

What Do Women Bring to Leadership? Lessons from Indian Political Life

Dr Juhi Gupta, Andrew Davies

juhi.amu@gmail.com, a.davies.4@bham.ac.uk

Assistant Professor at the Advanced Centre for Women's Studies

Professor of Public Religion , Director, Edward Cadbury Centre

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers some key contributions of women to leadership roles in Indian politics and public life throughout history. In identifying specific contributions that might be seen as distinctive of women's experiences, perspectives and insights, we offer a panoramic view of the evolution of the multifaceted dimensions of women's influence in the political sphere. From the context of the vibrant and dynamic cultural tapestry of the Indian subcontinent, we then reflect upon the unique characteristics and skills that women leaders bring to the forefront, emphasizing their indispensable role in fostering harmonious and inclusive societies around the world. Furthermore, in line with the conference theme of tolerance and dialogue, this paper also considers the pivotal role and distinctive perspective of women leaders in conflict resolution and consensus-building. Drawing parallels and comparisons between leadership styles that are considered by the scholarly literature to be distinctively 'male' or 'female', our research underscores the unique contribution and transformative potential of women leaders in redefining conventional paradigms of governance. Our analysis not only sheds light on the challenges India's women leaders faced, but also highlights their resilience and their contributions towards creating a more tolerant and inclusive society, seeking to learn lessons from their experience which can be applied more widely. The paper not only serves as a reflective analysis of the past, therefore, but also as a catalyst for future conversations on the pivotal role of women leaders in promoting tolerance, cohesion, dialogue and constructive coexistence worldwide.