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*Female political leaders of South Asia
The role of dynasticism in achieving political power*

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ABSTRACT**Female political leaders of South Asia
The role of dynasticism in achieving political power**

The paper examines the careers of those South Asian female leaders who have gotten elected into the topmost executive office of their country. Female leaders of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, namely Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Sheikh Hasina and Begam Khaleda Zia were studied. The paper looks at the correlation between dynastic politics and the emergence of female political leadership. Political dynasties have been a formative and salient trait of South Asian political culture in the 20th century. After presenting the theoretical background of dynastic politics and female leadership, the paper explores the dynastic elements of political succession of the female leaders and looks at the political families' current situation in South Asia.

ÖSSZEFOGLALÓ**Vezető női politikusok Dél-Ázsiában
A dinasztikus elemek szerepe a politikai hatalom megszerzésében**

A műhelytanulmányban azon dél-ázsiai politikusnők karrierjét vizsgálom, akik életpályájuk során elnyerték az országukban elérhető legmagasabb rangú, választás útján betöltött végrehajtói tisztséget. Az elemzés során India, Pakisztán és Banglades női vezetőit, vagyis Indira Gandhit, Benazir Bhuttót, Sheikh Hasinát és Begam Khaleda Ziat vizsgálom. A tanulmányban arra a kérdésre keresem a választ, hogy ezek a női politikusok milyen folyamatok révén kerültek hatalomra, illetve a dinasztikus politika milyen szerepet játszott karrierjük alakulásában. A politikai dinasztiák, vagyis olyan családok, amelyeknek tagjai több generáción keresztül komoly politikai szerepet vállalnak az adott ország közéletében, a dél-ázsiai politikai színtér jellemző szereplői. A tanulmány általános elméleti bevezető után a női politikusok hatalomra jutásának dinasztikus okait elemzi, majd rövid kitekintést nyújt a dinasztikus politika jelenlegi helyzetére.

JÚLIA SZIVÁK**FEMALE POLITICAL LEADERS OF SOUTH ASIA
THE ROLE OF DYNASTICISM IN ACHIEVING POLITICAL POWER**

Traditionally, female political leadership had not been a typical feature of either Western or Asian politics and it continues to be a rare phenomenon. Especially if female political leadership is considered in terms of party and parliamentary politics and not socio-political activist movements. This scarcity has many causes and roots, but in the case of South Asia, it can be traced back to generally lesser participation of women in politics, which is closely connected to the overall situation of women in the traditional South Asian societies. Nevertheless, it can be observed that in all the major states of South Asia, namely Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, one or even more female politicians have been elected into the highest executive offices of their respective countries in the 20th century.

However there is a consensus among social scientists dealing with the topic that this cannot be interpreted as a sign of general female empowerment, but their coming into power has rather to be understood in the context of dynastic politics and specific features of the South Asian political systems. In my paper I will examine parts of the political careers of the elected female executives of the three countries formerly part of British India, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and when applicable, I will refer to Sri Lanka as well. The female politicians under discussion are Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Begam Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina Wajed, and to a smaller extent, Sirimavo Bandaranaike. The main goal of the paper is to determine the amount of influence dynasticism had played in the development of their careers.

I. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF LEADERSHIP

I.1. POLITICAL CULTURE

The countries under scrutiny have had very similar historical experiences, receiving most of the time similar cultural influences and to a certain extent, sharing a common past. Especially formative was the period of British colonialism, which unified most of the territory of the current nation-states of South Asia into one political entity. This has had an impact on political systems and cultures in all of the countries discussed, creating some overarching regional characteristics.

It is typical for all of these countries that the political institutions came into being not as a result of internal democratic processes, but as a result of choices made by Westernized, Anglicized elites taking part in the respective freedom struggles.¹ They tried to implement and carry on the British type of centralized, impersonal sovereignty through bureaucracy, which was completely different from the traditional concept of sovereignty in South Asia: personal patronage of rulers.²

Patronage politics relying on patron-client relationships are still very dominant in the politics of these countries. This can be explained by the concept of highly personalized power, with people seeing political power connected to certain persons occupying political offices, and not in the offices themselves, and as such, they are linking legitimacy to private behavior. Patron-client relationships often prevail over politics of policy implementation and these underlying social structures encourage a paternalistic leadership style.³ In addition to this, political parties oftentimes serve as a vehicle for their respective founders in order to achieve or maintain power. This can be best described with the concept of neopatrimonialism, which means the domination by a ruler who treats his domain (which can be a political party or a country if in power) as his personal property, run on the basis of an administrative staff personally loyal to him.⁴

It is also quite typical that the authority of such charismatic and neopatrimonialistic leaders is supported by extended familial lineage networks, which leads directly to the fact that political culture is oftentimes dominated by political families

¹ MALIK et al. 2009: 39.

