
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Gendered Deification: Women Leaders and Political Iconography in Bangladesh

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| ABSTRACT

This paper explores gendered political deification in Bangladesh with emphasis on the situation of women politicians in Bangladesh today. Using political deification tools developed by Sen and Nielsen with the help of the concept of political leadership feminism, we look at the interaction of gender with the construction of political imagery. In accomplishing this research, critical discourse analysis and visual semiotics are employed to establish an understanding of the representation and received portrayal of two key Bangladeshi 'women of power', namely, Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia. These findings uncover a multi-layered duality based on the gender and dynastic-political relations in Bangladesh, along with the persona of the supreme leader of a country. We map out how the concept of mother and family relations is mobilized to build strong political discourses, even as the patriarchal framework is both affirmed and subverted. In trying to attain gender equality, female leaders obtain the most political power but are subject to gender roles and, at times, contribute to the perpetuation of those roles. By contextualizing this study in South Asian politics, we are indeed helping the existing scholarly discourse on gender and political iconography, women's participation in democratization, and the dilemmas of female leadership in patriarchal societies. This study advances knowledge on gender, power, and political symbolism in SA with the potential for introducing similar phenomena in other cultural settings.

| KEYWORDS

Gendered Deification, Bangladesh, Women Leaders, Political Iconography, Gender and Politics, South Asian Politics, Feminist Theory, Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia, Critical Discourse Analysis.

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1. Introduction

1.1 *The Paradox of Female Leadership in Bangladesh*

Bangladesh is one of the fascinating examples of a contemporary system of international relations, especially within the South Asian subcontinent. Although this is a highly preserved patriarchal culture, the country has had female leaders for nearly the last three decades (Jahan, 2018). This paradox of having a woman in leadership in a man's world is a fertile area to study gender, power, and political symbolism.

1.2 *Political Deification and Gender*

Building upon Sen and Nielsen's (2016) concept of political deification, it is necessary to focus on the effectiveness of religio-mimetic symbols in political discourses. However, the aspects related to gender in this phenomenon, especially when it comes to women leaders, have not been sufficiently analyzed. Thus, it is an attempt to fill this gap and focus on the role of gender in conjunction with the political deification in the context of Bangladesh.

1.3 Women Leaders in Bangladesh: A Brief Overview

Since its independence in 1971, Bangladesh has seen two women rise to the highest echelons of power: Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia are, the two main female political leaders in Bangladesh. They have been monopolizing political power and switching between Premiership since 1991 occasionally (Riaz, 2019). It looks at gendered political deification through their rise to power due to family inheritance and their political careers.

1.4 Research Objectives and Significance

This study seeks to:

1. Analyze the gendered aspects of political deification in Bangladesh
2. Examine how traditional gender roles are reinforced or challenged through political iconography
3. Investigate the intersection of religious symbolism and gender in political narratives

By focusing on these objectives, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on gender and politics in South Asia. It offers new insights into how gender shapes and is shaped by political symbolism, with implications for understanding women's political participation and leadership in traditionally patriarchal societies.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Political deification

Sen and Nielsen's (2022) idea of political deification offers an important analytical tool for analyzing the power of religious icons and symbols in political situations. Political deification is defined as the transformation of political leaders into divine entities and their treatment as such. This notion is especially important in East and South Asian politics, where the line between religion and politics is often blurred.

2.2 Sen and Nielsen believe that political deification serves a variety of functions:

1. Legitimising political power
2. Increasing public support
3. Developing a feeling of national identity
4. Supporting established power structures

In the case of Bangladesh, this paradigm enables us to investigate how female political figures, such as Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, are depicted and interpreted via religious and quasi-religious lenses.

2.3 Feminist Theory of Political Leadership and Representation

To properly grasp the gendered dimension of political deification in Bangladesh, feminist ideas on political leadership and representation must be included. Childs and Krook (2008) believe that women's political participation extends beyond simple numbers, highlighting the necessity of substantive representation - the capacity to act in women's interests.

Fleschenberg (2008) observes that women leaders in South Asian politics often confront a double bind: they must display traditionally male leadership skills while still complying with conventional feminine norms. This issue is especially important in Bangladesh, where female leaders have gained enormous political authority in a patriarchal culture.

