclear proliferation, gender-based violence, etc. The end of the Cold War did not necessarily bring peace to our region. Ethnic strife is taking heavy tolls in Sri Lanka and

⁶ UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 1995 points out that globally only 14 percent of administrative and managerial position, 10 percent of parliamentary membership, and 6 percent of ministerial positions are held by women, p. 47. These figures have not improved significantly in the last five years.

Indonesia. Religious differences lead to frequent communal riots in India. In East Timor, we witnessed a bloodbath. Respect for citizens' human rights is absent not only in the autocratic political systems, even in democracies human rights of women, children, minorities and indigenous people are routinely violated. To bring back security and civility in our daily lives, we need leaders who are committed to take short-term political risks and stand up for the human rights of the "other."

The "transformative" leaders are not necessarily driven by simple efficiency considerations. They value sustainability over growth. They are committed to preserve "time and resources for care".⁷ The relentless competition of the market economy is putting pressure on the "care economy"⁸ (e.g. child care, care of the aged and elderly) and creating extra burden for women as they carry a disproportionate load of the unpaid care related activities. For example, in Bangladesh, women garment workers spend 56 hours a week in paid employment and additional 31 hours in unpaid work in total 87 hours, as opposed to only 67 hours for men.⁹ Such a burden on a sector of labor that contributes significantly (garment contributes nearly 70 percent to Bangladesh's exports) is not, in the final analysis, sustainable for the country's overall economic well-being.

Leaders working towards transformation need to highlight a commitment towards the principles of sharing power, responsibility and well-being. If we can create a just social order in this century through greater sharing rather than through greater competition and conflict then only we can claim that we have been able to bring about a transformation--a fundamental change from our past practices.

"Transformative" leadership not only calls for a change in the vision and commitment of leaders, it also emphasizes the need for the leaders to follow a different set of institutional processes and behavior. The "transformative" leaders make consultation and participation a part of the organizational routine. The institutional decisions are not handed down in a bureaucratic top down manner. Instead, democratic participation by all members is emphasized. Decision-making processes are open and transparent and not secretive set behind closed doors. The leadership is responsive and accountable to the general members of the organization. The leaders are as much committed to means as ends setting high standards of non-corrupt behavior. They work towards building consensus through consultation and participation though these processes are time-consuming and challenging. Instead of manipulating and controlling people, transformative leaders attempt to empower them.

When qualities of transformative leadership are noted in a normative manner as is done in table 1, one may wonder whether these normative categories will fit any living individual! Can we think of a leader/leaders who demonstrate some of these qualities? Instead of listing the very well-known leaders who fit the bill e.g. Nelson Mandela, I shall try to showcase below a few women leaders--some relatively known and some unknown--who have embodied many of these qualities. The examples are all drawn from South Asia, the sub-region I am most familiar with: Some of these women are not active in mainstream politics, yet by taking a principled stand and championing the causes of excluded groups, they have been able to transform the discourse of politics and development in a significant way.

For example, Ela Bhat of Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) has transformed the definitions of both "employment" and "trade union" by focusing on the officially uncounted work of poor women and organizing them in a trade union. By organizing invisible women workers such as street vendors and home

⁷ UNDP, *Human Development Report*, 1999, p.7

⁸ Ibid, p.7

⁹ Ibid, p.7

based piece rate workers in a trade union, she forced national and international policy makers to recognize their work as “employment” and their organization as a trade union though these women do not have a traditional employer-employee relationship as is required by textbooks to call workers “employed” and make them eligible for collective bargaining. SEWA model inspired organization of similar trade unions in other regions of India and in other countries including the West. The plight of millions of home-based piece rate workers was brought to light and became a legitimate concern of mainstream public policy.

Similarly Asma Jahangir and Hina Zilani of Pakistan have transformed the human rights agenda by focusing on the violation of women's' rights. They have taken great personal risks to defend women's rights guaranteed by law yet suppressed by custom. The practice of “honor killing ” as a gross violation of human rights is now internationally recognized as a result of the work of these and other women leaders in Pakistan.

