

Women Empowerment: Relevance of Gandhi an Views

Ms. Jyoti Devi*

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology

Abstract – Empowerment of women is prerequisite for the development of a society, as it enhances both the quality and quantity of human resources available for development. It is one of the main procedural concerns when addressing human right and development. Women empowerment and achieving gender equality is essential for our society to ensure the sustainable development of the country. Without the empowerment of women, it would be a fallacy to dream about the goals of sustainable development and gender equality. Mahatma Gandhi had expressed his views on numerous issues concerned with the Indian society in particular and humanity in general. He worked not only for the emancipation of the nation, but for liberation of all the suppressed and oppressed sections of society and empowerment of women as well. In Gandhian view, empowerment means equal status to women and provides equal opportunity and freedom to develop them. Man should control the pleasure of senses and not to consider the women just a sex object. Sensual pleasures have no known bounds”. Gandhi said “The goal of women empowerment depends on the threefold revaluation. First of all, bring a change in their lives. Secondly, create a change in their lives. Thirdly, change their social structure”. An attempt is made in the present paper to understand Gandhi’s views on women in context of social, economic and political sphere. Objectives of the current study are: a) to understand the role of Gandhi ji for the empowerment of women b) to know the position of women in socio- economic and political field. c) to understand the various issues and the challenges coming in the way of women empowerment. The researcher has collected the data from the secondary sources like books, journals, magazines and various other publications have also been consulted. Findings of the study have revealed that Gandhi’s view on women empowerment is quite relevant in present era. Considering the fact that Gandhi has believed in the empowerment of women a decade ago, but still its relevance is and will be necessitated in every phase of time.

Keywords – Women Empowerment, Sustainable Development, Gender Equality, Humanity.

----- X -----

INTRODUCTION

“There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women “

Kofi Annan

Empowerment means creating an atmosphere in which one can make decisions and make choices either individually or collectively for revolution. It is a multi-dimensional process which facilitates individual or group of individual to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. The empowerment of women play vital role to solve the many social problems and to uplift the status of women in economic, social and political field as they are traditionally underprivileged in the society. Women empowerment is a condition must for creating a good nation. Women empowerment means emancipation of women from the scathe grips of social, political, economic and gender based discrimination. Women

empowerment is not a new concept it is quite a well-known concept around the world. Women all over the globe have been challenging and face many social problems since the beginning of history. The objective of women empowerment is simply means to strengthen them. The strength may be giving in social, political or economic field and also to provision of health and nutrition. The concept of Women empowerment was initiated at the International women conference in 1985 at Nairobi, which defined it as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favor of women. The National commission for women was set up by an Act of parliament in 1990 to safeguard the right and legal entitlement of women. In recent years the empowerment of women has been notable the central issue in determining the status of women. India has also ratified various international conventions and human rights instrument committing to secure equal rights of women. Key among them is the endorsement of the convention on “elimination of

all forms of Discrimination Against women (CEDAW) in 1993. The Cairo conference in 1994 organized by UN on population and development called consideration to women empowerment as a vital focus on the three variables that reflect women's participation in socio-political power or decision making, education and health. And also government of India declared 2001 as the year of women empowerment. The status of women in India has been subject to many great transformations over the past few millennia. In ancient period, they enjoyed equal status with men, through the low in the medieval period, to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers. One of them is Mahatma Gandhi. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation, sought to bring a revolutionary change in the position of women in the 20th century. The ideas and actions undertaken by Mahatma Gandhi for the women position in the society can never be doubted. Gandhi ji played the important role to eradicate the social evils against the women like child marriage, dowry system, purdah system, gender discrimination ,untouchability etc. that are existed in the Indian society.

“Women are gifted with equivalent mental capacities and therefore she has equal rights”. However, due the force of custom, ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying superiority over women. (Speeches and writings of Mahatma Gandhi)

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the role of Gandhi ji for women empowerment.
- To study the views of Gandhi ji on man – women relationship.
- To know the position of women in socio-economic and political field.
- To identify the challenges for empowerment of women.
- To know the constitutional provision for women empowerment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the present study, data has been collected from the secondary sources like books, journals, magazines and some other publications.