² JALAL 1995: 10.

³ FLESCHENBERG 2013: 69.

⁴ GERLACH 2013: 125.

in all three countries.⁵ Nepotism, the promotion and preference of own family members when in privileged position, can be viewed as a deeply rooted phenomenon in South Asian societies and traces its origins back to the traditional philosophy of power equations in South Asia, which can be formulated as the theoretical question of: “What good is the ruler who can’t even help his own family?”⁶

The aforementioned nepotism often develops further into dynasticism, when political position and power is passed on within the family from one generation to another. According to some thinkers this can be viewed as a natural extension to what is considered a traditional custom, in which progeny carry on the heritage of the parents in many ways including that of occupation. Malhotra thus alludes that politics could have become another field, where birth determines the opportunities and responsibilities of the individual, becoming very similar, or even part of the traditional understanding of the caste, or rather the *jati*.⁷ It is important, in my opinion, to keep in mind that politics remain fundamentally different from examples taken from the world of business or arts, because in the case of the latter categories, the decision of an individual can determine who is going to follow in his or her footsteps, while in politics a large number of people have to agree on the decision of the political leader about succession, such as the party organization itself and the electorate as well.

I.1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF DYNASTICISM

With a quick glance on recent South Asian politics, it seems that the electorate has indeed accepted (or there were times when it accepted) the concept of political power concentrated and carried on within the family of a politician. If we examine the national level of politics in the countries, which is the focus of this paper, we can quickly deduce that this dynasticism forms a part of South Asian political culture. In Sri Lanka the Senanaikes, Bandarnaikes and the Jayawardenes, in India, among many regional political dynasties, the national-level dynasty of the Nehru-Gandhis, in Pakistan the Bhuttos and in Bangladesh the families of Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman have been dominating the

⁵ FLESCHENBERG 2013: 69.

⁶ MALHOTRA 2003: 28.

⁷ MALHOTRA 2003: 36.

national political scene for long periods of time. Many members of these prominent families have gotten elected into the top executive offices as well. It is visible in contemporary South Asian politics that dynasticism is not only accepted, but oftentimes demanded too, such as in the cases of Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi or Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.⁸

There is considerable opposition to the concept of dynastic politics as well, this disapproval usually coming from the ranks of the middle class, who find the practice undemocratic and even anti-democratic. But considering the fact that most often elections in South Asian democracies are comparatively free and fair, it can be deduced that if a politician coming from a dynastic background does not succeed in convincing the electorate about his or her individual merit as well, he will not get elected.⁹

But what can be the explanatory factors for the abundance of political families in South Asia? In my opinion the already mentioned centralization and personalization of political parties, serving as a vehicle for the interest articulation of a certain charismatic leader is an important factor. The concept of inherited charisma introduced by Max Weber can be a possible explanation for the dynastic successions in party leadership. He defines a charismatic leader as a person having outstanding and exceptional qualities. His followers hope to keep current arrangement of power even after the time of the charismatic leader: hence they will try to extend this charismatic leadership to the next generation as well. This might happen through extended search, as in the case of the Dalai Lama, or institutional selection, like in the case of the Pope. Another option is dynastic succession, because of the belief that this charisma can be inherited as well, so a close family member, preferably a child of the charismatic leader has to be chosen to carry on the political legacy.¹⁰

As parties are usually quite personalized and build on the image of a great leader, with the selection of a family member as successor, reorganization of hierarchical networks and party image can be avoided as well. This not only saves time and energy for the party organization – which can be crucial in times of an unexpected void of leadership – but can prove to be a more successful campaign strategy, as large segments of society are either illiterate or possess a very basic level of literacy and education and thus find it

⁸ HELLMANN-RAJANAYAGAM 2013: 29.

⁹ MALHOTRA 2003: 318.