Feminist academics have also stressed the significance of intersectionality in comprehending women's political leadership (Crenshaw, 1989). In Bangladesh, female leaders' political trajectories are shaped by elements such as class, familial lineage, and religious identity, which overlap with gender.

2.4 Gender and Symbolism in South Asian Politics

Gender and symbolism theories in South Asian politics provide another degree of complexity to the theoretical framework. According to Haq (2011), in Bangladesh, political symbolism commonly employs gendered imagery, with female politicians being depicted as mothers of the country or guardians of democracy.

This gendered symbolism is not exclusive to Bangladesh but is seen across South Asia. Sinha (1995) shows how gendered metaphors affected colonial and postwar politics in India, with the country often feminized and in need of male protection. In Bangladesh, we witness a unique spin on this relationship, with female leaders exhibiting both protective and caring qualities of leadership.

Suvorova's (2015) study on female political dynasties in South Asia sheds light on how family legacies interact with gender in political symbols. This is especially important in Bangladesh, where both Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia have used their family ties to male political heroes to shape their political personalities.

2.5 Integrating the theoretical perspectives

We may get a better understanding of gendered political deification in Bangladesh by combining these theoretical views. Sen and Nielsen's concept enables us to investigate how religious and quasi-religious symbols are used in political situations. Feminist political leadership theories help us comprehend the particular problems and tactics that female leaders face in patriarchal societies. Finally, gender and symbolism theories in South Asian politics help us understand how regional cultural and historical elements influence these processes.

This comprehensive paradigm allows us to pose critical questions regarding the nature of political deification in Bangladesh.

1. How do political deification processes vary between male and female leaders?
2. How do female leaders deal with the contradiction between conventional gender norms and political power?
3. How does the use of maternal images in political symbols support or challenge established gender norms?
4. How do overlapping identities (class, religion, and family history) influence the political deification of female leaders?

Addressing these concerns may help us get a better understanding of the complicated interaction between gender, religion, and politics in South Asia. This theoretical framework not only enables us to examine the unique example of Bangladesh, but it also serves as a model for studying comparable events in other cultural and political settings.

3. Historical Context of Women in Bangladeshi Politics

3.1 Overview of Women's Participation in Bangladesh's Political History

Deeply ingrained in the larger framework of South Asian politics is the long and complicated history of women's involvement in Bangladeshi politics. Women have been involved in politics since the anti-colonial fights against British control and the nationalist movement that followed against the Pakistani government (Nazneen, 2017). Bangladeshi women's political engagement is now greatly influenced by this historical trend.

Thought leaders in women's political emancipation during the British colonial era were Begum Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain (1880–1922). Women's political and public realms were opened for them by revolutionaries like Pritilata Waddedar (1911–1922) and Kalpana Datta (1913–1995), who took up weapons in the nationalist movement (White Board Magazine, 201). The foundation for the next generations of Bangladeshi women in politics was established by these early pioneers

Women's political engagement underwent a major sea change with the 1971 War of Liberation. Women were engaged actively as organizers, warriors, and public opinion shapers. For their efforts, notable people like Taramon Bibi and Sitara Begum received the Bir Pratik, Bangladesh's most prestigious bravery medal (White Board Magazine, 2021). Women were given chances at this time of national struggle to claim their political agency and a place in the political discourse of the just established country. For instance, during the Liberation War of 1971, women like Taramon Bibi and Sitara Begum played crucial roles, not only in combat but also in supporting the war efforts through various means. Their contributions were recognized with prestigious awards such as the Bir Pratik, highlighting the significant yet often overlooked role of women in the national struggle. This period marked a pivotal moment for women's political agency, setting a precedent for their involvement in the newly formed nation's political landscape (White Board Magazine, 2021).

3.2 A Patriarchal Society's Conundrum with Female Leadership

Regarding women's political leadership, Bangladesh offers a unique conundrum. "For most of the past three decades, women have dominated the nation despite its predominantly patriarchal culture (Jahan, 2018). This phenomenon questions accepted beliefs regarding the connection between women's political success and societal gender standards.

Being the first in the history of the Indian subcontinent to specifically acknowledge women's political involvement, Bangladesh's 1972 Constitution was a historic document. In both public and private domains, it institutionalized women's equal rights (White Board Magazine, 2021). These constitutional clauses have been applied unevenly, nevertheless, which is a reflection of the patriarchal conventions' enduring power.