Gandhi's Vision of Women

There was an evident departure of Gandhi's vision of women from the other social reformers. The opinion taken by other social reformers and leaders prior to Gandhi created a helpless image of the Indian women. During the period of emergence of Gandhi, new conception of women gradually gained recognition. For Gandhi, “Women were not mere toys in the hands of men, neither their competitors. Women are at par

with men, one complementary the other”. According to Gandhi, “Education for women was the need of the time that would ensure their moral development and make them capable of occupying the same podium as that of men”. In Gandhi's views, “Women can never be considered to be the weaker sex. In fact, women for Gandhi were incarnation of virtues like knowledge, tolerance, modesty, sacrifice, and faith”. These qualities were indispensable for imbibing the virtue of Satyagraha. The tenet of ahimsa as proclaim by Gandhi incorporates the virtue of suffering as is evident in the women. Gandhi invoke the instance of ancient role models who were the greatest of Indian womanhood, like Draupadi, Savitri and Sita , to reveal that Indian women could never be feeble. Women have equal mental abilities as that of men an equal right to freedom. In Gandhi's words,” The wife is not the husband's slave but his companion, his helper and an equal in all his joys and sorrows as free as the husband to choose her path”.

Importance of women envisioned by Gandhi

Gandhi admitted that the role of women in political, economic and social emancipation of the country was of overriding importance. Gandhi believed that the women had the capability to carry on a non-violent crusade. Women played a key role in India's freedom struggle under his guidance. Women held public meetings, selling foreign alcohol, organized picketing of shops and article, sold khadi and actively participated in national movements. They bravely faced the cudgel of the police and even were behind the bars. Gandhi's encourage the women to join India's freedom struggle for independence was instrumental in transforming the outlook of women. Gandhi concept of Swaraj uprooted the age old taboos and restrictive customs. Through their participation in Indian struggle, women of India broke down the restraint of oppression that had relegated them to a secondary position from time immemorial.

In the context of economic emancipation of women was concerned, Gandhi felt that men and women had different spheres of work. In his opinion, women could take to economic activities to enhance the income of her families like spinning, which Gandhi believed to be a good option available to the women. In the social sphere, Gandhi envisaged the role of women very critical in doing away with the forces of communalism, caste system and untouchability.

Status of Women before Independence

To know the role of Gandhi that played for improving the position of women in society, it is essential to look at the women status prevalent at that time. When Gandhi emerged on to the political leader, social evils like child marriage, dowry system, purdah system, gender discrimination and untouchability were rampant in the Indian society. The percentage of women in basic education was very low and also their health condition was not

good. Only few could avail the facility of education and attend the schools. It was in such a depressing situation that Gandhi took the responsibility of shouldering a social movement that led to a major reorientation of the common notion in the society. Mahatma Gandhi argues that social reforms were essential for the restructuring of the societal values that had so far dominated the perception of Indian women. Acc. to Gandhi, "It is good to swim in the waters of tradition, but to sink in them is suicide". The custom of child marriage and dowry system became a target of his criticisms. In his opinion, child marriage is a source of physical deterioration as well as a moral evil. He defined dowry marriages as 'heartless' and opined that girls should never marry men who demand dowry, at the cost of their self-respect and dignity. Gandhi believed that the basis of marriage is mutual love and respect. He advised people to solemnize inter communal marriages between the harijans and caste Hindus. The system of purdah also came under Gandhi's attacks and he argues purdah system was no less than a "vicious, brutal, and barbarous" practice. The dilemma of the devadasis, a part of the lower, untouchable segment of the society had an ineradicable effect on the sensitive mind of the Mahatma Gandhi. According to Gandhi, one of the first goals that need to be accomplished as soon as the country won freedom was to abolish the system of devdasis or temple women.

