

## **Indira Gandhi as an Ideal Woman of India**

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India has had only one female prime minister of India .Indira Priyadarshini was the only one child of Kamala and Jawaharlal Nehru, who was the first Prime minister of independent India. Abundantly endowed with charm, intelligence and charisma, Indira was much loved and admired by many of her people, to the extent that they saw India and Indira as one and the same.

She was born on November 19, 1917 at Allahabad at ` Ananad Bhawan` which literally means `Abode of Happiness. It was home town of her grandfather Pandit Motilal Nehru who was the wealthy and famous advocate of Allahabad High Court. Originally they belonged from a Kashmiri Brahmin family. Motilal was overwhelmed to hear that he was blessed with a granddaughter, he was offended at someone remark that it would have been better if the child was a male one. He retorted, "This daughter of Jawahr will prove herself much better than a thousand sons." This was duly proved by Indira Priyadarshini. In due course of time, she proved to be greater than a son, she always stood by her father during crucial time took care of all important matters in abettor manner than a son might have done, she brought immense fame to her father's name. A great freedom fighter and a poetess **Sarojini Naidu**, wrote Jawharla Nehru after seeing the child,' She was the proudest looking baby` she had ever seen and went to the extent of writing' this child will be the new soul of India`

Indira was strongly influenced and attached to her mother Kamala whom she loved enormously In spite of being very busy as kamala Nehru was active freedom fighter, she spent her free time in narrating innumerable tales from Hindu mythology, classics and folk lore, she told her tales about brave Indian ladies and was particular that her daughter learned Hindi and realized the importance of Indian culture and traditions. Indira learned from her mother to be fearless and remain firm if she realized she was right. She learned the value of independence in context with the man, human being and the nation. Indira was very young when she was took active part in the boycott and swadeshi movement, when one day at the terrace of the house, there were piles of sprightly coloured foreign clothes collected and a large bonfire was made. Indira collected her clothes and told her grandfather that she would also make bonfire for her clothes and will wear only `khad` clothes. A relative from Paris brought a lovely embroidered dress for her. Kamala returned it saying, "we now wear dresses made of hand-woven material`Khadi` The relative said, "If you adults do not want to wear the foreign clothes, I understand, but why are you imposing this on children." Kamala said, "If Indu wants to have the dress, shall not mind." It was the first encounter with conscience and duty, Indu was tempted to feel the soft dainty coloured dress. Indira made up her mind; she rejected the dress and said to her aunty that she would wear only `khad` like other members of the family. Suddenly the lady said, "If you won't wear the foreign clothes then why do you play with foreign dolls."Indu felt extremely hurt, the doll was

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very dear to her, and it was like a living companion. She spent many sleepless nights, not being able to decide for herself; at least she did make up her mind. Indu took doll up to the terrace and set it afire. Indira had very unusual childhood, she remarks, "My public life began at the age of three, I have no recollections of games. My favorite occupation as a small child was to deliver speeches to servants, who pretended to be afraid of the little figure perched on the table, delivering fiery sermons to them and her dolls."

In 1923, Indira was enrolled in St. Cicilias, a private school in Allahabad. Three years later, she accompanied her parents to Switzerland and was admitted to l'Ecole Nouvelle, In December, 1927, she returned to India and joined St.Mary's Convent in Allahabad. In May 1932, she joined Jahangir Vakil's Pupils school, Poona and passed the Matriculation Examination in April 1934. From July 1934 to April 1935, she studied in Visva-Bharati, Shantinikentean and was greatly influenced by the Charismatic personality and philosophy of **Ravindranath Tagore**. After her mother died on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1938, Indira joined Somerville College, Oxford. The same year she joined India League. She also met Harold Laski and become a member of the Indian National congress. When she was 11, Indira created the Vanar Sena or Monkey Bridge movement, inspired by the monkey army in Ramayana...the members were young girls and boys and it played a small but notable role in the freedom struggle. Its members organized protests and flag marched and help Congress politicians to circulate important publications. As the leader of the Vanara Sena, Indira delivered speeches while other children actually warned the people who faced arrest