Bangladesh's seventh place in the Global Gender Gap 2020 Report by the World Economic Forum attests to its advancements in women's political empowerment. The nation is ranked 86th in legislative involvement and 124th in cabinet portfolios, according to the same research (White Board Magazine, 2021). This difference emphasizes the intricate character of women's political engagement in Bangladesh, where structural issues coexist with high-level leadership.

3.3 Characteristics of Bangladeshi Female Political Ascent

The rise to the top political offices of Bangladeshi women has been mostly hereditary. The best way to illustrate this trend is through the long-term political careers of Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia (Riaz, 2019). Current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is the daughter of the nation's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Her political career is strongly related to the history of her family in the country's independence struggle. In a similar vein, Khaleda Zia joined politics after her husband, President Ziaur Rahman's murder, and has served as prime minister many times (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017). While offering women a path to high political power, this dynastic pattern begs the issue of whether women without such family connections can gain political leadership.

Current Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is the daughter of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's founding father. Her family's history in the nation's independence movement has been intimately linked to her political career. Comparably, when her husband, President Ziaur Rahman, was assassinated, Khaleda Zia—who has held the position of prime minister many times—entered politics (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017).

While not exclusive to Bangladesh, this dynastic pattern of female leadership is widespread across South Asia. According to Suvorova (2015), women's political leadership in the area is legitimated in large part by family legacies. Both Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh have built their political identities by using their ties to male political martyrs.

The phenomenon of Bangladeshi female political rise is hereditary; this has its advantages and disadvantages. While in a given culture, such chances might be scarce, it has, on the one hand, provided women with an avenue to reach extreme political power. However, it raises the question of how women who are not related to political gods can also attain leadership in the political arena.

Furthermore, sexism was combined with this dynastic tendency, which shapes what sort of political representation women have. Moreover, even those women in leadership have had affiliations with male political leaders, which have triggered their rise in power. This dynamic threatens the narrative of women's political representational maturation in Bangladesh because it suggests that gains in leadership do not necessarily require transformations in the roots of women's subordination in the sphere of politics.

Thus, the political legacy of the dynasty, the continuance of patriarchy, and the provisions of the progressive constitution interplay complexly in the historical profile of women in Bangladeshi politics. To grasp the necessity of such a background analyzing the present level of political deification of female leaders in Bangladesh and the following consequences to gender equality in the/political province, the following points are significant.

4. Case Studies:

4.1 Deification of Female Political Leaders

Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia are two well-known examples of Bangladeshi political deification. Rich instances of how gender combines with political symbolism and family legacies in the process of political deification are provided by their ascent to power and subsequent political careers.

a) *Sheikh Hasina*

Presenting a strong instance of political deification that combines gender, national identity, and family history is Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

➤ *Portraiture as "Mother of the Nation"*

Many times, the political character of Sheikh Hasina is built on her role as a mother figure to the country. This image depends on firmly ingrained cultural ideas of motherhood as a source of moral authority, protection, and nurturing. According to Haq (2011), this motherly imagery frames Hasina's political authority within conventionally accepted female roles, therefore justifying her leadership in a patriarchal culture.

Several political and media discourses serve to support the "mother of the nation" storyline. During national crises or catastrophes, for example, Hasina is often portrayed as a loving mother figure who personally supervises rescue operations and consoles victims (Riaz, 2019). Particularly powerful is this vision in a society that values mothers highly.

➤ *Using the Legacy of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*

Sheikh Hasina's deft utilization of her father's heritage is an essential component of her political deification. In Bangladeshi politics, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's founder, is revered in and of himself. Hasina's political story often presents her as the legitimate successor to her father's ambition for the country.

This relationship with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman goes beyond words and is ingrained in the Awami League, Hasina's political party, symbols, and customs. Images of both Mujibur Rahman and Hasina are often used in party rallies and national festivities, therefore symbolizing the continuation of leadership (Jahan, 2018).

➤ *Political Storytelling Gender*

Though it's crucial to Hasina's "mother of the nation" image, her gender also has a subtle influence on more general political narratives. As a female leader, she is celebrated on the one hand for embodying Bangladesh's progress in gender equality. To demonstrate female power in a male-dominated political setting, Hasina often takes on traditionally masculine leadership traits (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017).

b) *Khaleda Zia*

A further instance of female political deification is former prime minister and leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Khaleda Zia, but with distinct attributes. Her reputation as a champion of democracy is often based on the storyline of her husband Ziaur Rahman's legacy as well as her own political struggles. In a patriarchal political system, this image presents her as a protector, therefore validating her leadership position (Riaz, 2019).

