

Gandhi and his Ideologies about Women and their Education

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Abstract

Women hold an important position in society. They constitute about 52% of the overall population of the country. In present times they play prominent roles in political, cultural, social and religious sectors of the country. They are the first to educate children. Moreover, an educated woman plays a better role in society. Thus, educating women is important. Education that holds key to all the development of one's personality is bound to shape a better future of women.

This explains the promotion of women's education by the 'Father of nation'. M.K.Gandhi or Mahatma Gandhi, himself promoted women's education. The man who is famous for bringing revolution in India, the pillar who brought freedom to India and the idol of peace and non-violence, believed in a better India where women played a greater role in building a better country. Gandhi is said to have had two influential women in his life, his mother Putlibai and wife Kasturba Gandhi. Gandhi believed women to be the greatest creation and gift by God to humanity. He believed that women have the power to create or destroy.

In the pre-Independence era Women in India were treated with inferiority. They were exposed to negative social norms and harsh rituals and customs like child marriage, dowry, forceful widowhood, sati and others. These not only degraded women but also showed their inferior position in society. The country in which devotion and worship of Goddesses are custom, the same country degrades its women.

It was during the Colonial period and post-independence that women gained some value in society. The study of these changes and the Gandhian Ideologies is the aim of this paper.

Keywords: MK Gandhi, Gandhian principles, Gandhi's Teachings, Women education, Growth of women

Article History: Submitted: 11th March, 2022, Revised: 12th March, 2022, Accepted: 13th March, 2022, Published: 31st March, 2022.

I. INTRODUCTION

Women have always had to face brutality in society. With the growing world women felt more left out. They were subject to various social norms which bore negative impact on their lives. Having to live under the shadow of the men in their lives, women often were considered lower than most in the society. Norms like the Purdah system prevented women from stepping out of their houses for most of the time. In such cases expecting the women to step out of their cocoons and explore the world is not easy.

As women barely escaped the bounds of the house, they couldn't have learned or found an educative path and thus couldn't have grown out and fought against the social evils against them. Thus education plays an important role in women's life. This was understood by Gandhiji. He promoted women into educating themselves and growing out of their shells. He promoted women into participating in the freedom movement and spreading awareness in the society. With his blessings, women participation in political activity increased. Women were considered to be the modest representation of the party and its policies. They played an important role in constructing successful programs and campaigns for social changes and had a greater contribution in Gandhian nationalism and Gandhian politics.

With such a boost, the life of women has improved ever since. But is this what Gandhiji had envisioned for the women? Is this the kind of life we expect for a woman? Does the current life of women align to the thoughts of Gandhi, as he might have imagined?

II. OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this paper is to study the Gandhian way of empowering women. The objectives of this study are:

1. To understand Gandhiji's thoughts and his principles for women
2. To study the Gandhian path of educating women.

III. A LOOK ON PRE-INDEPENDENCE LIFE OF WOMEN

The life of pre-independence women could be described as a horrible time compared to the lives of the present women. Indian women suffer from many differences and mistreatments in society. In order to fully understand the role Gandhi played in correcting the position of women in society, it is crucial to consider the dilemma of women at this time.

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Social grievances such as child alliance and the dowry policy were widespread on the scene. When it reached the phase of the Indian liberation struggle, the average life expectancy of Indian women was 27 years and only 2% of women had an education, which shows what a huge, burdensome task it was to bring women from India who did not get their fundamental rights to protest for the nation's cause. But it was their efforts that as many women as Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Sarojini Naidu, Sucheta Kriplani, Aruna Asaf Ali, and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur came ahead, circulating the word of gender equivalence to the masses and criticizing the Indian desire for male child over female. Gandhiji was rigidly against child marriage and prompted widows to remarry. He motivated the young men to accept the young widows as partners. He said that girls are skilled at anything boys can do, too, but it takes time to provide them opportunities so that they can prove their worth.

Because of the male dominance of the culture, women were relegated to the role of a subordinate race, submissive to their male partners. Northern India was enamoured with the purdah regime. Women were not allowed to go out on their own unless escorted by male kin. Only a select few were able to obtain an education and go to school. It was in such a dismal environment that Gandhi accepted the duty of directing a social campaign that resulted in a dramatic reorientation of the prevalent perception of women in Indian culture.

