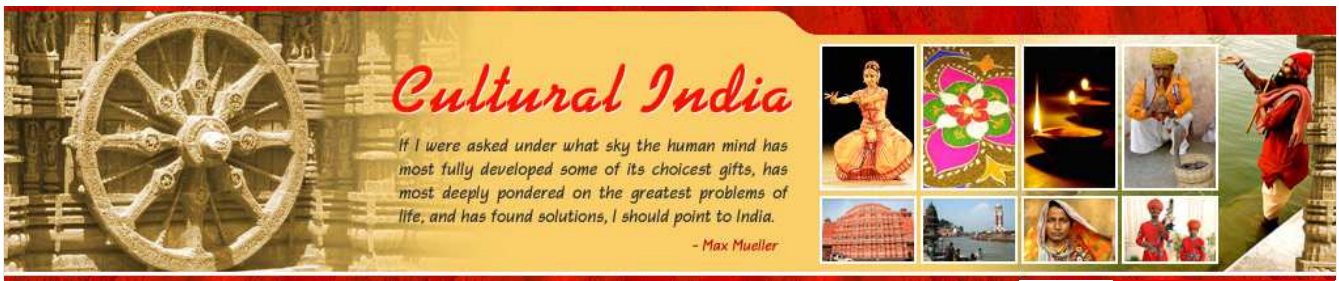

Leaders

- Bal Gangadhar Tilak
- Bhagat Singh
- Chandrasekhar Azad
- Gopal Krishna Gokhale
- Indira Gandhi
- Jawaharlal Nehru
- Lala Lajpat Rai
- Lal Bahadur Shastri
- Maulana Abul Kalam Azad
- Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose
- Dr. Rajendra Prasad
- Rajiv Gandhi
- Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel
- Sarojini Naidu

Indira Gandhi was the first woman Prime Minister of India. To know more about Indira Gandhi, read the brief biography and profile of Indira Gandhi.

Cultural India : Leaders : Indira Gandhi

Indira Gandhi

Born: 19 November 1917
Passed Away: 31 October 1984

Contributions

Indira Gandhi was, undoubtedly, one of the greatest political leaders of India. She was the first and only woman to be elected as the Prime Minister. She is also regarded as the most controversial political leader of the country for her unprecedented decision of imposing "a state of emergency". She was also criticized for carrying out the Operation Blue-Star in Punjab that eventually scripted her assassination on 31 October 1984.

Life

Indira 'Priyadarshini' Gandhi was born on 19 November, 1917, in Allahabad to Kamala and Jawaharlal Nehru. Indira's father was a well-educated lawyer and an active member of the Indian Independence Movement. Since the Nehru family was the centre of national political activity, Indira Gandhi was exposed to politics when she was a little child. A leader like Mahatma Gandhi was among the frequent visitors of the Nehru house in Allahabad. She passed her Metric from Pune University and went to Shantiniketan in West Bengal. Here, the students were made to lead a very strict and disciplined life. She later went on to study in Switzerland and Oxford University in London. Indira, then stayed few months in Switzerland with her ailing mother. In 1936, after Kamala Nehru finally succumbed to tuberculosis, she returned to India. At the time of Kamala's death, Jawaharlal Nehru, was languishing in the Indian jails.

After his return to the country, Indira showed an active participation in the national movement. She also became a member of the Indian National Congress. Here, she met Feroze Gandhi, a journalist and key member of the Youth Congress - the youth wing of the Congress Party. In 1941, despite his father's objections, she married Feroze Gandhi. In 1944, Indira gave birth to Rajiv Gandhi followed two years later by Sanjay Gandhi.

Post Independence

After the independence, Indira Gandhi's father Jawaharlal Nehru became the first Prime Minister of India. Indira Gandhi decided to shift to Delhi to assist his father. Her two sons remained with her but Feroze decided to stay back in Allahabad. He was working as an editor of The National Herald newspaper founded by Motilal Nehru.

During the 1951-52 Parliamentary Elections, Indira Gandhi handled the campaigns of her husband, Feroze, who was contesting from Rae Bareli, Uttar Pradesh. After being elected as MP, Feroze opted to live in a separate house in Delhi.