➤ *Portraiture as "Guardian of Democracy"*

Many times, Khaleda Zia's political character is built on the idea of a defender of democracy. This story builds on both her own political battles against what her supporters see as the authoritarian inclinations of competing political groups and the legacy of her husband.

Opposition narratives emphasize the "guardian of democracy" concept, especially portraying Zia as a shield against alleged dangers to democratic institutions. This image links her to the traditionally male function of a protector, therefore legitimizing her leadership position within a patriarchal political system (Riaz, 2019).

➤ *Applications of Ziaur Rahman's Legacy*

As with Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia's political deification is intimately linked to her husband's legacy. Former Bangladeshi president Ziaur Rahman is seen by his admirers as a pivotal player in the nation's independence movement and its political evolution.

Often, at party gatherings and political speeches, Zia brings up her husband's memories. The political symbolism of the BNP often includes pictures of Ziaur Rahman with Khaleda Zia, therefore bolstering the notion of legitimacy and political continuity via family ties (Jahan, 2018).

➤ ***Gender in Stories of Resistance***

Khaleda Zia's gender is a complicated issue in opposition narratives. Being a woman leader in a conservative culture, she often encounters obstacles and criticism based on her gender. Her supporters, however, often present these obstacles as proof of her tenacity and commitment to the cause of democracy, hence enhancing her reputation as a protector (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017). This narrative not only bolsters her political legitimacy but also challenges traditional gender norms by framing her resilience and leadership within the context of democratic struggle

➤ ***Further Notable Female Political Leaders***

While Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia are the dominant figures in female political leadership in Bangladesh, other notable individuals have also been subject to varying degrees of political deification. Rowshan Ershad, the spouse of former President Hussain Muhammad Ershad, has effectively used her husband's political legacy to retain her power and influence inside the Jatiya Party. Equally, Sajeda Chowdhury, an experienced politician and the Deputy Leader of the House has gained significant recognition in Bangladeshi politics over the years. She is well respected for her enduring association with the Awami League and her active participation in the independence struggle.

c) Rowshan Ershad

The wife of former President Hussain Muhammad Ershad Rowshan Ershad has been a major figure in Bangladeshi politics. Though not as idolised as Hasina or Zia, Ershad has used her husband's political history to keep her influential in the Jatiya Party.

d) Syeda Chowdhury

Veteran politician Sajeda Chowdhury is the Deputy Leader of the House at the moment. She has been a well-known figure in Bangladeshi politics for many years. Her long-standing affiliation with the Awami League and her involvement in the independence fight has added to her revered stature both within the party and among its followers, even if she has not been subjected to great deification.

e) Dipu Moni

As Bangladesh's first female foreign minister and current minister of education, Dipu Moni is a leader of a new generation of female politicians. Though not a traditional deity, her ascent to fame is sometimes presented as proof of Bangladesh's advancements in women's emancipation.

Finally, a complicated interaction of gender, family history, and national symbols is shown by Bangladesh's political deification of female leaders. These procedures support certain gendered expectations and narratives even if they have made it possible for women to hold high-level political posts. The situations of Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina especially show how political deification may both upend and support conventional gender norms in the political arena.

4.2 The Gender Dimensions of Political Deification

Deeply entwined with gender dynamics, the process of political deification in Bangladesh both challenges and reflects societal norms. This chapter looks at how political deification is gendered and focuses on how maternal imagery is used and how gender and religious symbols are both reinforced and challenged in political narratives.

4.3 In political iconography, maternal imagery

Bangladeshi political iconography makes extensive use of maternal imagery, especially in the deification of female leaders. Deeply ingrained cultural ideals that honor mom as a source of care, security, and moral authority are used in this artwork.

This phenomenon is best shown by Sheikh Hasina's image as the "Mother of the Nation." According to Haq (2011), this maternal imagery frames Hasina's political authority within conventionally accepted female roles, therefore

justifying her leadership in a patriarchal culture. Campaign materials and political posters often show Hasina in a caring position, surrounded by kids or consoling victims of natural disasters, hence enhancing her reputation as a mother figure for the whole country (Riaz, 2019).