In Bangladesh, Begum Sufia Kamal was for decades the symbol of the country's democracy movement. She demonstrated how one could stand up to autocratic rule by peaceful resistance. Jahanara Imam led the citizens' movement against the extremist Islamist forces. Motia Chowdhury, a Member of Parliament and the Minister of Agriculture, has shown that one can succeed in winning parliamentary election without the use of money and musclemen by simply being with the people and committed to their welfare (supposedly the main mission of political leaders that few honor). She was the only Member of Parliament who refused to take the privilege of a duty-free imported car.

These women leaders have not been able to change the destiny of nations in the same way as leaders such as Ghandi did, but they do demonstrate the capacity to lead differently, and champion the cause of the marginalized groups forgotten by the dominant elite. And they did succeed in transforming the agenda of mainstream institutions. They have shown that leadership does not mean simply capturing political and economic power for themselves or heading an existing large scale institution. Rather effective leadership can be exercised by questioning the existing norms of inequality and exclusion and creating spaces for the participation and empowerment of marginalized and the excluded groups such as women, poor, indigenous people and so on. These leaders have not only fueled debate on the definition of development, they have also shed light on different approaches to leadership.

There are, however, thousands of other potential leaders who are not internationally or nationally known, but given proper support they can play a significant role in transforming their own communities. Recently Bangladeshi newspapers reported the case of a woman elected to the *Union Parishad* (lowest tier of local self-governing bodies) who refused to give a false character certificate in support of a local strongman. (Such false certificates are routinely given by local counselors and officials). When she refused to buckle under the pressure of bribe or physical threat, the “strongman” raped her. But instead of being silent as the custom demands, the woman filed a case in the court of law. The prospects of transforming politics and governance depends in large measure on the activism and courage of women leaders at the grassroots level like the woman *Union Parishad* member in Bangladesh.

Transformative Politics: How Is It Different?

Similar to “transformation” and “leadership”, the term “politics” has been variously defined by English language dictionaries. For example, Webster's New International Dictionary defines politics as “the total complex of interacting and usually conflicting relations between men living in society...the relation

between men usually concerned with governing or with influencing or winning and holding control over a government...the relations between leaders and non-leaders... the art or science of government: a science dealing with the regulation and control of men living in society.” In all definitions of politics, several key words appear: power, control, conflict, win, regulations, and rules.

While politics in the sense of art of governance has traditionally involved hierarchical relations--rulers and ruled--and use of force, deceit, manipulation, corruption, a la Machiavelli or Kautilya, for centuries philosophers and social reformers have also envisioned other types of politics--a transformed politics and polity--which is more egalitarian and participatory. For example, in different periods of history socialism as an ideology as well as a practice has been a consistent feature of the vision of political transformation. From Plato to Marx, political philosophers envisioned socialist utopias. And though socialist communities in the earlier centuries were short-lived, the twentieth century saw large-scale experimentation with socialism in various states in Europe, Asia and Latin America. Socialism as an ideology is committed to the principles of equality and equity and socialist states have taken some deliberate actions to promote equality between social groups and especially equality between men and women.

Though in theory, socialism stood for equality between classes and gender, in practice new inequalities were created in the communist states based not on property but on access to political and state power. As a result, when the socialist states collapsed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, people with political power could easily turn this resource into economic gains. The Socialist states greatly expanded women's economic roles but they did not emphasize the transformation of gender relations. The artificial gains women made in representative institutions due to women's quota evaporated when the quota systems was withdrawn. Indeed, in the last decade there was an approximately 25 percent decline in the number of women parliamentarians due largely to the demise of the socialist system in the Eastern bloc countries!

The records of the two other great ideologies that transformed politics in the last several centuries e.g. nationalism and liberal democracy are also mixed. The nationalist movements successfully overthrew colonial rule and liberated people, but leaders of many post-colonial states turned autocratic and corrupt with scant respect for their own citizen's rights and little concern for their welfare. Foreign rule was replaced with rule by local despots. In liberal democracies, money influenced politics and policies. Women's voice was remarkably absent in the corridors of power though they did participate in the nationalist movements to overthrow colonial masters, and they did play a prominent role in pro-democracy movements.

The disillusionment of the women's movements with the three great ideologies of our times to live up to their promises has led the movement to articulate its own vision of political transformation. The priorities and strategies are different in different countries. Yet there are many commonalities in the women's visions across cultures and countries. The feminist vision of transformative politics envisages fundamental changes in values, processes and institutions. Table 2 highlights some of these changes.