IV. GANDHI'S THOUGHTS ON WOMEN AND THEIR SOCIAL DILEMMA:

Gandhian thoughts on Women Equality: As said by Mahatma Gandhi, women being endowed with equal mental powers have equal rights. However, because of the notion that women are inferior to men, uncultured and unfit men have enjoyed preeminence over women.

Gandhi could not accept the notion that women had a low status in our culture and were intellectually or spiritually inferior to men. He, as a social reformer, drove to amend the patriarchal trait of Indian culture, which chanced to limit women to the role of a subservient gender to their male equivalents. He made ample contributions to the progression of women's status in India and encouraged the women of his period, which boosted their morale and helped them reclaim their self-esteem.

As per his views, men and women are of equal stature and complement each other, and the presence of one cannot be rationalized without the being of the other. He also felt that, as men affect the social lives of others, women influence home life, and that women should have as much sovereignty in their own circle of influence as men do in theirs.

"Woman is the partner of man bestowed with equal mental powers," Gandhi says. "She has the right to engage in man's activities, and she has the same right to freedom and liberty as he has."

Gandhi also urged that women stop thinking of themselves as animals created to gratify man's libido. He urged women to see themselves as self-sufficient human beings and to adorn themselves with noble traits for the sake of mankind as a

whole. "Man is born of woman; he is the flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone," Gandhi stated. "Come on your own and repeat this message." Gandhi wanted women to realise that they were not subordinates or novelties of men's urges and imaginations, but rather work hard to meet men's norms and multiply what was finest in them. Gandhi asserted to the women, "The future of India hinges on your knees, for you will cultivate the future years. You may raise Indian youngsters to be simple God-fearing and fearless men and women, or you can coddle them into being weaklings, unfit to face life's storms and accustomed to foreign fineries that they would find difficult to live without."

Gandhian thoughts on Women's Social life: Gandhi toiled not only for political autonomy but also for the freedom of all oppressed and downtrodden parts of society. He had the proficiency to subdue a woman's deep-seated sense of inferiority and help them rise with confidence and self-esteem. Gandhi pioneered the inclusion of Indian women in the mass campaign and political platform. He emphasised women's dignity and higher position in Indian society. He denounced harmful societal models and exploitive nature all while upholding and appreciating Indian lineage and intents. One of the most vital facets of his political campaign, namely nonviolent opposition, was the inclusion of Indian women in the public sphere. Thus, as a political commander, his commitment to women's autonomy is crucial. Women were considered to be at the forefront of the Civil Disobedience and Salt Satyagraha Movements under the Mahatma's influence.

Gandhian thoughts on marriage: Marriage, as per Gandhian ideology, should not be viewed just as a way of satisfying sexual desire, but also as a means of producing offspring. It should also be intended for a more noble and religious organisation. "For me, married life is as much a condition of discipline as any other," Gandhi wrote in 1926. Life is a test, a trial. Marriage is supposed to foster mutual benefit, both now and in the future. It is also intended to benefit humanity." Marriage, according to Gandhi, should be seen as a holy institution that is inherent in life and should not be regarded as negative in any way. Gandhi counselled young men not to marry until they were 25 or 30 years old, and he advocated for marriages arranged by their parents.

The Gandhian View on Child Marriage Child marriage, according to Mahatma Gandhiji, was a moral and physical evil. He believed it undermined morals and caused bodily breakdown. It was heinous, terrible, and barbaric. During his leadership, Gandhi aspired to drastically overhaul the marriage structure and common evils such as child nuptials that prevailed in Indian culture. He was an advocate for inter-caste and non-communal nuptials. Gandhi, a subject of child marriage, regretted all through his life for marrying at such a young age. Early marriage, he claimed, was harmful since it led to the couple's deteriorating health and an overabundance of children. Child marriages were one of the reasons for many child widows in India, as well as a factor responsible for women's sociable, bodily, and ethical degradation.