¹⁰ DERICHS – THOMPSON 2013:

easier to connect to individual leaders perceived as symbols, than as to complicated party programs hence dynasties can serve as symbols that people can understand and identify with.¹¹

I.2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN SOUTH ASIA

Moving closer to the topic of female participation in politics, other factors of politics in general and South Asian politics in particular have to be examined as well that are limiting the availability of political positions. Not only patronage and contacts are needed, but money, time, skills, experience and information are also necessary.¹²

It is hard for aspiring male politicians not hailing from families with any political prominence to achieve important political positions, but coupled with the generally worse human development indexes and lower status of women in the region and the traditional, patriarchal societies of the region, it is even harder for women to step out from the seclusion of the world of poverty and *pardah*.¹³ This is especially problematic in the world of patronage politics, where each young aspiring politician needs a mentor in order to achieve higher positions. There are few senior female leaders, and getting into a client-patron relationship with a senior male leader would more likely rather hinder than facilitate their careers, as suspicions could arise about the nature of their relationship.¹⁴

The general opinion regarding a woman's place in life nevertheless holds the traditional belief that the woman is supposed to be within the household, that being her "natural sphere", while the "natural sphere" of the male is public life and politics.¹⁵ This is of course not only a specialty of South Asian thought; the long holding general belief in Europe and America as well had been that politics would sully the female's purity and would promote discord within the family. The only difference in South Asia is that there it was not family harmony that was at stake but the concept holding paramount importance: the family *izzat*, the family honor. The prejudice still being in place, women are usually only accepted as behaving appropriately in politics when they are perceived as filling a

¹¹ GERLACH 2013: 126.

¹² JAHAN 1987: 852.

¹³ THOMPSON 2004: 36.

¹⁴ JAHAN 1987: 853.

¹⁵ THOMPSON 2004: 36.

political void created by the death or imprisonment of a male family member, a factor to be discussed later on in greater detail.¹⁶

This does not mean, however, that there are no females who would be active in politics: it rather implies that where the social status of women is generally low, only those women can participate who are members of the elite. Female members of the elite have better access to education, their social standing is much higher and they are closer to gender equality.¹⁷

If we take a closer look at the female political leaders under discussion we will find that all of them were members of the elite and the most prominent political families of their countries. They had a privileged social background and extraordinary access to education compared to average women in their countries.

Indira Gandhi was a Kashmiri Brahmin, which is one of the highest ranking castes in India,¹⁸ she had the opportunity to study in Switzerland and England¹⁹ and was acquainted to the leading figures of Indian politics since her earliest childhood.²⁰ Benazir Bhutto came from the richest landowning family of Sindh,²¹ she studied at Harvard and in Oxford, accompanied her father to many important political meetings and got to know not only the leading Pakistani, but international politicians as well.²² Sheikh Hasina was very active in student politics and had been acting as her father's representative among the youth.²³ Khaleda Zia used to be first lady of Bangladesh, and although she did not take an active part in politics, she still counted as a member of the elite.²⁴

For this reason, some authors state that the status and overall circumstances of these female leaders was so different from the other, less privileged women in their countries, that it is not possible at all to view their political positions as a representative achievement towards gender equality; in fact, they sometimes even state that in attaining their respective positions their gender could only be considered of secondary importance. The most important feature that enabled these women to achieve high ranking political offices was that of the exceptional political situation, which coupled with their privileged

¹⁶ RICHTER 1990: 526.

¹⁷ RICHTER 1990: 530.

¹⁸ SAHGAL 2012: 247.

¹⁹ SAHGAL 2012: 5.

²⁰ GANDHI 1981: 14.

²¹ JAFFRELOT 2002: 76.

²² BHUTTO 2008: 60.

²³ GERLACH 2013: 119.

²⁴ GERLACH 2013: 121.

family and social background, made a simple transgression of gender possible, in which high social status and kinship trumped gender.²⁵ In order to address this assumption, political dynasties in general, and the specific families of the female leaders have to be further examined with a special emphasis on political succession.

II. POLITICAL DYNASTIES OF SOUTH ASIA

II. 1. THE FIRST GENERATION – FOUNDING FATHERS

As already mentioned before, political dynasties or political families are a typical and salient characteristic of South Asian politics, and they have played a very important role in the ascendance of female leaders. All the female politicians under discussion, who have held elected topmost executive offices in any of the four countries come from a political family. Belonging to a political family means that all of them had one or more male relatives, who had been influential and charismatic political leaders.

Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the first female prime minister of Sri Lanka was the widow of the assassinated prime minister, Solomon Bandaranaike, and the country's next female prime minister and its first female president was their daughter, Chandrika Kumaratunge. Indira Gandhi was the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first, iconic prime minister of independent India, who himself was an offspring of the influential Nehru family. Benazir Bhutto was the daughter of the widely popular founder of the Pakistani People's Party and the country's prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, member of the prominent Bhutto family. Sheikh Hasina Wajed is the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the first prime minister of independent Bangladesh, and Begam Khaleda Zia is the widow of Bangladesh's first president, Ziaur Rahman.

There are some striking similarities between these male politicians. All of them were iconic figures in their countries and were "founding fathers" of their nations or at least their highly popular (and oftentimes populist) parties created outstanding amount of popular emotions. Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the leaders of the Indian independence movement and of the Congress Party, the first prime minister of independent India and popularly regarded as the most important architect of the modern, independent Indian

²⁵ THOMPSON 2004: 43.

state. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the founder of the Pakistani People's Party is hailed as *Qaid-e Awam*, the leader of the people, who was not only champion of the poor but of democracy as well. It was under his leadership that the constitution of 1973, the first constitution in the history of Pakistan to be drafted by elected representatives, was enacted.²⁶ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, popularly called the *Bangabandhu*, the friend of Bengal, was in fact the leading figure of the independence movement and the first prime minister and president of Bangladesh. He was also a founding member of the Awami League, and a couple of years later he became the most formative leader of the party as well. Ziaur Rahman, because of his declaration of independence and his important role in the liberation war, is considered by many as the real founding father of Bangladesh. He founded the Bangladesh National Party and gave a new direction to the development of Bangladeshi identity.

These leaders were loved by many but in the eyes of their critics, left a very controversial political legacy. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto came from a rich landowning family, thus was blamed for possessing a feudal mindset and for building a personality cult ("Bhuttoism"). His government, just as that of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was considered as performing rather poorly. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Ziaur Rahman were both suspected of having engineered political assassinations; Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was in fact sentenced to death for one of these assassinations, and General Zia's role in the assassination of Sheikh Mujib has been widely speculated ever since. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Sheikh Mujib were thought to be very corrupt,²⁷ with a strong inclination towards nepotism. The notable exception was General Ziaur Rahman, who was thought to have learned from the example of the brutal murder of the entire Mujib family and deliberately kept clear of nepotism.²⁸ Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were seen as developing less and less democratic approaches to politics and becoming dictatorial in some ways,²⁹ while it was the problem of Jawaharlal Nehru that he was considered too soft, hesitant and undecided.³⁰

Another all-too-common feature of South Asian politics is that of political assassinations, which end was met by three out of the four male politicians under discussion. It was only Jawaharlal Nehru who died of natural causes. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto

²⁶ MALIK 2009: 191.

²⁷ THOMPSON 2004: 40.

²⁸ GERLACH 2013: 121.

²⁹ GERLACH 2013: 116, 118.

³⁰ HELLMANN-RAJANAYAGAM 2013: 54.

was first imprisoned and then executed by the military dictator, Zia ul-Haq, who had engineered the coup against him. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated along with almost all members of his family in a bloody military coup, while Ziaur Rahman was assassinated by army officers. A dictator followed three assassinated leaders: Zia ul-Haq followed Bhutto in Pakistan, a chaotic and violent situation came after Mujibur Rahman, with Ziaur Rahman taking over as a military dictator at first, and Hussein Muhammad Ershad established a military dictatorship after the death of Ziaur Rahman. None of the aforementioned leaders were perceived universally popular, most of them were quite controversial figures of their countries' politics, but as soon as they became assassinated, they reached the precious status of martyrdom.

Their undeserved, untimely deaths leading to the perception of martyrdom freed them from ambiguous political pasts and thus they could later become symbols of opposition struggle and their own parties' fighting for leadership. They became secular saints after their deaths, their jail cells and funeral sites turning into pilgrimage sites supplying the opposition with moral resources for mobilization.³¹

II.2. SUCCESSION ISSUES – FEMALE LEADERS EMERGE

As already mentioned before, all parties under scrutiny were highly personalistic and were building their activities and campaigns on the image of their great leaders. With the sole exception of the Indian National Congress, the parties were to a great extent held together by the leader's charisma and authority. Following the death of the leader power struggles and internal splits appeared in the absence of a successor designated by the deceased leader.