TABLE 2: THE FEMINIST VISION OF TRANSFORMATIVE POLITICS

Traditional Politics	Transformative Politics
<p>A. Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power as domination • Win/Loss • Conflict and war • Authoritative control • Homogeneity 	<p>A. Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Power as liberation - Win/Win - Peace and co-existence - Stewardship and service - Diversity
<p>B. Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top down • Secretive • Corrupt • Burdensome • Selective 	<p>B. Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participatory - Transparent - Clean - Empowering - Inclusive
<p>C. Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchical • Autocratic • Bureaucratic 	<p>C. Institutions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Egalitarian - Accountable - Responsive

To bring about a fundamental change in politics, the value system on the basis of which traditional politics operates needs to be changed. For example, in traditional politics power is viewed and used as a source of domination over others. This needs to change. Power should be perceived and used as a source of liberation. Traditional politics works on the principle of win/loss scenario. Politics is a power struggle, somebody wins, somebody loses. Again, this win/loss principle needs to give way to win/win scenario. Indeed, in many “winner takes all” situations, nobody really wins. For example, extreme inequities are not in the long run sustainable and hence the ‘win’ is only a temporary phenomenon. Conflict and war is embedded in traditional politics which has turned many countries of the South very close to Hobbes’ imaginary Leviathan where life is “nasty, brutish and short.” This needs to change. Peaceful co-existence of diverse interests and views should be a guiding principle. In traditional politics, players are motivated by the goal of gaining authoritative control over the state. Again this needs to be replaced by the notion of “stewardship” and “service.” State power should be viewed as a responsibility to promote public interest and common good; It is a call to serve the citizens. Finally, traditional politics often plays on peoples’ fear of the “other” and promotes interests of single homogenous groups. This has to change. Politics needs to accommodate and celebrate diversity.

The feminist vision also envisages a change in the political processes. Traditional political processes are often top-down with very little scope for genuine grassroots participation. Generally people are mobilized to vote, and in between elections there are few mechanisms for consultations. Women’s movements, on the other hand, value participatory processes as was evidenced by the preparations of the Fourth World Conference on Women which generated unprecedented grassroots consultation and participation in countries around the world. Women’s movements also want a change from the current secretive decision making processes to transparent ones because discrimination and exploitation is difficult in a transparent process. In Sweden, for example, women’s movement noted that there were more women on the

electoral lists when these were shown to the voters than in the ones not shown to the public.¹⁰ Women's movements want political processes to be clean as the corrupt processes of traditional politics ensure the continuation of a system and an elite that no longer represents the interests of the average citizens. Women's movements also want to replace the processes which either exclude the marginalized groups or are too burdensome with processes that are inclusive and empowering.

Finally women's movements seek to transform political institutions. They want the institutions to be egalitarian and not hierarchical, accountable and not autocratic and responsive to people's needs and not serve the institutions' narrow organizational interests.

The feminist vision of transformative politics is not, again, an ideal that cannot be realized in practice. Indeed many of the principles of this vision is drawn from the experiences of women-led organizations and movements. The next section of the paper discusses why and how women should be involved in transforming politics.

Why and How Can Women Transform Politics and Leadership?

From the ancient Chinese, Indian and Greek philosophers down to the modern ones, the well-known proponents of both traditional and transformative politics have all been men. The practice of politics is also defined primarily by men. So why should women now get involved in transforming politics? Why not leave it to men as they have done before?

While many arguments can be put forward as to why women need to be active in transforming politics and leadership, I shall focus here on three major arguments. Women need to be engaged in transformative politics to promote:

- Common good
- Sustainable development
- People's, particularly women's empowerment

Women can no longer afford to be bystanders and victims of many dimensions of human insecurity-- financial, political, health, personal--generated by the current state of political and governance patterns. In the last decade we have witnessed financial volatility and economic insecurity sweep through Southeast and East Asia which resulted in sudden loss of jobs and income, dismantling of social protection, and cut backs on education and health budget. Poor people, particularly women, bore a disproportionate burden of adjustment to the crisis.