Feroze soon became a prominent force against the corruption in the Nehru led government. He exposed a major scandal involving prominent insurance companies and the Finance Minister T.T. Krishnamachari. The Finance Minister was considered to be a close aide of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Feroze had developed as a noted figure in the country's political circle. He, with a small coterie of supporters and advisors continued to challenge the Central government. On 8 September 1960, Feroze died after a major cardiac arrest.

India as Congress President

In 1959, Indira Gandhi was elected as the President of the Indian National Congress Party. She was one of the political advisors of Jawaharlal Nehru. After the death of Jawaharlal Nehru on 27 May 1964, Indira Gandhi decided to contest elections and eventually elected. She was appointed as the in-charge of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry under Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri

It was believed that Indira Gandhi was an adept at the art of politics and image-making. This is corroborated by an event happened during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965. While the war was going, Indira Gandhi went on a holiday trip to Srinagar. Despite repeated warnings by the security forces that Pakistani insurgents had entered very close to the hotel, she was staying, Gandhi refused to move. The incident fetched her huge national and international media attention.

As Prime Minister

Following the death of Lal Bahadur Shastri on 11 January 1966, in Tashkent, the race to the coveted throne of Prime Minister began. The party faced a

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  - Groom Preparations
  - Wedding Rituals
  - Wedding Preparations

serious trouble, as, all the senior leaders of the Congress party desired to contest. Unable to reach at a consensus, the high-command picked Indira as their contender. The virtual reason behind Indira's selection was the thought that "Indira would, indirectly be run by the top leadership." But Indira Gandhi, showing extraordinary political skills elbowed the Congress stalwarts out of power.

In 1971, in order to stop the Bangladeshi refugees from flowing in into the country, Indira Gandhi supported the East Pakistan's struggle for freedom against West Pakistan. India provided logistical support and also sent troops to fight against West Pakistan. India's triumph in the war of 1971 against Pakistan enhanced the popularity of Indira Gandhi as a shrewd political leader.

Imposition of Emergency

In 1975, the Opposition parties and social activists staged regular demonstrations against the Indira Gandhi-led Central government over rising inflation, the poor state of economy and unchecked corruption. The same year, a ruling of Allahabad High Court that Indira Gandhi had used illegal practices during the last election helped in adding fuel to the existing political fire. The verdict ordered her to vacate her seat, immediately. The agitation and anger of the people intensified. Realizing the consequences, on 26 June, 1975, Indira Gandhi declared "an emergency, due to the turbulent political situation in the country".

During the state of emergency, her political foes were imprisoned, constitutional rights of the citizens were abrogated, and the press placed under strict censorship. The Gandhian socialist Jaya Prakash Narayan and his supporters sought to unify students, peasants and labor organizations in a 'Total non-violent Revolution' to transform Indian society. Narayan was later arrested and jailed.

Meanwhile, her younger son, Sanjay Gandhi, began to run the country with full-authority. Sanjay Gandhi had ordered the removal of slum dwellings, and in an attempt to curb India's growing population, initiated a highly resented program of forced sterilization.

In 1977, fearing military coup if the emergency continued further, Indira Gandhi called for elections. She was brutally thrashed by the emerging Janata Dal, led by Morarji Desai and Jai Prakash Narayan. Congress managed to win only 153 Lok Sabha seats, as compared to 350 seats it grabbed in the previous Lok Sabha.

With so little in common among the allies of the Janata Party, the members were busy in internal strife. In an effort to expel Indira Gandhi from the Parliament, the Janata government ordered to arrest her. However, the strategy failed disastrously and gained Indira Gandhi, a great sympathy from the people who had considered her as an autocrat just two years back.

In the next elections, Congress returned to power with a landslide majority. Experts viewed the victory of the Congress as a result of inefficient and ineffective "Janata Dal".

Operation Blue Star and her assassination

In September 1981, a Sikh militant group demanding "Khalistan" entered into the premises of the Golden Temple, Amritsar. Despite the presence of thousands of civilians in the Temple complex, Indira Gandhi ordered the Army to barge into the holy shrine. The operation was carried out with tanks and armored vehicles. The act was viewed as an unparalleled tragedy in the Indian political history. The impact of the onslaught increased the communal tensions in the country. Many Sikhs resigned from the armed and civil administrative office and also returned their government awards. On 31 October 1984, Indira Gandhi's bodyguards Satwant Singh and Beant Singh, as a revenge of the Golden Temple assault, assassinated the Prime Minister at her Safdarjung Road residence.

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