The reason why there was no designated successor, in my opinion, lies in the fact that three out of the four observed politicians died as a result of an unsuspected political assassination, and the fourth one, Jawaharlal Nehru, who died a natural death, was famous for being a "banyan tree" of Indian politics, not letting any other politicians attain followership and power equal to his own, just like the real banyan tree does not let any other plants to thrive in its shadow.³² This, coupled with the fact that the parties in

³¹ THOMPSON 2004: 38, 41.

³² GHOSE 1992: 224.

question based their popularity on the individual charisma of their leader brought forth a difficult situation of succession. In most of the cases the conclusion was deducted that a successor should be sought from within the martyr's family, most probably keeping the Weberian notion of inherited charisma in mind.³³

It is very likely that in most cases the first choice of the party would not have been a woman, but for some reason, there was no available male in the family of the deceased leader. Jawaharlal Nehru had no living son and no other very close male relatives either. The entire family of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was wiped out along with him, only Sheikh Hasina and one of her sisters, Sheikh Rehana survived. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's two sons, Mir Murtaza and Shahnawaz were living in exile at the time of their father's execution.³⁴ Ziaur Rahman had two sons, but both of them were children at the time of their father's assassination. The prominent leaders of the parties thus chose the remaining female relatives of the deceased leaders to take over the position of the male relatives.

II.2.3. KEY FACTORS IN THE SUCCESSION OF FEMALE LEADERS

This choice indeed seems sensible in the light of later events because it turned out that these women were in the possession of huge symbolic capital: they evoked sympathy because of the loss of beloved family members, who were at the same time the beloved leaders of many.³⁵ The electorate could share their pain and would sympathize with them. What was more, infighting within the party among warring factions could be avoided or terminated, because these female leaders could unite the rivaling factions of their respective parties, thanks to the symbolic, unifying power of their familial ties to the deceased leaders.

As they were women, they were perceived less threatening by other possible political rivals. Senior party leaders thought that their leadership will be only symbolic, and they will have the real control over the situation: the female leaders only playing the role of the symbolic unifier and that, too, for a short period of time only. They were

³³ THOMPSON 2004: 41.

³⁴ THOMPSON 2004: 42.

³⁵ BENNETT 2010: 4.

perceived as temporary leaders who had the power to unite the country, only to later transfer power to their experienced, senior male colleagues.³⁶

These female leaders appeared credible to voters as well, because of their loyalties to the memories and legacies of the deceased leaders. The public generally became sympathetic with widows and orphans, and due to patriarchal social structure and mindset, these women were not seen as separate from their family, and the male leader himself, but were rather perceived as a continuation or extension of the power and influence of the male leaders.³⁷ More was not even expected from them, because since they were mostly viewed through a gendered perspective, they were not at all expected to match the merit of their male predecessors: rather it was enough that their merit could shine through them.³⁸ They were accepted as guardians of the dead leader's political legacy, as relatives unquestionably committed to the continuation of the male leader's policies, and as such, personally incorruptible.³⁹

In fact, most of the female leaders discussed explicitly stated many times that the only reason they joined politics was to honor their loved ones. This was emphasized by the fact that they admittedly did not become political leaders by their own choices, but only because of moral pressure and for the sake of the greater good of society, which was further perceived as the demonstration of their sincerity.⁴⁰

Moreover they had a clear moral drive to come into politics. They had the aim of fighting injustice and find justice for their martyrs and thus for society as well. The imprisonment and execution of the incumbent prime minister, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, by Zia ul-Haq became and remained a rallying cry for the supporters of the Pakistani People's Party and the opposition of Zia ul-Haq. The murder of incumbent president, Mujibur Rahman remained a key issue raised by the Awami League during anti-military government demonstrations in the 1980s.⁴¹ Khaleda Zia has brought up the topic of her husband's assassination as a means of raising sympathy for widowhood and in her rhetoric of self-sacrifice for the cause of the nation.⁴² Although Indira Gandhi had no martyr in her family in the sense that the other female politicians had, but she still had her

³⁶ RICHTER 1990: 535.

³⁷ FLESCHENBERG 2013: 75.

³⁸ DERICHS – THOMPSON 2013: 16.

³⁹ RAJAN 1993: 107.

⁴⁰ THOMPSON 2004: 43.

⁴¹ THOMPSON 2004: 48.