Women are also victims of armed conflict, trafficking for sexual exploitation, and spread of HIV/AIDS pandemic. In Afghanistan, the war has not only left the country devastated, women have been pushed back home and denied the basic rights of education and health care under the rule of religious extremists. Thousands of girls and women from South and South East Asia are trafficked to the Middle East and Europe for sexual exploitation. HIV/AIDS epidemic is not simply a deadly risk for commercial sex

¹⁰Anita Amlen, Plenary on "Governance, Citizenship and Political Participation," NGO Forum, Beijing, September 3, 1995.

workers of Bombay and Bangkok. Thousands of women are potentially exposed to HIV/AIDS thanks to their husbands who patronize the sex-workers.

Unless women take part in local, national and global decision making processes and structures and influence policies, they would continue to suffer as victims. Women need to redefine politics and governance and prioritize these inequities and insecurities in the political agenda.

Women's participation is also necessary for sustainable development. Chronic environmental degradation threatens everybody, but more particularly it undercuts the livelihood of the poor. The consumption gap between the rich and the poor and between North and South is making the current pattern of growth increasingly unsustainable. Again as citizens, women cannot afford to be helpless spectators of this silent crisis. To halt this process, women need to make their presence felt in politics.

Finally, women need to take an interest in transforming politics because only through that process they can facilitate the empowerment of the poor.

To transform politics and leadership is not easy. Old habits die-hard. Vested interests do not want to yield. It is difficult to classify at present any specific nation's politics as "transformed" fitting all the qualities noted in Table 2. Yet we can think of incremental progress and we can identify a number of strategies that the women's movements used in various parts of the world to bring significant changes at least in the political discourse. Some of the key strategies are listed in Table 3.

TABLE 3: STRATEGIES FOR TRANSFORMATION

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transform political agenda• Build a constituency• Strengthen the movement• Affirmative action to increase women's numbers to a critical mass |
|---|

In the last thirty years women's movements in most countries have achieved some degree of success in changing the mainstream mindset and priorities. In many countries women's organizations adopted advocacy work as the primary tool to influence and change the mainstream agenda. Advocacy was done through a variety of means: research, publication, gender disaggregated data and statistics, experimental projects, lobbying and so on. In critical periods, women's movements lobbied mainstream institutions to include issues prioritized by women in their agendas. For example, during election years in India and Bangladesh, democracy movements in Brazil and the Philippines, constitution formulation in South Africa and Uganda women's movements were able to put some of their agendas in mainstream party platforms. In the last decade women's organizations were also able to transform the agendas of many of the international conferences, e.g. Environment Conference in 1992, the Human Rights Conference in 1993, Population Conference in 1992 and the Social Summit in 1995.

Constituency building through networking is another effective strategy. In the last few decades, women's organizations not only networked themselves locally, nationally and internationally; they also networked with other civil society groups and political organizations. By networking with different civil society organizations e.g. human rights, environment, peace, indigenous people and so on, women's organizations were able to build their concerns into other organizations' agenda. Women also became active in these movements and became a part of a larger movement for political transformation.

However coalition building works when women’s own movement and organizations are strong. When women’s organizations are able to create a coherent set of agenda of their own and recruit women’s support behind their agenda, they are successful in negotiating with other organizations.

Affirmative action worked relatively well in some places e.g. Nordic countries, to significantly increase women’s numbers in political offices to reach a critical mass (above 30 percent) and thus enable women to push for their vision of politics and policies. Many laws and policies e.g. paternity leave, flexi-labor, etc could be enacted in Nordic countries to promote gender equality because of the presence of a critical mass of women in political offices.

However in this era of extreme global competition even Nordic countries with their long tradition of social policies are finding it difficult to continue their model of an egalitarian system. The obstacles are more in other regions. The next section highlights some of the obstacles to transformation.

Obstacles to Transformation

Table 4 highlights three key obstacles to transformation:

TABLE 4: OBSTACLES TO TRANSFORMATION

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vested interests of dominant groups• Problems of co-optation• Weakness and fragmentation of pro-transformation organizations
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The major obstacles to any change come from the dominant groups who benefit from the current system. These groups have used the traditional political system to make money and buy influence and they are not willing to give up their hold on the system which has worked for them. They can use coercive power of the state or armed mercenaries to intimidate the forces seeking political transformation. Through their control of the media, they can spread mis-information, confuse citizens and undercut the support of the prospective transformation seekers. They can use the tactics of both force and deceit and can divide and conquer their opponents.