Though not exclusive to Bangladesh, South Asian politics often use maternal imagery. As Sinha (1995) points out, female political leaders in India were often depicted as "Mother India," representing the country itself. Imagery like this has many functions:

1. It offers a framework that is appropriate culturally for female leadership in patriarchal countries.
2. It appeals to enduring feelings connected to parenting.
3. It presents the leader as a force for unity who cuts across political differences.

However, the frequency with which maternal imagery appears in political deification also begs the issue of what restrictions it may place on female leaders. According to Fleschenberg (2008), such images may perpetuate gender norms and roles, therefore limiting the options for leadership that women in politics have.

4.4 Traditional Gender Roles Reinforced and Challenged

In subtle ways, Bangladeshi political deification of female leaders simultaneously upholds and questions conventional gender norms. On one hand, the focus on maternal traits and family relationships reinforces traditional notions of women as caregivers and nurturers. On the other hand, the fact that women hold senior leadership roles challenges patriarchal conventions that have traditionally excluded women from politics. For instance, Sheikh Hasina is often portrayed as a strong, resolute leader capable of making difficult decisions while also being depicted as a nurturing mother figure. This duality highlights the complex balancing act of gender norms in Bangladeshi politics (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017).

According to Nazneen and Hussain (2017), Bangladeshi women leaders often combine aspects of traditionally masculine and feminine leadership. Sheikh Hasina, for example, is often seen as a strong, resolute leader who can make difficult choices and is a loving mother figure. This contradiction highlights the difficulty of balancing gender norms in Bangladeshi politics.

Gender conventions are challenged and reinforced in Bangladesh in part by the dynastic character of female political rise. Though they have given women a route to political power, family ties also serve to perpetuate the notion that women's political legitimacy stems from their ties to male political leaders (Suvorova, 2015).

4.5 Gender and Religious Symbolism in Political Narratives

Gender and religious symbolism interact to give Bangladeshi political deification even another level of intricacy. Bangladesh, a mostly Muslim nation with a secular constitution, offers a unique setting in which to study the relationship between gender and religious symbols in political narratives.

Bangladeshi political figures, male and female, are often deified using religious iconography. Gender typically affects how this symbolism is used, however. While female leaders are often shown in positions that conform to religiously approved ideas of femininity, male leaders are more likely to be linked with religious authority and leadership (Haq, 2011).

For example, Sheikh Hasina is portrayed with aspects of Islamic modesty in her attire and manner, especially in settings with a lot of religious symbolism. This helps her to balance her strong political standing with the religious norms that are demanded of women (Riaz, 2019).

4.6 Religious allusions in political tales may have many functions:

Religious allusions in political tales may serve multiple functions: They can provide women leaders with a source of legitimacy and moral authority, facilitate the reconciliation of female leadership with patriarchal religious customs, and appeal to voters' religious beliefs. However, the intersection of gender and religious symbols in political discourse also presents challenges. It may reinforce traditional gender roles and potentially limit the political opportunities available to women (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017)

Finally, In Bangladesh, the gendered dimensions of political deification reveal a complex relationship between religious symbols, evolving notions of female leadership, and conventional gender norms. Employing maternal imagery and religious symbols in a male-dominated culture might potentially bolster women's leadership, but it also carries the risk of perpetuating limited stereotypes. Female leaders must navigate the intricate associations between politics and traditional gender norms by challenging them and using culturally appropriate imagery. Understanding these gendered aspects of political idolization is crucial as Bangladesh grapples with gender parity and political inclusivity. It provides a clear understanding of the current political landscape of the nation and potential avenues for enhancing women's political influence. In a patriarchal culture, using religious symbolism and mother imagery might help to validate female leadership, but it also runs the danger of feeding restrictive preconceptions. Navigating these intricate relationships and using culturally relevant images while also challenging conventional gender norms in politics is the task facing female leaders.

Realizing these gendered facets of political deification becomes essential as Bangladesh struggles with issues of political representation and gender equality. It sheds light on the political scene as it is now, as well as possible paths for women's political empowerment in the nation.