⁴² BENNETT 2010: 106.

fair share of family tragedies and sacrifices on the altar of the nation: her parents and close family members spent the greater part of her childhood in prison because of their association with the freedom struggle, her husband became estranged from her because she chose to be her father's political hostess instead of remaining in their own household, and the death of Jawaharlal Nehru shook her deeply just like it shook the nation.⁴³

Another often heard argument for the elevation of these women into leading positions is that they were mostly apolitical beforehand, and so they could appear non-partisan at the time of their succession, despite their dynastic backgrounds.⁴⁴ Most of these women were not actively involved in party politics before, Indira Gandhi being the exception, who had been the president of the Congress Party from 1959 for a short period of time.⁴⁵

Their relative political inexperience had other advantages as well: they had fresh and clean images, unlike many established politicians in their party, and in the world of amoral politics they could stand for principles.⁴⁶ It was even more so in the cases of Benazir Bhutto, Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, because unlike Indira Gandhi their opponents in the first place were not only senior politicians, but military dictators, General Zia ul-Haq and Hussain Muhammad Ershad, respectively.⁴⁷

III. CONCLUSION – NOT OF THE DYNASTIES

The conclusion can be drawn that all of these female leaders have gained entry into political leadership through their family connections, their assumption of power happened because of male family members, and none of them was a grassroots politician who would have come into power representing the bulk of women in their country. The existing structures of leadership, such as the clientelistic milieu, and the political system privatized by charismatic leaders made it possible for these women to achieve authority, but this was largely the result of birth and circumstances, and, in many respects, not that

⁴³ HELLMANN-RAJANAYAGAM 2013: 30.

⁴⁴ THOMPSON 2004: 39.

⁴⁵ SAHGAL 2012: 2.

⁴⁶ JAHAN 1987: 852.

⁴⁷ THOMPSON 2004: 45.

of merit. In addition it can be deducted that the role of gender was not of real significance in any of the cases.⁴⁸

Upon assumption of power, they most often faced the fact that their *de facto* leadership was not at all desired and they were only supposed to be the symbolic leaders of their parties. However, the female leaders have proven that they could not be seen as puppets, they were able to exert great influence over party and governmental affairs. During their careers all women have outmaneuvered the old guard of the leaders and became leaders of their own right, not empty symbols of their male predecessors any more. Even more so that apart from shared family relationships and similar rhetoric stance, they often held no real ideological connections to their male relatives, or to be precise, they often held no clearly identifiable ideological stance at all, but did what was necessary in order to stay in power. In my opinion it is the indicator of their becoming of separate political entities, more than just representatives of the male relatives, that later generations of the dynasties were basing their legitimacy on these women as well.

It is really interesting that there is no clear evidence that the deceased male politicians would have wanted to see their own family members, or these particular family members following in their political footsteps,⁴⁹ or in some cases there is evidence to the contrary;⁵⁰ on the other hand, it is clear that the discussed female leaders were conscious builders of their own political dynasties. Indira Gandhi spent years grooming first his younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, and following his death, his elder son, Rahul Gandhi for political leadership.⁵¹ Benazir Bhutto named her husband as her political successor.⁵² Sheikh Hasina has been involving her son gradually into politics, while Khaleda Zia has been engaging both in extended nepotism and grooming of her son, Tarique.⁵³

A twist of fate is that two of the female leaders discussed also became victims of political assassinations, hence reaching the same martyr status as their fathers. The assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1986 and of Benazir Bhutto in 2008 propelled their successors into power even more equivocally as it happened with the female leaders. Rahul Gandhi, the son of Indira Gandhi won the election with a huge margin, riding on a

⁴⁸ RAJAN 1993:104.

⁴⁹ FLESCHENBERG 2013: 79.

⁵⁰ MALHOTRA 2003: 60.

⁵¹ MALHOTRA 2003: 89. ⁵²

ANDERSON 2013: 103. ⁵³

GERLACH 2013: 120.

wave of sympathy,⁵⁴ and the previously highly unpopular husband of Benazir Bhutto, Asif Ali Zardari won the presidential elections of Pakistan after her death.⁵⁵

The Gandhi dynasty is still present in Indian politics, although with less electoral success and the Bhutto-Zardari family is in a phase of transition, with the gradual involvement of Benazir's and Zardari's son, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari into politics. Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia are still alive and active, and only time will tell if dynasticism in South Asia will remain a salient factor or we are witnessing the beginning of the decline of political dynasties.

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⁵⁴ MALHOTRA 2003: 158.

⁵⁵ FLESCHENBERG 2013: 102

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