Gandhi's Views on Woman as 'Herald' of Change

Education is the most commanding instrument for changing women's position in society. Women and girls experience multiple and intersecting inequalities. Structural barriers in the social, political, economic and environmental spheres produce and reinforce these inequalities. Obstacles to women's economic and political empowerment and violence against women and girls' are barricades to sustainable development and the achievement of human rights, gender equality, justice and peace. Women have the ultimate potential to change themselves and that of their communities and countries in which they live. Unequal opportunities between men and women impede women's ability to lift themselves from dearth and secure improved options to improve their lives. Investing in women's and girls' education is one of the most efficient ways to reduce poverty. Gandhiji stated that "as for illiteracy among the women, its cause is not simply laziness and inertia as in the case of men. A stronger basis is the status of inferiority with which an immemorial tradition has, partially branded her. Man has converted her into a domestic labor and an instrument of his pleasure, instead of considering her as his helpmate and 'better half'. This results into semi-paralysis in our society. Woman has aptly been called the mother of the race. We owe it to her and to ourselves to eliminate the great wrong that we have done her."

Gandhi's idea on vocational education was unique which even now-a-days is being promoted by the government. Gandhi was a critic of traditional

education and viewed that education, should be an all-round drawing of the best in child and man in body, mind and spirit. Gandhi was a protagonist of women education. He advocated that there should be no difference in equality of status between men and women in society. He strongly opposed exclusion of women in the name of customs and widowhood. He wanted to liberate women from social serfdom. So, the number of girl students considerably mounted in various educational institutions inside the country. Thus, Gandhi emphasized the need of women education to develop the lot of society. Women in India still suffer from gender based inequality because of the lack of gender sensitization on the part of males. Many of us censured that degradation of values and ethics in the society is the origin of such problems. These problems are related to the lack of gender sensitivity (directly or indirectly) be it the case of eve-teasing, domestic violence or the case of brutal rape. The blunt truth is whatever has permeated in the minds of the members of the society has finally been given to them by their socio-cultural environment which mainly includes their school, peers, family. Mainly, the responsibility for developing gender sensitization rests on the shoulders of family members and educators. They are the one who can inspire the feeling of gender equality in young girls and boys and develop the understanding for each other. In the present scenario, even females seem to be unable to find their gender sensitivity towards males. Working on many fronts at the same time, no respect in family and society, getting no care and appreciation in return, frustrated from earning. Their outburst comes in the form of separations, broken families or as live-in relationships searching for absolute freedom for oneself. Even girls judge themselves that as they are physically weaker than boys, they would never be able to fight in any manner against them. Gandhi ji realized that this comes from how the boy has learnt to treat a female from his environment at home and at school. He has been observing throughout his life at home, a mother following the instructions of a ruling father, a sister being yelled at for not looking after him properly or not carrying out the household jobs properly in her mother's absence. It was to transform this narrow perspective that Gandhi prepared a primer for the children for a primary school. This Primer or Balpothi is in the form of a mother teaching the child. In his book, the last chapter on 'House Work' merits serious attention. It expressed the concept of gender equality right within the frontier of family. In his book, through their imaginary dialogue among sister, brother and mother within the household, he tried to teach children that house work is a shared responsibility of both men and women and boy and girl who live together under one roof and share unbreakable kinship. The book containing this chapter on 'House Work' is of colossal significance for 21st century world marked by women's struggle for achieving empowerment and gender justice. Gandhi ji encouraged women to do intellectual work

and men to help in and caring, cooking, cleaning conventionally 'women's chores'.

Gandhi's views on Gram Swaraj

According to Gandhi, woman was neither man's play thing, nor his challenger, struggling to be like him. What she needed only was education, her birthright recognition to be free and equal and to steer her own destiny side by side with man. Sarvodaya means 'development of all'. Gandhi's concept of development is sarvodaya through Antyodaya, involving the wellbeing of all through the weakest of the society. He considered principles of cooperation and collective endeavor central to society. Gandhian model highlighted the decentralization of socio-economic and political systems starting from the lowest to the highest level of the village life. Village life should awaken a sense of cooperation and fellowship. Gandhiji mentioned that "if each woman in India spins, then a unspoken revolution will certainly be created, of which Jawaharlal can make complete use. Until and unless the steam generated is put to proper use, the engine will not move and the person generating the steam may himself be burnt by it even unto death. We do not ask to universalize the charkha through mass construction in one place. Our idea is to make the charkha and all its accessories in the vicinity where the spinners live".