Once she had completed her education, Indira returned to India in 1941. She married Feroze Khan Gandhi in March 1942, much against the wishes of the conservative Hindu community, as he was a Parsee. Feroze was the son of the family grocer, who supplied groceries to Indira's house Nehru did not approve of his daughter marrying Feroze and requested Mahatma Gandhi to advise her. But Indira was stubborn and the marriage between the two, predictably, attracted much controversy. Soon after the marriage Indira and Feroze were arrested and jailed for nationalist activities. Indira Gandhi was freed after eight months and Feroze Gandhi, after a year. After his release, Feroze Gandhi became editor of the The National Herald, a newspaper founded by Jawaharlal Nehru. He also worked for an insurance company. In 1947, India achieved independence and Jawaharlal Nehru became the Prime Minister Indira was the principal confident and assistant of her father. She acted as hostess at his home and travelled with him when he went abroad. During the Partitions of India, Indira helped to organize refugee camps and provide medical care to the refugees. Meanwhile Feroze Gandhi was started his own political career the fact the at Nehru's policies and style were different from his own probably contributed to this. Indira managed the campaigns of both Feroze and her father for the general election. Feroze did not consult Nehru about his decision to run for elections. He was elected but

*Variorum, Multi- Disciplinary e-Research Journal*  
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chose to live in different house in Delhi Feroze died of second heart attack in 1960. Indira and Feroze had two sons Rajiv and Sanjay, born in 1944 and 1946, respectively.

In 1959, Indira Gandhi became President of the Indian National Congress. In 1964, Jawharla Nehru died and Lal Bahadur Shashtri became Prime Minister. Indira was appointed as a member of the Rajya Sabha by the President of India and Joined Shashtri's cabinet as Minister of Information and Broadcasting. She played an important role when riots erupted in Madras over the imposition of Hindi as the national language. She was able to call the regional leaders, thereby upstaging Shashtri and his senior ministers. Indira had many rivals within the party who couldn't stomach the idea of a woman in politics.

In 1965 war broke out between India and Pakistan. Lal Bahadur shashtri died suddenly after Tashkent Agreement. The Congress party President K.Kamraj was chiefly responsible for making Indira Gandhi the Prime minister. Her main party rival, Morarji Desai, referred to her as a "Gungi Gudiya" meaning "Dumb Doll". But if anyone thought that she could be easily manipulated, she soon proved them wrong. Due to extra ordinary political skill, confidence, hardwork, selfrespect and determination. she was able to wrest power from the Congress dons Kamraj, Morarji Desai and others. In 1971 she had won the elections on the slogan, "garibi Hatao". She was promoted number of policies for the poor. Meanwhile in 1971 second Indo-Pakistan was broke out Pakistan was defeated. Indira invited the new Pakistani President, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Shimla for signing Shimla Pact. Indira was criticized for not making the Line of Control a Permanent border, and the accord did put an end to immediate. It also greatly reduced the chance of Pakistani aggression in the near future. In 1974, she successfully conducted an underground **nuclear test**, unofficially abode name as, "**Smiling Buddha**" near the desert village of Pokran in Rajasthan. India thus became the World's Youngest Nuclear Power and it also enhanced Indira's reputation as a strong and political leader. In Delhi and North India there were angry demonstrations by people because of galloping inflation, weakening economy, rampant corruption and poor standard of living. Indira was accused of authoritarianism. Her party had amended the constitution, upsetting the balance of power between the centre and the states. Under Article 356 of the constitution, her government had twice imposed President's rule on states ruled by opposition parties, thus wresting administrative control of those states.

On June 12, 1975 the High Court of Allahabad declared Indira's election invalid, citing grounds of alleged electoral malpractices in a petition filed by Raj Narain. The court ordered her to vacate seat. Indira appealed the decision but the opposition parties came together and demanded her resignation. In response to the growing criticism by her foes, Indira advised the President, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad, to declare emergency, Emergency was declared on June 26, 1975. Indira claimed that strikes and rallies were creating a state of "internal disturbance". She granted herself extraordinary powers. Political opponents were jailed, constitutional rights abrogated and the press subjected to strict censorship. Meanwhile her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, was in the news

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for all the wrong reasons. It was believed that he exerted an unhealthy influence over his mother who seemed to have no control over him. His slum clearance and family planning drives inflicted untold miseries on the poor of India. Slum dwellings were bulldozed leaving many homeless. Thousands were killed. President's Rule was imposed on the state of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, which were ruled by Non-congress parties. In 1977, she announced fresh elections but she was defeated by a newly formed coalition of several political parties. She lost her seat to Raj Narain. The Janata Party won majority and Morarji Desai became the Prime minister.