5. Analysis Comparative

Though not unique to Bangladesh, numerous South Asian countries share the phenomenon of gendered political deification. This chapter compares gendered aspects of political deification in Bangladesh with those in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia. In these different contexts, the examples of Indira Gandhi, Benazir Bhutto, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, and Megawati Sukarnoputri enable us to see both similarities and fundamental differences in the ways that gender influences political imagery.

a) Indira Gandhi of India

One well-known case of gendered political deification is that of Indira Gandhi, the first and only female prime minister of India. Gandhi was dubbed "Mother India," a reference to mothers and powerful, forceful leadership (Sinha, 1995). This contradiction—she was both forceful and compassionate—helped her to manage the patriarchal political climate.

Like Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh, Gandhi was bolstered by her family in her political legitimacy. Being the daughter of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi's political history was intimately linked to her father's (Sen & Nielsen, 202). This dynastic aspect allowed her to be deified and placed her as a continuation of Nehru's vision for India.

However, there were unique aspects to Gandhi's deification as well. Her declaration of the Emergency in 1975, which stopped democratic processes, gave her an authoritarian image. At this point, her image evolved from one of a protecting mother to one of a more authoritarian one, highlighting the adaptability of political deification to changing political contexts.

b) Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan

A third instance of gendered political deification is the first woman to lead a country where the majority of the population is Muslim, Benazir Bhutto. The image of Bhutto as a martyr and a symbol of democratic struggle after her death in 2007 defined her political career (Thiranagama, 202).

The deification of Bhutto was closely linked to the 1979 assassination of her father, former prime leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Her political iconography was based on a narrative of political death and sacrifice that this familial link provided (Sen & Nielsen, 202). Bhutto often emphasized in her public image the need to continue on her father's political legacy and get retribution for his murder.

But unlike Sheikh Hasina and Indira Gandhi, Bhutto's deification was hampered by her gender in a conservative Muslim culture. Religious and conservative groups who questioned the legitimacy of a woman leading the country vehemently opposed her leadership, even if many applauded it (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017). This struggle emphasizes the challenges of gendered political deification in contexts where traditional gender norms are more firmly upheld.

c) Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka

The first female prime minister of the world, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, offers another perspective on gendered political deification. Bandaranaike's political career began with her husband S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's 1959 murder. She was seen as carrying on her husband's political philosophy, much as in Bangladesh and Pakistan (Suvorova, 2015).

The deification of Bandaranaike combines representations of the mother and power. She was portrayed many times as a kind person who provided stability and continuity to Sri Lankan politics. This maternal image was reinforced by her emphasis on Buddhist principles and her contribution to the advancement of social welfare initiatives that resonated with most people (Sen & Nielsen, 2022).

However, Bandaranaike's gender presented challenges to her leadership. Her era was one of political turmoil and financial troubles, which were sometimes attributed to her purported lack of traditionally masculine leadership qualities. This criticism highlights the persistence of gender stereotypes even in situations where female leaders are honored (Haq, 2011).

d) Megawati Sukarnoputri of Indonesia

Southeast Asian case study presented by Megawati Sukarnoputri, the first female president of Indonesia. Much like with the previous presidents discussed, Megawati's political deification was closely linked to her father's legacy. Highly respected was Sukarno, Indonesia's first president, and Megawati's political career was seen as continuing his aspirations for the nation (Sen & Nielsen, 2022).

The deification of Megawati merged maternal and nationalist themes. Sometimes, she was shown as a motherly figure who embodied the spirit of the Indonesian people. Her endeavors to address social and economic issues, as well as her emphasis on fostering national cohesion, helped to maintain this image (Michelutti, 2020).

However, Megawati's gender also made her leadership very challenging. Indonesian patriarchy limited her political legitimacy, and she often had to go through challenging gender dynamics to use her authority. This dispute highlights the more general challenges of gendered political deification in contexts with deeply embedded traditional gender norms (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017).

➤ Comparative Characteristics of Gender Political Deification

The ways that gender influences political deification across South and Southeast Asia are shown by the stories of Megawati Sukarnoputri, Benazir Bhutto, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, and Indira Gandhi.

a) Similarities

1. Familial Legacy: The familial links of female leaders to male political figures are always intimately associated with their political devotion. Part of their political legitimacy and deification stems from this dynastic feature (Suvorova, 2015).

2. The Motherly Image: Maternal imagery is a common feature of the political iconography of these leaders. It is justified by the way this image presents their leadership within socially accepted female roles (Haq, 2011).