Gandhi against Gender –Based Discrimination

Gandhi was extremely against gender discrimination. He doesn't like the Indian society's fondness for a boy and neglects a girl child. In fact, in most cases she is not allowed to take birth or her continued existence is not ensured. Gandhi described discrimination against women as a relic. He said that, "I fail to see any reason for celebration over the birth of a son and for grieving over the birth of a daughter. Both are God's gifts. They have an equal right to live freely and are equally needed to keep the world going". Gandhi ji called "women as the epitome of sacrifice and ahimsa". Gandhi further states that "A daughter's share must be equal to that of a son and the husband's earnings are a shared property of husband and wife as he makes money by her assistance. He had almost a perceptive understanding of women and their problems and had a deep sympathy for them. The tyrannical custom of dowry too came under blaze from Gandhi. He preferred girls to continue to be unmarried all their lives than to be dishonored and humiliated by marrying men who is demanding dowry. He condemned that marriage must be stopped to be a manner of arrangement by parents for money. The system was directly connected with caste system. He opined that the girls or boys or their parents will have to break the bonds of caste if this sin is to be eradicated. In the freedom struggle, thousands of women were gathered with Gandhi on call for civil disobedience. Women sidelined their traditional roles, came out of shelter, cast off their purdah, entered the public realm along with men, offered Satyagraha, remained fearless by police beating and extreme

hardships in prison. Even illiterate tribal women joined the freedom movement. He further asserted, "I am adamant in the matter of woman's right. In my opinion she should labor under no legal disability not suffered by man. One should treat daughter and sons on an equal footing of perfect equality".

Gandhi's View on Women Upliftment and Political participation

Gandhi worked in all spheres not only for the political emancipation of the nation, but for liberation of all the oppressed and suppressed sections of society. One of the noteworthy results of his life has been the awakening of women, which made them discard their deep-rooted sense of inferiority and rise with dignity and self-esteem. Acc. to Gandhi, "When woman, whom we all call abala becomes sabala, all those who are helpless will become powerful". Mahatma Gandhi is one of them who encouraged women's active participation in the freedom struggle-marking him as a rare promoter of women's liberation. In Gandhi words, "My contribution to the great problem (of women's role in society) lies in my presenting for acceptance of truth and ahimsa in every walk of life, whether for individuals or nations. I have hugged the hope that in this, woman will be the unquestioned leader and, having thus found her place in human evolution, will shed her inferiority complex. Women's entry into national politics through non-violent methods brought unbelievable results. On the one hand, women became aware of their inner strength and on the other hand, the process brought human and moral elements into politics. Gandhi had tremendous faith in women's innate capacity for non-violence. And his experience of participation by women in politics from his days in South Africa till the end of his life bears testimony to the reality that they never failed his expectations. Women's participation in the independence struggle feminized nationalism and the nationalist fight and struggle helped them to liberate from age old traditions.

Though Gandhi had never challenged the traditional set up, he inspired women to shape out their own destinies within it, and thereby changing its very quintessence. Women learnt from Gandhi that how to be strong, even if they seem weak and to object to injustice. They understood that they do not have to accept the standards of male-dominated politics. They evolved their own perspectives and formulated their own methods. In a way they presented an appraisal of the colonial unethical state.

Gandhi had seen woman is devoted to service and not to power. When asked by a woman to him about the political scene and the scantiness of women in it, Gandhi wrote, "As long as considerations of caste and community persist to weigh with us and rule our choice, women will be well-advised to remain detached and thereby build up their prestige". He further stated that "Women workers should enlist women as voters, should impart or have imparted to them practical education, also teach them to think

independently, liberate them from the chains of caste that bind them so that a change could be brought about in them which will induce men to realize women's strength and ability for sacrifice and give her places of honor. If they will do this, they will purify the current uncertain atmosphere."

Current Scenario on Women Empowerment

Based on the opinions of many social reformers for women empowerment, they uplift the status of woman in social, economic and political field. As far as the social status of the women is concerned, it is better than previous period. Now a day's women is participating in almost all the walks of life and earning their livelihood and become economically independent. Through the Panchayat Raj Institutions, millions of women have actively entered political life in India. Even in the constitution, as per the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment acts, all local elected bodies reserve one-third of their seats for women. Although the percentage of women in various levels of political activity has increased considerably, women are still under-powered in governance and decision making positions. Women in India now participated in areas such as education, politics, media, sports, service sector and science and technology. But to the deep-rooted patriarchal mentality in the Indian society, women are still humiliated, tortured, victimized and exploited.