Indira's Congress Party was now a truncated group in Parliament. Soon details of the misuse of power by Sanjay Gandhi and Indira Gandhi emerged in the press. It was a difficult time for Indira, Courts and special commissions were formed to investigate their actions. In fact, nobody ever thought that she would make a comeback after such a fall. Indira and Sanjay Gandhi were arrested on several charges. Indira was automatically expelled from parliament. Ironically, her arrest and long trial gained her great sympathy from the same people who had cast her aside. Indira exploited the situation. In her speeches, she tacitly apologized for 'mistakes'. Morarji Desai resigned in June 1979, Charan Singh became Prime minister of India. Indira agreed to support Singh's government from outside, later she withdrew her support and parliament was dissolved in Winter of 1979. Election took place. She won the election.

Indira Gandhi's major contributions lie in the areas of scientific development, space exploration, irrigation and policies like the nationalization of banks and 20-point programme. Innovative agricultural programme launched in 1960s transformed India's chronic food shortages into surplus production of wheat, rice, cotton and milk. The country became a food exporter with the Green Revolution. It also helped to reduce malnutrition, especially among young children. Indira's rise to power was an inspiration to the women in other third world countries. In neighboring Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, too, women would rise to power even though in the developed world, it took many more years for women to achieve such positions. In the U.S. especially, going by the present pre-poll scenario, it is doubtful if, even now, the electorate has matured enough to accept a woman President. Indira was one of the most powerful women of her time. She was held in high esteem even in international circles and her political skills were extraordinary. She was deeply interested in literature, music, fine arts and other creative pursuits. Due to her initiative that the Asiatic Society, Calcutta, was given the status of an Institution of National importance in 1984. She also promoted Indian handicraft and cottage industries, science and technology. During her prime minister ship in 1971, India sent its first satellite into space. As Prime Minister, Indira visited foreign countries such as France, U.S.A., Great Britain, U.S.S.R, etc for the promotion of India to the global community. She improved relations with neighboring nations like the China. On 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1983, Indira became **Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement**. During her time, she often used the army to resolve internal disputes.

*Variorum, Multi- Disciplinary e-Research Journal*  
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In her life a big problem was began in 1973 when Alkali Dal issued “Sikh Autonomous Region “with its own constitution.It also demanded the transfer of Chandigarh, a union territory, to Punjab as the State`s capital. This had been promised by the central government in 1970. They demanded recognition of Amritsar, as a holy city, exemption from anti hijacking regulations and the passage of the All Indi Gurudawara Act to bring the management of all Gurudawara in the country under one administration As a counterpart to the Alkali Dal,Giani Zail Singh, who was the Congress I chief minister in Punjab and Home minister in central government, began to cultivate the fiery Sikh militant, sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.The intention was to benefit by creating divisions in Alkali Dal. But the plan was failed.Bhindranwale and his followers had taken over the Akal Takht.Shrine facing the Golden Temple and transformed into a headquarters and armory for Sikh militants. Indira Gandhi was forced to send the army, during a bloody three day siege. This operation was known as Operation Blue Star which started on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1984 almost destroyed the Akal Tahkt, did some damage to the Golden Temple and killed Bhindranwale and hundreds of his followers. Overnight Indira became a hated figure among the Sikhs. In effect, the countdown had started for her assassination .On 31<sup>st</sup> October 1984, Indira Gandhi was killed by her Sikh bodyguards, Satwant Singh and Beant Singh. The assassins were captured and handed over to the Delhi police. Indira Gandhi died on the way to the hospital, she cremated on 3<sup>rd</sup> November near Raj Ghat and the place came to be known as “Shakti Sthal”.Riots started in New Delhi and other cities in India. Her Death Anniversary is celebrated as National Unity Day,as a tribute to her memory

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