

Indira Gandhi: Women Empowerment – Issues and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The legacy of Indira Gandhi is an unforgettable one. Especially in the early 20th century, when being assertive was regarded as unacceptably outrageous by society, she sought to set standards for other women leaders across the board to follow suit. Her success shows us the importance of taking advantage of your surroundings and not letting your gender define you.

It is not only important to talk about the stories of women in leadership, it is imperative. The life of Indira Gandhi is a story that inspires a whole generation of women to be unapologetic and strive to achieve success by breaking the glass ceiling. Women's political participation and leadership are necessary factors for general peace and prosperity of a nation and the only way to encourage more women to be represented across platforms is by constantly reminding people about the tales of successful women through history. Indira Gandhi will forever be remembered as a powerful and capable leader who brought her country to the world's stage and developed India into a regional superpower. Having faced her fair share of criticism, Indira continued to relentlessly pursue her goals with a conviction unmatched by any leader of her time. And this was the reason she commanded respect, irrespective of gender.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, an Indian woman had four fold status-role sequences. These were her role as a daughter, wife, housewife (homemaker), and mother. The woman, whose status and role traditionally was well defined and almost fixed in the society, is now experiencing far-reaching changes. The woman in modern times is entering into certain new fields that were unknown to the woman's sphere of role-sets. They are activating participating in social, economic, and political activities. The women of the present generation have generally received higher education than the women of their preceding generation. There have been far reaching consequences in the economic status of their families. The modern women are inclined towards the social issues, and trying hard to improve the social status of women at large. Increased awareness and education has inspired women to come out of the four walls of the home. Many woman actively supported and participated in the nationalist movement and secured eminent positions and offices in administration and public life in free India. Traditionally Indian women exist because of the family and for the family.

2. Objective

1. To know the need of Women Empowerment
2. To study the reasons for women empowerment
3. To study the challenges of women empowerment
4. To study the constitutional provisions for empowering of women in india
5. To know about the ways for empowering women
6. To study about government schemes for empowering women

3. Need for Women Empowerment

The need for women's empowerment is felt because of the status they have in society since the beginning. There is a need to redefine the status of women in the society. A change can be brought through the constitution and supportive legislations. The Constitution of India gives a women status equal to men. There have been attempts to reserve seats for women in political bodies. This is no doubt a step in the right direction. Women have the ability to judge for themselves and take right decisions. However merely allowing for reservation of women in Panchayat and legislative bodies without empowering women individually falls short of actual emancipation.

For time immemorial women in general been forced to occupy a secondary place in relation to men. Women have been relegated to the margins in spite of the fact that they are numerically half of the world's population. This has resulted in women being unable to take a place of human dignity as free and independent entities associated with men on an intellectual and professional equal wavelength.

Women empowerment has to begin with women's active participation. Unless women throw off the shackles that ignore their talent, skill and spirit women through education and economic self-reliance, cannot be empowered. Unless they are empowered to take a decisive part in the social, political and economic life of the country the very development of the country will be lop-sided.

4. Reasons for women empowerment

According to 2001 census, rate of literacy among men in India is found to be 76% whereas it is only 54% among women. Thus, increasing education among women is of very important in empowering them. It has also noticed that some of women

are too weak to work. They consume less food but work more. Therefore, from the health point of view, women folk who are to be weaker are to be made stronger. Another problem is that workplace harassment of women. There are so many cases of rape, kidnapping of girl, dowry harassment, and so on. For these reasons, they require empowerment of all kinds in order to protect themselves and to secure their purity and dignity. To sum up, women empowerment cannot be possible unless women come with and help to self-empower themselves. There is a need to formulate reducing feminized poverty, promoting education of women, and prevention and elimination of violence against women.

5. Challenges of women empowerment

- ✓ **Professional Inequality:** This inequality is practiced in employment and promotions. Women face countless handicaps in male customized and dominated environs in Government Offices and Private enterprises.
- ✓ **Household Inequality:** Household relations show gender bias in infinitesimally small but significant manners all across the globe, more so, in India e.g. sharing burden of housework, childcare and menial works by so called division of work.
- ✓ **Education:** While the country has grown from leaps and bounds since independence where education is concerned, the gap between women and men is severe. While 82.14% of adult men are educated, only 65.46% of adult women are known to be literate in India. The gender bias is in higher education, specialized professional trainings which hit women very hard in employment and attaining top leadership in any field.
- ✓ **Health and Safety:** The health and safety concerns of women are paramount for the wellbeing of a country and is an important factor in gauging the empowerment of women in a country.

6. Constitutional provisions for empowering women in India

- Equality of opportunity for all citizens relating to employment or appointment to any office under the state (Article 16).
- State policy to be directed to securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood (Article 39(a)); (v) equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39(d)).
- Provisions to be made by the state for securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief (Article 42).
- Promotion of harmony by every citizen of India and renunciation of such practices which are derogatory to the dignity of women Article 51A(e).

- Reservation of not less than one-third of total seats for women in direct election to local bodies, viz; Panchayats and Municipalities (Articles 343(d) and 343 (T)).

7. Ways to Empower Women

- Changes in women's mobility and social interaction
- Changes in women's labour patterns
- Changes in women's access to and control over resources and
- Changes in women's control over Decision making
- Providing education
- Self employment and Self help group
- Providing minimum needs like Nutrition, Health, Sanitation, Housing

8. Indira Mahila Yojana (IMY):

Launched on 15th August, 1995, the scheme is being implemented in 238 blocks in the country for the holistic empowerment of women. The main strategy of the scheme is to create an organisational base for women to come together, to analyse and fulfil their needs through existing departmental programmes of the State and Central Governments. Till December 1999, 40,000 small homogenous women groups have been formed under the scheme.

The vision of IMY is to develop empowered women who will:

- Demand their rights from family, community and government;
- Have increased access to and control over material, social and political resources;
- Have enhanced awareness and improved skills and
- Be able to raise issues of common concern through mobilisation and networking.
- It is premised on recognition of the fact that empowerment is a multifaceted process. It seeks to achieve this by the following objectives:
- To generate awareness among women by disseminating information and knowledge, so as to bring about an attitudinal change;
- To help women achieve economic strength through micro-level income generating activities and
- To establish convergence of various services such as literacy, health, non-formal education, rural development, water supply, entrepreneurship, etc.

9. Priyadarshini Yojana

Women are considered to be more stable and organised than men, which is why the initiatives or businesses that they start up have a discipline and are more consistent than the ones started by men. However, the reason why not many women are coming forward to start their own ventures in spite of having immense potential is because of lack of external support in the form of financial assistance, collateral and moral encouragement. Having the necessary funds to start a venture is half the battle won for them. This is where the Priyadarshini Yojana is of great help to women.

10. Conclusion

The Empowerment of women has become one of the most important Concerns of 21st century not only at national level but also at the international level. Efforts by the Govt. are on to ensure Gender equality but Government initiatives alone would not be sufficient to achieve this goal. Society must take initiative to create a climate in which there is no gender discrimination and Women have full opportunities of Self decision making and participating in the Social, Political and Economic life of the Country with a sense of equality.

Thus, the attainment in the field of income / employment and in educational front, the scenario of women empowerment seems to be comparatively poor. The need of the hour is to identify those loopholes or limitations which are observing the realization of empowerment of women and this initiative must be started from the women folk itself as well as more importantly policy initiative taken by the state and society. Let us take the oath that we want an egalitarian society where everybody whether men or women get the equal opportunity to express and uplift one's well being and well being of the society as whole.

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