Constitutional Provisions for Empowering Women in India:

- Article 14- Equality before law for all persons.
- Article 15(1)- Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
- Article 15(3)- Special provisions may be made by the state in favors of women and children.
- Article 16-Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.
- ▶ **As in Directive Principles of State Policy:**
- Article 39(A)-Securing for men and women equally the right to an adequate means of livelihood.
- Article 39(d)- equal pay for equal work for both men and women
- Article 42- Securing just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief.
- Article 243(D)- Reservation of seats for women not less than one-third in direct election of Panchayats.

- Article 243(T)- Reservation of seats for women not less one-third in direct election of Municipalities

Hindrances of Women Empowerment

There are some major problems that were faced by women from history and still today upto some extent.

- ▶ Gender discrimination
- ▶ Lack of education
- ▶ Child marriage
- ▶ Domestic violence
- ▶ Endogamy marriage
- ▶ Family responsibility
- ▶ Social status
- ▶ Dowry

Initiatives for empowerment of women

- ◆ Providing education.
- ◆ To encourage the women for self-employment.
- ◆ To change the mentality of society towards the word "women".
- ◆ To change the control over decision making capability of women.
- ◆ To encourage the women to excel in fields in which they were interested.
- ◆ Changes in women access and control over resources.
- ◆ Changes in women labour patterns.
- ◆ To create self-help groups for women.
- ◆ To aware the women for their socio-political rights.

CONCLUSION

As per the Gandhian thought, the empowerment of women, without sharing our intellectual, financial and material resources, is not possible. No social reformer has done as much as Mahatma Gandhi has done to bring out masses of illiterate women from the four walls of their houses. So, in the present era also there is a need to know about the Gandhian efforts for women empowerment. Gandhi ji believed that men and women are equal and they are

together responsible for finding solutions for their personal and social problems. There are many provisions in our constitution to improve the position of women, but this is not sufficient to accomplish the objective of women empowerment. There is the need of the hour to change the outlook of society towards women and to create an environment in which there will be no gender discrimination and women have been provided full chance in decision making and taking an interest in political, social, and financial existence with a feeling of equity. Thus, women are able to take part in all the spheres of life in modern India at par with men. When a women moves forward, the family moves, the village moves, and the Nation moves.

REFERENCES

1. Despande, S and Sethi, S. (2010). Role and Position of women empowerment in Indian Society, International referred journal. Vol. 1, Issue 17
2. Devi, T. R. (2017). Gender equality: Women empowerment. Global Journal for Research Analysis. Vol.6, Issue 9
3. Fischer, L. (1951). Mahatma Gandhi-His life and Times, Janathan cape Publishers, London.
4. Gandhi, M.K. (1929). The Story of my Experiment with Truth, Navjivan Magazine publishers, Ahmedabad.
5. Gandhi, M.K. (1962). Village Swaraj. Navjivan publishing House, Ahmadabad.
6. Kadam, R.N. (2012). Empowerment of Women in India –An attempt to fill the Gender Gap, International journal of scientific and research, Vol.2, Issue 6
7. Kapadia, S. (1995). A Tribute to Mahatma Gandhi: His views on Women and Social Change, Journal of South Asian Women Studies ,vol.1
8. Nagaraja, B. (2013). Empowerment of women in India: A critical Analysis. IOSR journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, Vol.9, Issue 2
9. Parathara, Fr. T.J. (2016). Gandhi's Concept of Womanhood: A Critical Study. International Journal of Scientific and Engineering Research, Vol. 7, Issue 10

Web References:

1. Patel, V. Gandhi and Empowerment of Women. Retrieved from

<http://www.mkgandhi.org/article/womenempowerment/html>

2. Shubhangi. Gandhi and women empowerment, Retrieved from <http://www.mkgandhi.org/article/womenempowerment/html>

3. <http://www.gandhilibrary.org>

4. <http://www.egyankosh.ac.in>

Corresponding Author

Ms. Jyoti Devi*

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology

jyotimohan62@gmail.com