

MAHATMA GANDHI'S PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN

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Abstract: We are living in a global age. In the present scenario, we all talk about egalitarian rights for all. Women have been a prime concern nowadays as they represent the vulnerable section of society. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our country, had a major role in upholding the conditions of women. According to Gandhi, women are not like toys or dolls played by patriarchal society. Men and women are equally responsible for solving societal challenges. India's future rests on the enlightenment of women. In the All India Women's Conference in 1936, Gandhi stated, "When a woman, whom we call abala, becomes sabala, all those who are helpless will become powerful". It reflects Gandhi's focus on women's independence in the battle for the establishment of an anti-monopolization society. According to Gandhi, women are considered the potential force through which a society can be understood perfectly. Women have to be fearless if they want to be free. Gandhi accepts that the affliction of women is due to psychological fear imposed on them by society rather than physical incapacity. Gandhi was the most ardent supporter of women's liberation and worked to elevate women's status in Indian society.

According to him, for development to happen in a true form in the society it is important that both of them (men and women) share equal opportunities and status in the society. Development would not be possible if a half of the population of the society remains under the domination of others. This article intends to discuss Gandhi's view on women. Although not in a very systematic manner, Mahatma Gandhi through his active participation in the independent movements sought to liberate women from all those evil practices prevalent in society and subordinated their rights as a human being.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Equality.

Introduction: Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our country, had a major role in upholding the conditions of women. Gandhi was the most ardent supporter of women's liberation and worked to elevate women's status in Indian society. According to Gandhi, women are not like toys or dolls played by patriarchal society. India's future rests on the enlightenment of women. In the All India Women's Conference of 1936, Gandhi stated, "When a woman, whom we call abala, becomes sabala, all those who are helpless will become powerful" (Parathara, 2016). It reflects Gandhi's focus on women's independence in the battle for the establishment of an anti-monopolized society.

According to Gandhi, women are considered the potential force through which a society can be understood perfectly. Women have to be fearless if they want to be free. Gandhi accepts that the affliction of women is due to psychological fear imposed on them by society rather than physical incapacity (Kishwar, 1985). He urged the women to realise themselves as independent human beings and rediscover their self esteem so that the whole of humanity will benefitted. In Young India he wrote, "The future of India lies on your knees, for you will nurture the future generation. You can bring up the children of India to become simple God-fearing and brave men and women, or you can coddle them to be weaklings, unfit to brave the storms of life and used to foreign fineries which they would find it difficult in after life to discard." That bravery and courage are not the property of men is the constant reply to them by Gandhi. In this article, Gandhi's perspective on women is being discussed.

Objectives:

- To study the conditions of Indian women from the perspective of Gandhi and contribute towards the welfare of women in this country.
- To analyse on what grounds women were marginalised and try to study solutions of these problems.
- To study the Role of women in the Indian struggle of independence.

Methodology: The present investigation applies a descriptive and exploratory research design. This study is based on secondary sources. Various types of survey related to Gandhi's perspective on women, natural research, census booklet, reports are being used here and at the same time, various books, journal articles, newspaper are also used.

Discussion: First in Africa, Gandhi's experience with female power took place. There he realized that a woman might become the pioneer of satyagraha, for which she does not require bookish knowledge but does require a stout heart coming from struggle and trust (Kishwar, 1985). Gandhi deliberately encouraged women in the first non-cooperation movement in 1921 to unite their power in the battle for independence. As a result of the non-cooperation movement, all Indians were asked to boycott government educational institutions, legal courts, the legislature, and British goods and titles given by the British government. Swadeeshi's constructive approach was based on boycotting British products. In this campaign, women played a vital role in spinning and wearing khadi. The female programme of Gandhi seemed to complement their domestic roles while also giving them a sense of duty in their everyday lives (Kishwar, 1985). Indian women are given a unique status by the restoration of spinning. Gandhi addressed the Gujarat Stri Mandal and stated that weaving for women was "the first lesson of the school of industry". The history of organized resistance to the British dates back to the 1800s, when its pioneers included not only male leaders, but also female leaders such as the Rani of Jhansi. Gandhi's idea of women in the struggle for freedom was based on the belief that they personified the spiritual and moral valor of the Hindu epic heroines Sita and Draupadi. He encouraged women to be as "self-reliant" as