Co-optation is invidious and is another major problem. The groups seeking transformation can be co-opted by the dominant groups in the name of consultation, participation and dialogue. In a dialogue between unequals any work towards consensus building is problematic as to who gives how much and who takes how much. Sometimes co-optation can happen even unwittingly. For example, to change institutions one needs to work both from inside and outside. Often “outsiders” can be co-opted when they join inside to change the institutions.

Finally, fragmentation and organizational weakness of groups seeking transformation is another major obstacle. Many of women’s organizations are small and work in isolation; their coalition building efforts are episodic, and often they cannot put up a strong common front against the vested interests.

Suggested Actions By the Women Parliamentarians

Women parliamentarians who seek to transform the dominant paradigm of politics and governance have to be fully aware of the many challenges of their task. Their job is particularly difficult because they are part of the mainstream. They are part of the dominant group, yet they want to change the mainstream and challenge the norms of the very group where they belong. Some of the women parliamentarians have won their seats not on the mandate of reforms but because they played by the rules of traditional politics. So why should these women parliamentarians, who are not wedded to fundamental change be still interested in providing leadership to change politics and governance?

I would argue that transforming politics and governance would work in favor of all women parliamentarians whether they are committed to reforms or not. The traditional paradigms of politics and leadership based on the “male model” no longer serves the greater interests of the community and humanity. As new entrants, women should attempt to reshape politics in the light of their definition of public interest and common good. Suggested below are a number of actions for the consideration of women parliamentarians.

TABLE 5: SUGGESTED ACTIONS BY WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Champion issues critical to transformation● Support policies and budget for the social sector● Initiate debate on campaign finance reforms● Promote targeted policies and legislation to empower women● Network with the women’s movement● Nurture constituency based on records of performance and service● Collaborate with women leaders elected to local governments |
|--|

CHAMPION ISSUES CRITICAL TO TRANSFORMATION

Often women parliamentarians remain inactive in legislative and policy-making fronts. Their participation in parliamentary debates is infrequent and rarely draws media attention. They generally speak when women’s issues or other social issues come up but only a few women parliamentarians demonstrate initiative in championing issues. Yet by taking up a few critical issues that capture the nation’s imagination consistently they can make a mark and turn their issues into nationally important causes. For example, women parliamentarians can pick up social justice and good governance issues on a non-partisan basis. They can formulate policies for poverty reduction, e.g. land reform measures. They can design mechanisms for greater accountability e.g. they can organize parliamentary hearings on specific human rights violations or environmental disasters. They can inhibit corruption through parliamentary debate and questioning. By picking up the theme of clean politics and governance and organizing parliamentary hearings or commissioning reports, women parliamentarians can distinguish themselves as proponents of transformation.

SUPPORT POLICIES AND BUDGET FOR THE SOCIAL SECTOR

In the era of globalization, the intense competition for market is putting pressure on national governments to cut down on social sector (e.g. education, health, safety net) budget. But from the perspective of strengthening human development and the care economy it is important to protect strong social sector

policies and budget particularly in the less developed countries so that the vast majority of citizens are enabled with human capabilities to compete in the global market on better terms. When social sector budget is cut, the poor and women are disproportionately hit as they are more dependent on public sector schools and health care facilities. The rich can afford to buy services from private sector educational and health care institutions. As people's representatives, the members of parliament have a special responsibility to look after the interests of the average citizens. Again, women members of parliament can distinguish themselves as the "voice" of the vast majority of poor women if they support appropriate policies and greater budgetary allocation for the social sectors.

