

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND LEADERSHIP: YOUTH AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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Abstract. This article examines the central position of young women as social change makers, comparing women's empowerment in Uzbekistan to that in India. The article argues that empowerment of women is central to national development. The progress of Uzbekistan includes higher political engagement of women, social programs for women, more education, and more job opportunities. Initiatives in India, i.e., "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao," are also mentioned. The article addresses challenges in unconventional areas, emphasizing the importance of education. The empowerment of young women is encouraged, recognizing their potential to be social change makers and to facilitate Uzbekistan-India cooperation. The India-Central Asia Youth Forum is a central platform for this.

Key words: opportunity, education, gender equality, social change, women's empowerment, challenges, rights, policy.

Introduction

The attitude towards women is one of the key indicators of respect for a country, government, future, and next generation. In recent times, Uzbekistan, guided by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has been making every effort to provide gender equality, better working and living standards for women, and a system that permits youngsters, in particular young women, to exhibit their knowledge and potential to their maximum (President.uz, 2021). This is deeply related to the vision of laying the cornerstone of the Third Renaissance – a period of new blossoming of culture and intellect. One sees it in practical action, not in declarations. As a practical example, one can refer to the expansion of women in the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) after the elections of 2019, a concrete step towards more women in political decision-making (UzA, 2020). The reports indicate that women's representation was approximately 32%, a considerable expansion compared to previous parliamentary terms. This is also in line with making a new spiritual space in society, in which the moral principles of fathers, mothers, and teachers take precedence. As great enlightenment philosopher Abdurauf Fitrat wrote, "For raising our children to be men of good character, to begin with, the mothers of the people need to be educated and trained." This shows the basic role of educated women in determining society's future. The programs such as the "Temir Daftar" (Iron Notebook), "Yoshlar Daftari" (Youth Notebook), and "Ayollar Daftari" (Women's Notebook) point to a strategic approach to working on concrete needs of vulnerable families, youngsters, and women (UNDP Uzbekistan, 2022). These are not concepts; these are concrete programs providing financial support, social services, and opportunities for self-improvement.

India has also made significant progress in women's empowerment, albeit in its own unique challenges and victories. Initiatives such as the "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao" (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child) programme, launched in 2015, address gender imbalance

and promote girls' education (Ministry of Women & Child Development, 2015). The reservation of women's seats in local government institutions (Panchayati Raj institutions) has also brought more women to political participation at a local scale (UN Women, 2021). India has also seen a boost in women entrepreneurs, in particular in micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), helped by programs such as the "Mudra Yojana" providing collateral-free loans (Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises, n.d.). There is, however, continued struggle in areas such as gender-based violence, unequal access to resources, and deeply entrenched social norms. An analysis of India's achievements and challenges serves to provide a useful comparative perspective of the complex nature of women's empowerment in Central Asia.

Today, Uzbekistan embraces an open society, judiciously utilizing progressive principles without getting carried away by harmful influences that would destroy its national identity. Such a balance is crucial in ensuring social transformation in a sustainable manner, particularly in a rapidly changing, increasingly globalizing world. Respect to women, pillar of family and society, has been a cornerstone of belief of the Uzbek people for centuries. Women increasingly take key roles, not only in family life, but in national development also. Tanzila Narbaeva's appointment to Chairperson of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis is a shining example of leadership of women at government's higher reaches (Senate.uz, n.d.). Such advancement is a fertile ground for women to become active participants in social transformation, and the India-Central Asia Youth Forum is a useful platform for it to take place, providing a means of sharing of ideas and experiences between our two countries of common historical and cultural heritage.

In today's time, there is more scope for women to grow, encouraging them to continue to evolve. There are also discussions that continue to be brought up, such as whether or not women should be allowed to pursue traditionally masculine occupations such as in the military. As more women in defense can be instrumental in ensuring gender equality is better met, it is also crucial to note the challenges that they would face. By working in protection or in law enforcers, women can prove their potential. By making it possible for them to become soldiers or policemen, their lives would be transformed, offering many possibilities. As Uzbekistan's military is largely male, there is increasingly a number of women in various roles, such as in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Kun.uz, 2023). This is a forward-thinking yet impactful move.

Nevertheless, women in such careers can suffer serious problems. Even in those nations that support gender equality, women soldiers and officers risk sexual harassment and discrimination. Statistics point to it being one of the key reasons many women avoid such careers (UN Women, 2018). This halts careers, induces lifelong depression, and undermines gender equality progress. The challenges require not only tough protection mechanisms and legislative frameworks but also a fundamental shift in social attitudes and company culture. This is something that Uzbekistan, as many other countries, is struggling to address.

The concept of education quality has become a key one. Just to be able to count, write, and read is not enough for a woman anymore. The gates of knowledge in Uzbekistan have been opened, offering every woman a chance to continue studies. Efforts are undertaken not only to get girls to attend basic education but also to equip them with professional skills. The "Monocenter" program is a great example of this. Such centers, found in every region of the country, teach different professions, starting from design and IT to handicrafts and entrepreneurship, to girls and women without higher education (Gazeta.uz, 2021). Furthermore, interest-free credits given to such women allow them to start their own business,



ensuring personal development and national economic growth. The new Presidential Decree to provide grants to women to obtain a master's degree without any fee is yet another milestone (Lex.uz, 2022), ensuring that women continue their studies and move to leadership positions.

These initiatives elevate the position of women in society. Such social aspects hold a great significance, as women are social change makers. Liberty for India's women also means freedom for India to build a new tomorrow. The overall progress of any society requires recognizing the position of women. World Bank reports also suggest that there is a positive effect of educating women on reducing infant and child mortality (World Bank, 2019). The empowerment of women is equal to empowerment of all.

Conclusion

Women play a key role in family and society's advancement. In Uzbekistan, for instance, women take a more active role in the private sector, NGOs, and in leadership in their respective communities. This is a promising indicator of a growing economy. Entrepreneurship among women can also be a force of immense social transformation. Economically independent women also take better care of their children's health and education. The growth of women's business in Uzbekistan, for instance, in the textile, tourism, and agriculture sectors, is a reflection of this (UzA, 2023). Considering the key position of women, their empowerment in all spheres is of great importance. The empowerment introduces desired social change in the aspect of reducing gender inequality. The India-Central Asia Youth Forum is a wonderful opportunity to enable this empowerment. As a young Uzbekistani lady, deeply committed to these ideals, I am eager to be a participant in the vibrant exchange of visions and ideas at the forum.

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