Draupadi and as upholders of "superior moral bravery" as Sita. British rule was compared to Ravanaj's tyranny in the Ramayana, and Gandhi urged women to be Sita to protect their nation from the oppression of British rule. As Gandhi believed, British power would collapse when it faced a confrontation with women's power. This was used as a technique to legalize the power of women in the political sector or to motivate them to merge into the national movement (Kishwar, 1985). Gandhi characterized women's position in the movement by highlighting the "domestic" and "non-violent" nature of women's efforts. He established a relationship between nationalization and female liberalization (Acttuthan, 2008). Women were to bear the burden of breaking free from the "shackles of domesticity" and hegemony of men in order to achieve personal and national freedom. Their actions would serve a greater purpose than simply preserving political independence. Swaraj also mentioned societal reconstruction, which Gandhi believed should be led by women (Kishwar, 1985). Women's contribution to the Satyagraha movement would emerge from the domestic arena. Despite Gandhi's strong support for women's freedom and gender equality, he believed that their contributions should be stored separately. Mahatma Gandhi created a split in which he emphasized the dominant position of males and females while also encouraging women to break prejudices. These views are based on the ability of women to work as non-violent, satyagraha from the domestic sector.

To understand Gandhi's attitude to women, the best way is to look at his overall philosophy of life. Gandhi stated that a woman was the partner of a man bestowed with the same mental powers while addressing the annual meeting at the Bombay Bhagini Samaj in 1918. Women have the right to engage in every aspect of a man's activity, and they have the same liberty as he (Gandhi, 1942). Explaining the prejudice of Hindu scriptures against men as a result of historic events, Gandhi declared that he did not discriminate between sons and daughters. In his opinion those discriminations were disrespectful and inappropriate, the arrival of a boy or a girl should be welcomed with equal enthusiasm as they complement each other (Jain). The Gandhi-led people's movement's counterculture emphasized women's culture against the basic characters of British rule, which favored masculine symbols like authority, which are not governed by the desire to protect benefits and favors from colonial rule.

Mahatma Gandhi's views on women have been mostly condensed in his autobiography 'My Experiment With Truth'. His views on women's empowerment were a model for the people of that time. Gandhi said that his mother and wife motivated him to embrace the path of non-violence and Satyagraha. Wife Kasturba Gandhi was not like other typical wives of the period; she despised men's enslavement that is why she assisted Mohandas in being a wise husband rather than a dominant one. Gandhi also believed that the Dandi and Satyagraha were successful because of women activists. Gandhi did not see women as a matter of empowerment, but he believed that women themselves were strong enough to play an important role in the welfare of not only themselves but also the entire human race. If women are to be free, he believes they must be brave. Only opposing the injustice imposed on them, breaking the bonds of family and society, can liberate them from oppression. Gandhi encouraged women leadership in the congress and ensured their active participation in every movement. In 1921, when the question of women's voting was

