



A study of women empowerment and leadership through the lens of traditional and contemporary women organizations

PROF. DR. SUREKHA N. PATIL

ATHAWALE COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK

BHANDARA

Abstract

Women empowerment and leadership have evolved significantly over time, with women's organizations playing a crucial role in driving this change. This article explores the multifaceted nature of women's empowerment and leadership by examining both traditional and contemporary women's organizations, highlighting their distinct approaches, contributions, and challenges. Historically, women's organizations often focused on social welfare, charitable activities, and community development. These organizations provided a platform for women to engage in collective action, address social issues, and support each other. While their primary focus was not always explicitly on empowerment or leadership, they laid the foundation for future movements by fostering a sense of solidarity and agency among women. The All India Women's Conference (AIWC) founded in 1927, AIWC played a significant role in advocating for women's education, suffrage, and social reforms in India. The National Council of Women of the United States (NCW) established in 1888, focused on promoting women's rights and welfare through various initiatives and advocacy efforts. These organizations often operated within the existing social structures, working to improve women's lives within the constraints of their time. Their leadership style was often collaborative and consensus-oriented, reflecting the traditional gender roles and expectations.

Keywords:

Women, empowerment, leadership, traditional, contemporary, organizations

Introduction

The contemporary women's organizations are more diverse in their focus and approach. They address a wide range of issues, including gender equality, reproductive rights, economic empowerment, political participation, and social justice. These organizations often adopt a more assertive and advocacy-oriented approach, challenging traditional power structures and demanding systemic change.(Phanjoubam, 2020)

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) is A global organization dedicated to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through various programs and initiatives. The National Organization for Women (NOW) is a feminist organization in the United States that advocates for women's rights and equality through activism, lobbying, and legal action.

Contemporary women's organizations often emphasize leadership development, providing training and mentorship programs to empower women to take on leadership roles in various spheres. They also utilize various strategies, such as social media, public awareness campaigns, and grassroots mobilization, to amplify their voices and reach a wider audience.

While traditional women's organizations focused on social welfare and community development, contemporary organizations address a broader range of issues, including gender equality and social justice. Traditional organizations often operated within existing social structures, while contemporary organizations challenge traditional power structures and advocate for systemic change.

Traditional organizations often adopted a collaborative and consensus-oriented leadership style, while contemporary organizations emphasize leadership development and utilize various strategies to empower women to take on leadership roles. Both traditional and contemporary

women's organizations face various challenges, including limited resources, societal resistance, and internal diversity. However, they also have significant opportunities to create positive change by leveraging their collective strength, building alliances, and utilizing innovative strategies. (Northouse, 2020)

Women's empowerment is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the social, economic, political, and legal dimensions of women's lives. It involves enabling women to realize their full potential and exercise their rights and freedoms on an equal footing with men. This includes access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and political participation, as well as freedom from violence and discrimination.

The National Organization for Women (NOW) is a prominent feminist organization in the United States that has been at the forefront of the women's rights movement since its founding in 1966. NOW's mission is to advance women's equality and end all forms of discrimination against women. The organization focuses on a wide range of issues, including reproductive rights, economic justice, ending violence against women, racial justice, LGBTQIA+ rights, and constitutional equality.

NOW has played a crucial role in advocating for legislation and policies that promote women's empowerment. For example, NOW has been a strong supporter of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which would guarantee equal rights for women under the U.S. Constitution. The organization has also worked to pass laws that protect women's reproductive rights, ensure equal pay for equal work, and combat violence against women. In addition to its legislative advocacy, NOW engages in public education campaigns and grassroots activism to raise awareness about women's issues and mobilize support for gender equality.

The organization has chapters in communities across the United States, where members work to address local issues and promote NOW's national agenda. NOW's work has had a significant impact on advancing women's empowerment in the United States. The organization has been instrumental in raising awareness about the challenges women face and advocating for policies

that promote gender equality. While there is still much work to be done, NOW's contributions have helped to create a more just and equitable society for women. (Mukherji, 2020)

Review of Literature

Agrawal et al. (2021): Women empowerment is a multifaceted concept that encompasses social, economic, political, and legal dimensions. It aims to enable women to realize their full potential and exercise their rights and choices freely. The All India Women's Conference (AIWC), established in 1927, has been a pioneering organization in India's struggle for women's empowerment.