Gandhi was compassionate to the unfortunate state of Indian widows during his time, and his opinions on widow remarriages established an excellent illustration of a

thoughtful social activist. He believed that the prohibition on widow remarriage imposed by social and religious obstacles was indeed a social evil prevalent in Indian culture that needed to be eradicated and criticised without delay. "Widowhood enforced by religion or custom was an onerous load, defiling the home with concealed immorality and degrading the faith." He has stated various views on widow remarriage established on women's widowhood, including child widowhood and adult widowhood.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, if a girl is widowed before the age of 15, she should be married off by her parents and the marriage should not be labelled remarriage because she was not truly wedded. In the case of young widows, they should be given the option of living alone and remaining a widow or marrying again. "In the case of mature widows, particularly those with children, he would have preferred that they stay faithful to their marriage vows and first love rather than remarry." However, if she has a desire to remarry, she should have the freedom to do so, and society should not condemn and respect such marriages.

Gandhian thoughts on Social evils against women: Gandhi had enormous admiration for the country's cultural lineage, but he was also critical of many established practises that deterred the advancement of women in the country. "It is incredible to swim in the seas of beliefs; descent in them is a suicide," Gandhi said. As a conclusion, in addition to child marriages and widowhood, he was harshly critical of other social problems common in Indian society, such as the sati pratha, purdah, dowry system, witch-hunting, devadasi and prostitution, and so on. He believed that women's liberty and progress in role and dignity would be feasible only when the current societal ills were exterminated.

From ancient times, the Purdah system was used in Indian civilization to ensure female virginity. Gandhi could not recognise the institution of purdah as an Indian tradition and was distressed to see the humiliation of women as a result of the practice of purdah. He motivated men to have faith in their wives and not to force purdah on them in order to keep their chastity. "It hampered not just women's unrestricted mobility, but also their progress and capacity to conduct constructive labour for society." According to him, humanity would be weakened as long as women are jailed and hindered in their homes and courtyards. As a result, he recommended that it was every Indian's commitment to topple the purdah system with their arms.

He was also vehemently opposed to the dowry system, which he saw as a harsh ritual that degraded the position and dignity of women. According to him, the prevalence of the dowry practise lowers the concept of marriage into "bought marriage" and reduces females to assets to be sold, purchased, and even negotiated over. He also believes that dowry marriage undermines women's education and denigrates womanhood. "He was harshly critical of the dowry system and demanded that the spouse who asked for dowry be ostracized." Gandhi advocated for the formation of a strong popular perception that condemned the practise of the dowry system, as well as for women to wait until the perfect suitor arrived before marrying their daughters well without economic transaction.

Sati Pratha is another noted common crime in Indian society, in which a woman, either of her own choice or in the brand of tradition, enters the funeral pyre of her late husband and is singed while she is alive beside the dead body of the husband. Gandhi happened to be a witness of this practice, in which a living woman is burnt alive, which was inhuman. Rather than joining the funeral pyre, he advised the ladies to illustrate their sati status by relinquishing and dedicating their life to the assistance of her husband's household and the nation.

Gandhi vehemently disagreed with prostitution because he was very upset by the crisis of women in brothels, as well as the dismal surroundings and approach towards children in brothels. He also held his fellow men equally condemnable for the persistence of this ghastliness. "Whether they are dubbed as Devadasi or by any other name, the condition is the same," Mahatma Gandhi said. It is the basis of great disgrace and grief, as well as deep humiliation, that an abundance of women are blamed for trading their innocence for the lust of man." He believed that defending women's integrity and honor was as sacred as defending cows. He hoped that after India's Liberation, the practice of temple girls and prostitution would be wiped out, and that women who had participated in such acts would be healed.

Gandhian thoughts on Women's education and coeducation: Gandhi perceived women's illiteracy as a concern and aggressively preached for promotion of education among women. Women have the same cognitive skills as males, thus they must have the same privilege to schooling. However, Gandhi's standpoint on women's education is beloved to be in family moralities. He felt that men are gifted in extra-curricular activities while women are gifted in intra-mural activities. As a result, education should be supplied to both men and women in harmony with their predetermined posts in life. Women's schooling is awfully vital since it is their human privilege and is essential for the development of many of their abilities in any organization. While one is concerned with conserving and transmitting the values of that society, the other is concerned with developing new values or modifying current ones to keep up with the times. Both of these responsibilities are particularly relevant to attempts to empower women. Education is the most potent tool for both value preservation and value change. It has the greatest potential for empowering women.