3. Gender Bias Challenges: Despite their devotion, these leaders must confront grave problems with gender preconceptions and traditional gender conventions. Criticism of their leadership based on gender often highlights the continuous obstacles in the way of women's political empowerment (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017).

b) Indices

1. Every country has its own cultural and religious context that shapes the specific forms of political deification. Sen & Nielsen, (2022) point out that the Buddhist values emphasized in Sirimavo Bandaranaike's portrayal differ from the use of Islamic symbols in Benazir Bhutto's deification.

2. Political Setting: The kind of political opposition and the level of democratic governance affect the dynamics of political deification. The authoritarian strategy of Indira Gandhi during the Emergency period contrasts with the democratic issues associated with Benazir Bhutto's leadership (Michelutti, 2020).

3. Public Perception: How different individuals regard female leaders depends on how society sees gender. Conservative and religious groups vehemently reject certain leaders, even as they are praised for shattering gender norms (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017).

Lastly, there are parallels as well as differences between gendered political deification in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries. These cases show how complexly gender, family history, cultural background, and political factors combine to influence the adoration of female leaders. Understanding these similarities and differences helps understand the more general phenomenon of political deification and its impact on women's political empowerment in South Asia and other places.

6. Digital Deification Techniques

Worshipping or idolizing political leaders has found new avenues for expression and disseminating in the age of digital technologies. In Bangladesh, political personalities are elevated to the level of deities via digital means, as this chapter examines. It looks especially at how paid campaigns and bot networks are used to amplify traditional media narratives, as well as the usage of social media, memes, infographics, and video content.

a) Using videos, infographics, and memes

Social media sites have completely changed the way that political communication is done by providing new ways for political leaders to be idolized. Like in other countries, Bangladesh has found that memes, infographics, and video content are powerful instruments for promoting idealized depictions of political figures.

Because memes may convey complicated ideas with simple and even humorous images, they have become a popular tool for political debate. Memes from Bangladesh often show politicians like Khaleda Zia or Sheikh Hasina in heroic or celestial poses, implying parallels to mythological or religious figures. (Sen & Nielsen, 2022). These memes are utilized to reinforce the leaders' respected status and to make them more relevant to younger voters who are proficient with digital technologies.

Infographics are visually beautiful representations of statistical data or policy achievements that often emphasize the leader's direct role in the success of the country. It is more difficult to separate political accomplishments from supernatural intervention in these infographics since they often contain religious or cultural symbols.

Digital idolization is mostly facilitated by video content, particularly on Facebook and YouTube. Short, intensely felt videos that highlight a leader's charisma, empathy, or strength are often shared, which heightens the impression that they are larger and more powerful than in reality. Incorporating religious images or music into these films helps to reinforce the leader's quasi-divine status (Riaz, 2019).

b) Bot networks and sponsored social media campaigns: their importance

It is not simply normal for political leaders to become godlike in Bangladesh's digital sphere; well-planned and funded social media campaigns and networks of automated bots often make this possible. These strategies are used to highlight positive stories and muffle critical ones, thereby fostering an atmosphere in which only favourable viewpoints are heard, and so strengthening the leader's prestigious position.

Paid social media campaigns need a purposeful strategy to target certain demographic groups by using sponsored content and customized advertisements. These ads often in Bangladesh focus on highlighting the leader's achievements, personal qualities, and goals for the nation. The content is painstakingly crafted to conform to religious and cultural norms, therefore bolstering the leader's almost divine status in the public mind (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017).

Comprising artificial accounts, bot networks have a significant influence in amplifying information that backs a leader and suppressing opposing views. The rapid distribution and interaction of content by these automated tools create the appearance of broad public support. Though their influence on constructing online narratives is significant, it is difficult to precisely quantify bot usage in Bangladeshi politics (Sen & Nielsen, 2022).

c) Resonance of stories from conventional media online

Digital platforms elevate political personalities to godlike status by enhancing and magnifying traditional media narratives and skillfully fusing old and new media. Internet platforms provide Bangladeshi traditional media, which sometimes has restrictions, a way to disseminate and reinforce stories that glorify certain people or things.

Social media channels are quickly used to share and discuss television interviews, newspaper articles, and public speeches that present leaders in a kind and appreciative way. In this process, digital influencers and party supporters are essential as they interpret and improve these stories for their online followers (Riaz, 2019).