INITIATE DEBATE ON CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

From the perspective of transformation, campaign finance reform is very important. Increasingly, election campaigns look like big time carnivals or spectacle sports that require huge sums of money. The need for funds has propelled the politicians to turn to black money or private sector business to finance election campaigns. In many countries businessmen are turning themselves overnight into politicians simply because they can donate to party funds or can afford to underwrite the campaign expenses on their own. These businessmen turned politicians are often interested in joining politics to make more money through their access to state power and are not motivated by a sense of public service. Women, who generally do not have huge personal assets, are at a disadvantage in electoral politics. Similarly many male political leaders, who may otherwise be suitable candidates for public service, are at a disadvantage as they do not command private funds. Campaign finance reforms that will limit election expenditure and solicitation of private funds, and provide for public funding for campaigns is essential to limit the influence of big money and clean up politics. However, very few politicians want to take the risk and suggest campaign finance reforms. Again women parliamentarians, who are generally not beholden to big business or black money, can demonstrate a different kind of leadership by taking up the issue of campaign finance reforms. They can, for example, start public hearings on the topic, and thus initiate a process of mobilizing public opinion in favor of reforms. Such mobilization would facilitate the process of transforming politics.

PROMOTE TARGETED POLICIES AND LEGISLATION TO EMPOWER WOMEN

Women parliamentarians can also promote targeted policies and legislations to empower women which male parliamentarians may not be enthusiastic about but may not also oppose. In many countries women parliamentarians have successfully passed legislation to give women equal rights in family laws and to combat human rights violations of women e.g. trafficking, domestic violence, rape, etc. These legislations and policies have a profound effect in setting legal norms. Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) recommends a number of legal reforms to ensure gender equality. Women parliamentarians can follow-up on CEDAW recommendations, especially if their country has ratified CEDAW. In the event the country has ratified CEDAW with some reservations, women parliamentarians can work towards withdrawal of these reservations.

NETWORK WITH THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Networking between the women's movement and women politicians has been found to be one of the most effective strategies to push forward women's agenda. The Nordic countries used this strategy successfully. Unfortunately, in our region in many countries there is a gap between the women's movements and mainstream women politicians. Women's movements often find it more useful to network with international NGOs than with their own women politicians, as they find more favorable responses

from the former. Women politicians are also not very supportive of autonomous women's organizations and they often align themselves with only the officially sponsored women's groups. This mutual distrust is counter-productive. Women parliamentarians can help the women's movement by translating into legislation and policies many of the movements' issues. They can help move these issues from the margin to the center stage. The women's movement can also help the women parliamentarians by bringing new ideas on legislation and mobilizing electoral support for the parliamentarians.

NURTURE CONSTITUENCY BASED ON RECORDS OF PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE

The women parliamentarians should nurture their territorial and group constituency based on solid records of performance and service. Nurturing constituency involves being receptive to the needs of the particular locality or the issues groups fight for, resources from the government for the constituency, and be available to settle problems within the constituency. Many women parliamentarians are not experienced enough to bring resources to the constituency or they are removed from their constituencies. In many countries e.g. Bangladesh, the reserved women's quota implies that the women members of parliament do not need the votes of ordinary citizens. So long as the party bosses nominate them they can easily become members of parliament if their party happens to be the majority. But in representative democracies, women cannot expect to be sheltered from the electorate for an indefinite period of time. Women politicians' credentials as people's "representatives" need to be built on a solid record of performance and service to both territorial and group constituencies.

COLLABORATE WITH WOMEN LEADERS ELECTED TO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Women parliamentarians need to build alliances with grass roots women leaders elected to local governments. In India and Bangladesh as a result of one-third reserved women's quota in locally elected bodies, thousands of women are now active in local level politics. Some of these women are elected because of their kinship ties with male leaders but many are elected on their own right and are looking forward to serving their communities. These women are often not given clear responsibilities or access to funds. They need support. Women parliamentarians can strengthen the hands of these local women leaders by linking them up with issues and resources. The local women leaders in turn can help the women parliamentarians by keeping them informed of the local issues and mobilizing electoral support for them.

Conclusion

The quotation from the writings of Aung San Suo Kyi, which appears at the beginning of this paper, summarizes very well the challenges and prospects for transformative leadership in the 21st century. As she notes, the major obstacle to transformation is fear--fear of losing power on the part of the haves and the fear of what the powerful can do to them on the part of the have-nots. The prospects of transformation depends on how each one of us will define our own responsibility and commit ourselves to a long-term struggle without calculating short run victories. As Aung San Suo Kyi reminds us the cause of democracy and political transformation "is something one must nourish all one's life, if it is to remain alive and strong" and the struggle for its achievement requires our working together not "half-heartedly" but "heart and soul."