

## THE PHENOMENON OF FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN WESTERN SOCIO-POLITICAL THOUGHT: THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES

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The issue of social equality between women and men, the elimination of gender discrimination, and the development of socio-political and cultural attitudes aimed at protecting women's rights have a long historical background. The origins of feminism date back to the late 18th century, when women's rights began to be actively discussed in Europe and North America. One of the earliest and most influential documents reflecting feminist ideas was Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), in which she advocated for women's education and asserted their right to equal treatment.

Today, interest in and demand for female leadership in society is growing in countries around the world. In the 21st century, feminism has become one of the most prominent global socio-political movements. In Western countries, feminist ideas have become part of mainstream culture, and many women have achieved significant progress in the fight for equal rights and opportunities. For instance, movements like #MeToo have had a profound impact on society, drawing widespread attention to issues of sexual violence and harassment.

However, despite these achievements, feminism continues to face resistance in some parts of the world, particularly in countries where traditional or religious values are dominant. In regions such as the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia, gender inequality remains a pressing issue, and feminist ideals are often perceived as a threat to national or religious norms. Nevertheless, feminist movements in certain countries across Asia and Africa are adapting their approaches to align with cultural and religious contexts, seeking to balance equality with tradition<sup>1</sup>.

In Western Europe, the advancement of women's leadership is increasingly seen not only as a matter of gender equality but also as a key factor in effective governance and the creation of inclusive societies. The emergence of female leaders is now widely recognized as a vital tool in promoting social innovation and just governance in modern societies<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Beckwith, C. (2016). *The Rise of Women in Leadership: A Global Perspective*. Harvard University Press; Walby, S. (2011). *The Future of Feminism*. Policy Press; Young, I. M. (2000). *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford University Press; Rudman, L. A., & Glick, P. (2012). *The Social Psychology of Gender: How Power and Intimacy Shape Gender Relations*. Guilford Press.

<sup>2</sup> Haffner, S. (2019). *Women and Politics: The New Era of Leadership*. Routledge; Tong, R. (2009). *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*. Westview Press; Weldon, S. L. (2002). *Protest, Policy, and the Problem of Representation: A Comparative Study of Women's Movements*. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 9(2), 139-168; Freedman, E. (2002). *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*. Ballantine Books.

Thinkers such as John Locke, Mary Wollstonecraft, and John Stuart Mill have played a pivotal role in redefining women's rights and societal roles, laying the foundation for contemporary concepts of gender equality. Theories on female leadership have contributed significantly to ensuring women's active participation in the socio-political and cultural life of society<sup>3</sup>.

Historically, ideas about political and social equality between men and women, including the question of leadership, began to take shape in influential political and philosophical schools such as those of Athens and Rome. While patriarchal views were dominant during those periods, certain philosophers and political theorists acknowledged women's intellectual capacities and leadership potential. For example, philosophers like Plato and Aristotle expressed contradictory views about women's roles in society and their political engagement. In his seminal work *The Republic*, Plato argued that the differences between men and women were relative and primarily related to reproductive functions.

Plato, observing the deeply rooted traditions and customs of his time, described the limited societal roles of women—often confined to tasks such as “cooking soup” and “nurturing children”—as a result of entrenched social norms. He explored the social roots of this issue and proposed revolutionary ideas regarding women's roles in society. In particular, Plato advocated for increasing women's participation in public life and championed the notion of female leadership, which was highly progressive for his era<sup>4</sup>.

In contrast, Aristotle held somewhat opposing views. He largely associated women with domestic responsibilities and assessed their intellectual capabilities as inferior to those of men. In his work *Politics*, Aristotle wrote: “Women are by nature less rational than men and are naturally subject to male authority.” These views formed the theoretical foundation for patriarchal societies and contributed to the marginalization of women's political, social, and economic rights<sup>5</sup>.

During the Roman Empire, attitudes toward female leadership were somewhat aligned with those of Athenian philosophy—women were primarily restricted to familial roles. However, certain women in the eras of Julius Caesar and Augustus held considerable informal influence in state affairs. For example, Livia Drusilla, the mother of Emperor Tiberius and wife of Augustus, is considered one of the first female figures in Roman political life. Though she did not hold any official governmental position, her political opinions and advisory role

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<sup>3</sup> Mackie, V. (2018). *Gender Equality in Leadership: A Study of Global Trends*. Palgrave Macmillan; Okin, S. M. (2018). *Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton University Press, Okin, S. M. (2018). *Justice, Gender, and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Plato. (1992). *The Republic*. Translated by G. M. A. Grube. Hackett Publishing Company; Nevett, L. (1999). *Gender and Society in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle. (1996). *Politics*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. The Internet Classics Archive; Walker, S. (2003). *Women and the Politics of War in Ancient Rome*. University of California Press.

significantly influenced decision-making processes. Nevertheless, during this period, women were still formally excluded from participating in state governance<sup>6</sup>.