Part of the amplification process is often the purposeful focus on certain aspects of traditional media coverage. A leader could, for instance, get a lot of attention on social media for attending a religious event and receive comments that reinforce their pious persona. This selective amplification process helps to build a well constructed public persona that fits the story of being admired or adored (Haq, 2011).

Moreover, digital platforms make it possible to convert traditional media content into more interesting forms. Making a newspaper piece that praises a leader's economic policies into a shareable infographic increases its usability and attractiveness, therefore expanding its audience.

d) Characteristics and Effects

Digital deification techniques raise serious issues about the manipulation of public opinion and the integrity of democratic discussion, even if they have shown their efficacy in influencing public perception. Using these strategies may lead to an echo chamber effect, which can worsen division and lead to a misunderstanding of political reality (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017).

Furthermore, the difference between real public feeling and artificially produced support is hidden by the employment of bot networks and paid advertising. This might lead to a legitimacy dilemma as it becomes harder to ascertain how much public support a leader really has.

The digital world's elevation of political leaders to a godlike stature creates challenges for critical media and opposition voices. Strong democratic debate may be hampered by the abundance of pro-leader information on digital platforms, which may stifle opposing viewpoints (Sen & Nielsen, 202).

In the end, Bangladeshi politics now have a new face thanks to the use of digital deification techniques. These technologies raise important questions about the features of political communication in the digital age, even if they have shown their efficacy in producing and disseminating romanticized depictions of political leaders. It is essential to examine and deal with how these technologies affect democratic processes and public opinion as Bangladesh develops its digital economy.

7. Conclusion

This study looked into the phenomenon of gendered political deification in Bangladesh. It showed that there are complex links between faith, politics, and gender in that country. This study led to a number of important findings that helped us learn more about how gender shapes and is affected by political symbols in South Asia.

First, we've seen that the way women leaders in Bangladesh are worshiped in politics, especially Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, has deep roots in family customs. Because they are connected to powerful men in politics, these leaders make a lot of political capital, which keeps family trends going in Bangladeshi politics (Suvorova, 2015). This familial aspect gives them political respectability and makes them seem godlike, but it makes me wonder if women who don't have such strong family ties can still become powerful in politics.

Second, this study showed how often images of mothers show up in the political artifacts of women leaders. This picture helps to explain their leadership by putting them in socially acceptable female roles (Haq, 2011). However, it might also limit the kinds of leadership ideas that women in politics can use, which would be in line with gender norms.

Third, I've tried to show how serious problems are for female leaders, despite their high position, because of long-standing racism against women. Criticism of their leadership based on gender often brings attention to the fact that women in Bangladesh still face many challenges when they try to get elected (Nazneen & Hussain, 2017).

These data help us understand gender in South Asian politics in a broader sense. They show how complicated it is for women to deal with political power in male societies, where they often have to balance the demands of political leadership with gender roles. Gendered political deification is a thing that shows both the problems women still face and the progress they've made in getting involved in politics.

This study also focuses on how digital media creates and spreads false ideas about political leaders. With the rise of social media, jokes, and other digital content, political deification has become more complex. This is because well-crafted political stories can reach more people (Sen & Nielsen, 2022). This digital aspect of political deification opens up new ways for women to get involved but may also support gender stereotypes. This can help and hurt women's political freedom.

This work shows a number of areas where more research needs to be done. First, there needs to be more comparison studies on how gender affects political deification in different South Asian countries. This kind of research could show how different political, religious, and cultural settings affect the process of becoming a god.

Second, more study could be done to find out how gendered political deification changes the way government works and how policies are made. How does the fact that female leaders are seen as gods affect their ability to enforce rules that help women? Even though most of the questions haven't been answered yet, this problem may shed important new light on how useful it is to make politicians gods.

Lastly, more research needs to be done on how people see and understand political pictures that are made to look like gods. How do people from different social groups see and connect with these imagined female leaders? If you know about these steps, you might be able to see the pros and cons of using political deification as a way to give women more power in politics.

Last but not least, the study of gendered political deification in Bangladesh shows how gender, religion, and politics are all connected in South Asia. As the area continues to deal with problems of gender equality and political participation, knowing these factors will help women gain more political power and make democratic processes more open to everyone.

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