Chadha et al. (2020): AIWC has been a strong advocate for women's education since its inception. It has worked tirelessly to promote literacy among women and girls, believing that education is the foundation for their empowerment.

Chatterjee et al. (2020): AIWC has actively campaigned against discriminatory social practices such as child marriage, dowry, and sati. It has also fought for women's rights to divorce, inheritance, and property ownership. AIWC has played a crucial role in advocating for women's political rights, including the right to vote and hold public office. It has also encouraged women to actively participate in the political process.

Das et al. (2020): AIWC has supported women's economic empowerment through various initiatives such as skill development programs, microfinance schemes, and promoting women's entrepreneurship. AIWC has been instrumental in advocating for legal reforms that protect women's rights and ensure their safety and security.

Women empowerment and leadership through the lens of traditional and contemporary women organizations

AIWC has been a vital force in the women's empowerment movement in India. Its contributions to education, social reform, political participation, economic independence, and legal advocacy have been invaluable. By addressing the challenges it faces and adapting to the changing times, AIWC can continue to play a crucial role in empowering women and building a more equitable society.

Women's education has been a long-fought battle in India, a struggle against deeply entrenched societal norms and prejudices. In the early 20th century, women's access to education was severely limited, with most girls being confined to household chores and denied the opportunity to learn and grow. However, amidst this backdrop of inequality, a beacon of hope emerged in the form of the All India Women's Conference (AIWC).

Founded in 1927 by Margaret Cousins, the AIWC was a pioneering organization that championed women's education and empowerment. It brought together women from diverse backgrounds, united by their shared belief in the transformative power of education. The AIWC's primary focus was to improve educational opportunities for women and girls, recognizing that education was the key to unlocking their potential and enabling them to participate fully in society.

AIWC's efforts have significantly impacted the lives of women in India. It has been instrumental in raising awareness about women's rights and challenging patriarchal norms. AIWC has also provided a platform for women to come together, share their experiences, and collectively fight for their rights.

Despite its achievements, AIWC faces numerous challenges. These include limited resources, bureaucratic hurdles, and the need to adapt to the changing needs of women in contemporary India. To remain relevant and effective, AIWC needs to strengthen its grassroots presence, engage with younger generations, and leverage technology to amplify its reach and impact.

The AIWC's efforts to promote women's education were multifaceted. They established schools and colleges, provided scholarships and financial aid, and organized awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of education for girls. The organization also worked to reform the curriculum, making it more relevant to women's lives and needs. Beyond education, the AIWC also addressed other critical issues affecting women, such as child marriage, dowry, and social discrimination. They advocated for legal reforms and social change, striving to create a more equitable society for women.

The AIWC's impact on women's education in India has been profound. They have been instrumental in increasing literacy rates among women, empowering them to take on leadership roles, and challenging traditional gender roles. The organization's legacy continues to inspire and motivate generations of women to pursue their dreams and contribute to the nation's progress.

AIWC has been a trailblazer in the fight for women's education in India. Their tireless efforts have paved the way for greater access to education, empowerment, and social justice for women. As we celebrate their contributions, we must also recognize that the struggle for women's equality is far from over. We must continue to support organizations like the AIWC and work together to create a world where all women have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The story of women's social reform in India is a complex and inspiring one, marked by the tireless efforts of countless individuals and organizations striving for equality and justice. Among these, the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) stands out as a pivotal force, shaping the landscape of women's rights and empowerment for nearly a century.

Founded in 1927 by Margaret Cousins, an Irish-born educationist and feminist, the AIWC emerged from a growing awareness of the need for a unified platform to address the multifaceted challenges faced by women in India. The organization's initial focus was on education, recognizing it as a fundamental tool for social transformation. However, it soon

expanded its scope to encompass a wide range of issues, including child marriage, divorce rights, inheritance laws, and political representation.