Men and women complement each other, according to Gandhi, and "the woman is not the husband's slave but his companion and help-mate and an equal partner in all delights and sorrows- as free as the husband to choose her own path." Women have the same mental abilities as men and the same right to freedom; so, educating women protects their fundamental rights. Gandhi's educational ideals are based on family values, since he believes that males are superior in extra-mural activities and women are superior in intra-mural activities. As a result, he believed that education should be imparted to both men and women in accordance with their predetermined stations in life.

Gandhi argued that women should have the same right to an education as men. He emphasised mother tongue rather than English as a forum of instruction. It demonstrates his disdain for the English language as the exclusive source of

information or literacy. He felt that nature distinguished between man and woman. As a result, a comparable differentiation in schooling is required. However, he was unsure if women's education should be separate from men's education. He was adamant that women should have access to the same amenities as males. He was also a supporter of night schools for uneducated folks.

He classified housework and childcare as a woman's domain and a man as the breadwinner. Man's actions, according to Gandhi, are tied to the outer world, but woman has the right to dominate within the house. Childcare is a mother's responsibility, according to him. "Mother is accountable for establishing their children's character," he remarked. "The instructor for those children is the woman."

He believed women had two responsibilities: housework and children. "A guy flies with very little accountability," he added, "but women must serve their husband, children, and other family members." Domestic servitude of women, on the other hand, he saw as a "poster of our barbaric nature." He says, "slavery in the kitchen is highest relic of paganism." Domestic errands should not absorb all of a woman's hours. He thought that the essence of men and women are equivalent. For Gandhi, the realms of women and men are diverse. His thesis was that the spirit (atman) of both genders (men and women) is the equivalent. In this manner, they are comparable. It represents Gandhi's "intangible and spiritual faith in sexual equality." He recognized women's spiritual nature. His most significant gift was to cultivate the notion of self-sufficiency amongst Indians.

V. WOMEN OF CURRENT GENERATION

India, which is on the path to superpower, needs to fulfill and understand that empowering women is the only way to be entirely ready to be a superpower. The literacy rates in India is presumably one of the worst in the world. Though the number has recently but has not been to fulfill the requirement. Unfortunately in India only 39% of women of total women population are educated. When discussing the twenty-first century and women's empowerment today. We are tremendously ashamed when we see a woman in a sad situation in our society, but we are also quite delighted when we see her in the highest position to represent our country. To achieve women's empowerment, we must first work to reduce the literacy gap between men and women and prioritise women's education.

Significantly, the notion of empowerment with development offers a new paradigm in the context of globalisation and the new economic order.

Before reorienting the pre-existing social development paradigm towards a process of power sharing, it is vital to first understand the nature of deprivation and marginalisation of women in society. The topic of women's empowerment must also encompass the sociopolitical conditions of the society in which women live, as well as the intellectual underpinnings of the emerging development with an underlying discussion on empowerment.

Empowering the disadvantaged, particularly women, necessitates sympathetic, empathetic, and egalitarian

governmental and nongovernmental projects; many efforts have been taken in this path in India, and many more are still needed; constitutional and non-constitutional projects have been countless, but they have been wracked with varied glitches. The government policy on female empowerment makes minimal mention of local mobilizing and funding for women's rights.

VI. CONCLUSION

Gandhi actually placed Indian women at the forefront of all life's activities. He advised them to become more 'Sabala' rather than 'Abala.' In terms of women's empowerment, Mahatma Gandhi provided every opportunity for women to go up in the service of nation development. He emphasised the education of women from underprivileged groups, Dalits, SC & STs, and other backward sections. He likened the strength of Indian women to Sita, Sabitri, and Damayanti. He was a firm believer in the integrity and respect due to Indian women.

The twenty-first century has arrived in India, and it is time to acknowledge that bigotry, crime towards women, and gender bias always will end in abuses of women's human rights and an obstacle to women's empowerment. As a result, we must adhere to and recall Gandhi's insightful words. If all nations adopted his peaceful idea, bias towards women would be reduced, and there would be no need to empower woman where there is no bias. As an outcome, a righteous society founded on equality and justice would surely emerge.

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