presented by Gandhi, they enthusiastically supported it. In 1936, Gandhiji expressed his views on education and made it clear that a woman should be strong enough not to hesitate to say 'no' to her husband. Prior to Gandhi's arrival on the Indian political scene, the "women's movement" in India was controlled by women from the upper classes. According to Kamala Chattopadhyay, the Indian feminist women were influenced by Europe and the movement was operated within a bourgeois-capitalist framework. The liberals and radicals had their different viewpoints regarding the women's involvement in the national movement. They agreed on how women should be perceived in the context of their families. They both believed that women's primary function was at home, and that women's political engagement was only an extension of their household obligations (Taneja, 2005). The newspapers and magazines were the first public expressions of female's thoughts and views in India during the half of last century, as well as a wealthy medium for expressing conflicts and confusions about female's role in the private sphere in relation to the national political movement. The domestic literature sheds light on how women regarded their positions in connection to education, the women's movement in Europe, and the relevance of women's participation in the freedom struggle in the first half of twentieth century. All these topics were imperial modernity and the rising awareness of the domestic sphere's importance, as framed by emerging challenges (Thapar-Bjorkert, 2006). Mahatma Gandhi sought to emancipate Indian women through his writings. He published many books related to womanhood. Gandhi advocated for the freedom and the empowerment of women from a radical standpoint. Because women were supposed to be unusual, women's recovery is an important aspect of his great programme. He had a lively perspective on numerous subjects and concerns relating to women. Gandhi spoke out against female feticide, child murder, child marriage, widowhood, domestic violence against women etc. Gandhi was an outspoken opponent of gender inequality. He repudiated shastras and smritis that were biased against women and proclaimed to follow the good components of the vast vedic tradition in which women were regarded as equals by preaching absolute equality of men and women. According to Gandhi, "of all the evils that man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abused of the better half of humanity to me, the female sex, not the weaker sex" (Mathai, 2000). In Gandhi's perspective, women should not be subjected to any patriarchal restrictions, when they began to recognise their power they would naturally despise the disparities happening with them. Gandhiji wanted the utmost emancipation of women. Gandhi mentioned many times that in the Satyagraha movement in South Africa, he saw the amazing ability of women's self-sacrifice, and this encouraged him to involve women in the national movement. On an appeal by Gandhi, the Indian women agreed to contribute to the national movement. To get involved in Satyagraha, swadeshi, swarajya, civil-disobedience and quit India movement, they got actively involved. The history of Indian society mirrors that the societal rules have been very indifferent to women. Therefore, Gandhiji says that the ethics and rules of social institutions should be women oriented. At the same time, it is necessary that all the rules of social life should be decided in collaboration with men and women. There should not be any domination or tyranny of any one in society. Gandhiji has given importance to the vow of celibacy (Brahmachariyata) for the promotion of women. In Hinduism, five mahavrats non-

violence, non-attachment, truth, asterya and celibacy have been recommended for the seeker of self-realisation. These were the five pillars on which Gandhiji's entire life and his philosophy of Satyagraha was created. Child marriage was the most disgusting practice among the social evils prevalent in India, in which girls were married to elderly men in their childhood. The day-to-day development of women was hampered by the growth and contempt of child widows in the society. Gandhi expressed his views that the conspiracy of child-marriage and child-widow was anomalous. Gandhi said that child marriage was the cause of poor health and overabundance of child production. Gandhi vehemently opposed prostitution because he was very upset by the situation of women and children in the deplorable surrounding of brothels. According to him, protecting women's honour and dignity was as sacred as protecting cows. In Gandhiji's view, the right things are necessary for the end of prostitution. He stated that men had to learn to control their vices, and women should be provided such a business in which they would find respect. The practice of purdah was started with the advent of Islam. Gandhi considered the purdah system to be an unnatural practice in the upliftment of women. According to him, this practice hinders the education of women, increases the immunity of women, keeps women away from the external world and creates a barrier to child education. Gandhi was of the view that the veil system is now coming to an end. On the basis of Gandhi's views, we can say that by keeping women on screen, we are not protecting them but making them captive. Women themselves will have to be ready to end the veil practice. They have to be mentally and physically strong. Fear and shame should be renounced from society.

Conclusion: Mahatma Gandhi's concept of women empowerment is not free from criticism. Gandhi failed to set up a special position and programme for the upliftment of women's economic, social status but he played an important role in raising moral concerns in the society about the suppressed status of women. Despite being sensitive to women's rights, Gandhi never encouraged women to create a political platform on their issues. While serving for the national interest they could have achieved their freedom but they were not getting any important positions within congress. Numerically their participation in national movement was very high, but at the level of decision taking, their role was secondary. Whether women would participate in the movement or not was determined by male sections during that time. The women participation in politics was confined to special women such as Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Devi etc. women had only confined themselves to work like Dharna and literary campaigns on the national stage(Taneja, 2005).

India is in the twenty-first century, and it is time to recognise that discrimination, criminality against women, and gender prejudice will always result the violations of women's rights and constitute a barrier to women's empowerment. So now is the time to recall and implement Gandhi's wise remarks. If all nations adopt his non-violence philosophy, prejudice against women would decrease, and there will be no need to empower women where there is no discrimination. And this would inevitably result in the establishment of just society based on equality and fairness.

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