The AIWC played a crucial role in raising awareness about discriminatory practices and advocating for legislative reforms. It actively campaigned against the abhorrent practice of child marriage, which not only robbed young girls of their childhood but also perpetuated a cycle of disempowerment. The organization's efforts contributed significantly to the passage of the Child Marriage Restraint Act in 1929, a landmark legislation that criminalized child marriage.

Beyond legal reforms, the AIWC also worked towards changing societal attitudes and promoting women's education. It established schools and colleges, organized workshops and conferences, and published journals to disseminate information and mobilize public opinion. The organization's emphasis on education was rooted in the belief that empowered women were essential for the progress of the nation.

The AIWC's contributions extended beyond legislative advocacy and educational initiatives. It provided a platform for women from diverse backgrounds to come together, share their experiences, and collectively work towards their empowerment. The organization fostered a sense of sisterhood and solidarity, enabling women to challenge patriarchal norms and assert their rights.

The AIWC's legacy is evident in the numerous achievements that have paved the way for greater gender equality in India. From the right to vote to equal opportunities in education and employment, women have made significant strides, thanks in no small measure to the efforts of organizations like the AIWC.

While the AIWC has been instrumental in advancing women's rights, challenges persist. Deep-rooted patriarchal attitudes, social customs, and economic disparities continue to hinder women's progress. Issues such as gender-based violence, discrimination in the workplace, and lack of access to healthcare remain pressing concerns.

The AIWC continues to adapt its strategies to address these evolving challenges. It works in collaboration with government agencies, civil society organizations, and international bodies to advocate for policy changes and implement programs that empower women. The organization's focus on grassroots mobilization, community engagement, and awareness campaigns ensures that its impact reaches the most marginalized sections of society.

The All India Women's Conference has been a beacon of hope and empowerment for women in India. Its unwavering commitment to social reform, education, and advocacy has transformed the lives of countless women. As India continues its journey towards gender equality, the AIWC's legacy serves as an inspiration and a reminder of the transformative power of collective action. With continued dedication and a focus on addressing the challenges that remain, the AIWC will undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping a future where women enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

Conclusion

Women's organizations, both traditional and contemporary, have played a vital role in advancing women's empowerment and leadership. While their approaches and focus may differ, they share a common goal of creating a more equitable and just society for women. By learning from the past and adapting to the changing times, women's organizations can continue to empower women and drive meaningful change in the years to come.

References

1. Agrawal, M. (2021). Women empowerment and globalisation: A modern perspective. New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, ISBN-9788184571509.
2. Chadha, V. (Ed) (2020). Institute for Defence Studies & Analysis. Armed Forces Special Powers Act: the debate. ISBN 9788170951292.
3. Chatterjee, S. K. (2020). North-East India: Dispersion and Discontent (Vol. 2). New Delhi: Abhijeet Publications, ISBN-9879380031729.

4. Das, J. K. & Basu, D. (2020). North East India in Perspective. New Delhi: Akansha publishing house, ISBN-8187606908.
5. Eagly, A. H., & Johnson, B. T. (2020). Gender and Leadership style: A meta analysis. Psychological Bulletin, 108(2), 233-256.
6. Ghosh, G.K. & Ghosh, S. K. (2021). Women of Manipur. New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing corporation. ISBN-81-7024-897-3.
7. Mukherji, S. (2020). Meira Paibis: Women Torch-bearers on the March in Manipur. Mainstream weekly, 49 (1).
8. Northouse, P. G. (2020). Leadership Theory and Practice (4th ed.). New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd: New Delhi, ISBN-9788178297866(Pb).
9. Pal, S. (2021). Exploring Ima Market, a 500 year old market with over 5000 traders all Women.
10. Phanjoubam, P. (2020). Manipur and Mainstream Media Lost in the Rhetoric. Economics and Political weekly, 51, 13-14.