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All about Eve

Imagine yourself a woman in 1450 BC, married to your half brother then forced to be stepmother to your dead husband's son with another woman. What would you do? Hatshepsut, wife of Thutmose II, decided to rule Egypt and became the first female, albeit cross-dressing, pharaoh of the kingdom in the seventh year of co-reigning as a regent to Thutmose III – the actual heir to the throne. She gradually assumed the titles, powers and even the ceremonial clothing and beard of a male Pharaoh, claiming legitimacy through divine birth, even calling herself a "female Horus".

How is that for shaping one's own destiny?

Even in China, Empress Dowager Cixi rose from the status of concubine to rule China for 47 years until her death in 1908, breaking the Qing imperial tradition that dictated that women were never to engage in politics. Sure, her method of seizing the throne was questionable – she cleverly allied herself with powerful figures and plied her son, the true heir, with concubines and opium until he reportedly died of syphilis. She managed to wield enormous power, surpassing even

that of her contemporary – Queen Victoria of England. Some historians say the empress was a tyrant while others believe she was no crueller than the next ruler.

History has shown that women have been in power since ancient civilisation the world over, yet how did the glass ceiling come about? Why are there countries that do not allow their women certain liberties – a voice or the power to vote? We have come very far as a civilisation yet why are there so few women leaders?

That said, while women leaders have been few and far between, they have been amazing in their ability to influence a nation, sometimes the world. The elite group they belong to is no longer exclusive to queens and empresses – these women come from all walks of life, some humble, some privileged. There is Benazir Bhutto, who was a great advocate of democracy for Pakistan (and was assassinated for it) and the late Mother Teresa, who led no country but was

Award-winning recording artiste Lady Gaga has also made the list, thanks to her efforts to raise over US\$200 million to fight HIV/AIDS. She is at an impressive No 11, beating Oprah Winfrey who comes in at No 14. At 25, Lady Gaga is the youngest on the list, which includes Christine Lagarde (France's former finance minister and now managing director of the IMF) and Thai Prime Minister Yingluck Sinawatra, while Queen Elizabeth II, aged 85 and at No 49, is the oldest.

The good news is that the list has not been static. It comprises mostly first-timers and those who are back after dropping off. Some have changed jobs or tracks altogether while some have been newly elected to office or promoted. Indeed, females are moving up the ladder in the sectors of their choosing. To

borrow the words of *Forbes* Power 100 Women's No 18, Beyoncé Knowles: "Who run the world? Girls!"

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