In summary, during antiquity, women were largely excluded from full participation in political life<sup>7</sup>. However, thinkers like Plato laid the groundwork for elevating the political status of women and contributed to the formation of theoretical concepts of gender equality in later periods. While ancient political philosophers helped initiate the reconsideration of women's societal roles and intellectual potential, and proposed their involvement in specific political functions, these ideas were often limited in their practical implementation<sup>8</sup>.

In the early Middle Ages, scholars began to present various conflicting views on the issue of women in leadership roles within society. Since the formation of socio-political theories during this period was heavily influenced by religion, divergent opinions emerged regarding the position of women in leadership. While most religious sources and scholarly works of that time supported the idea of a patriarchal society—emphasizing women's subordinate roles in political and social life, their behavior, and societal functions—some thinkers offered more positive and supportive assessments of women's participation in political processes<sup>9</sup>. One such thinker was Augustine of Hippo (354–430). In his work *The City of God*, Augustine acknowledged the importance of women in the family and society but argued that they were not naturally suited for political leadership. His views were largely shaped by the early doctrinal teachings of Christianity, which portrayed women as emotionally unstable, passive, and highly impressionable. According to scholar T.B. Ryabova, this outlook reflected the Roman legal norms of antiquity, where women were prohibited from representing themselves in court proceedings. Due to being seen as frivolous and unstable, women were denied the rights to file lawsuits, give testimony, or influence legal decisions<sup>10</sup>. Augustine himself stated, “Oh Lord, You have made man capable of making judgments about You... even trusting in the testimony of a simple woman.”<sup>11</sup>. This reflects the view of that time that women's testimony held less credibility than that of men<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> Blundell, S. (1995). *Women in Ancient Greece*. Harvard University Press; Goldhill, S. (2003). *The Theatrical Cast of Athens: Interactions between Ancient Greek Drama and Society*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Schmitt, J. (2010). *Women and Leadership in Ancient Rome*. University of North Texas Press; McClure, L. (1999). *Speaking through the Silence: Women's Voices in Ancient Greece and Rome*. University of Illinois Press.

<sup>8</sup> Lindsay, J. (2002). *Women in Ancient Rome: A Sourcebook on the Lives of Women in Ancient Rome*. Blackwell Publishing.

<sup>9</sup> Hodgson, M. (2005). *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain*. Routledge.

<sup>10</sup> Епифанова Т.В. Человек, общество и государство в историко-религиозном учении Августина Блаженного: Дис. ... канд. ист. наук. – Владимир, 2002. – 221 с.

<sup>11</sup> Ерохина Ю.А. Исторические взгляды Августина: Автореф. дис. ... канд. ист. наук. – Казань, 2000. – 25 с.

<sup>12</sup> Augustine of Hippo. (1950). *The City of God*. Translated by Marcus Dods. New York: The Modern Library; Richards, J. (2004). *Gender and Power in Medieval Exegesis*. Cambridge University Press; Kreider, R. (2009). *Women in the Middle Ages: The Role of Women in Medieval Society*. Routledge

Another prominent scholar from this era was Gregory the Great (540–604), who recognized women's leadership potential<sup>13</sup>. In the well-known work *On the Making of Man*, attributed to Gregory of Nyssa, it is asserted that "gender differences are only biological and do not affect the human capacity to attain spiritual perfection." Gregory acknowledged women as mature members of society and emphasized that they could hold important roles in religious and spiritual leadership. According to him, women serve not only as caregivers within the family but also play a vital role in shaping society as a whole. Therefore, Gregory was among the first scholars to highly value women's intellectual capacity and recognize their potential as active and influential members of society<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> 10. Weber, K. (2017). *Feminist Perspectives on Medieval Philosophy: The Historical Impact of Women Thinkers*. Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory the Great. (1999). *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great*. Translated by William McCarthy. New York: The Paulist Press; Duffy, E. (2005). *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes*. Yale University Press; Wiesner, M. (2000). *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge University Press.