

Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi on the Empowerment of Women – A Study of Rural Women

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I. Introduction:

Women's attitude of inferiority and dignity were transformed by education as a result of Mahatma Gandhi's life's work. In a culture where men predominate, he underlined the value of women's education for granting them equal rights and position as well as for raising their children to be responsible adults. Gandhi's life work focused on the importance of education in order to transform women's status. "I believe in the proper education of women," he wrote in the publication "Harijan." Sharma (2007). Gandhiji maintained that women's religious convictions, customs, and legal frameworks play a major role in their marginalization and sense of being male slaves. In the belief that men and women are complimentary, he wanted women to understand their rights and equal standing with men. He also thought that women are empowered by knowledge. to claim their rights as indigenous people. Gandhiji held that although men are better at outwardly visible tasks, women's influence comes from their private lives. He underlined how crucial education is to advancing gender equality and giving women the confidence to stand up for their rights. Since both men and women have domestic obligations, Maatma Gandhi thought that education should be adapted to their respective life stages. He thought that women's illiteracy was a result of their social status rather than a lack of aptitude or desire to learn. According to him, women ought to know more about their families, values and that because of their great capacity for self-sacrifice and suffering, girls were less valuable than men. Gandhiji felt that women acquire enduring strength via education, which enables them to influence decision-making processes and advance social and economic justice. When it comes to domestic duties like childrearing and education, both men and women are accountable. Gandhiji encouraged women to challenge religious texts, support legal education, and follow their own inspiration. and customs that diminished their social standing. By promoting social, political, and legal equality as well as encouraging education, women can help create a more just society. Mahatma Gandhi thought women could make a big difference in society with their progressive beliefs and deeds. His extreme opinions are consistent with Gandhi's focus on education as a tool for enacting meaningful moral, social, and political reforms in Indian society. The radical ideas of Gandhiji show how women may bring about meaningful social, political, and moral change.

II. Review of Literature:

In the essay "Drawing a Link—Women's Empowerment and Mahatma Gandhi," Bhattacharyya M. (2016) investigated the degree of economic empowerment attained by women participating in the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in the district of Goalpara, Assam. An investigation into the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act was carried out in the Goalpara District of Assam. Based on nine variables and computed using the empowerment index, the study compared the level of women's empowerment before and after participating in MGNREGA. The results show that although MGNREGA is a significant step in guaranteeing the economic empowerment of rural women, it was not appropriately administered in the region, leaving both men and women without 100 working days, with inconsistent pay, relatively stable progress, and subpar employment.

In their paper "Mahatma Gandhi's Thoughts on Women Empowerment and Present-Day India," Campbell and Dass (2019) examined Gandhi's views on women, Gandhi's views on social issues against women, the role of women in forming future Indian citizens, the current state of women in India, and efforts for women's empowerment in post-independence India. Scenario: They discovered that Mahatma Gandhi supported women's economic autonomy. Gandhiji believed that women were the ones who were responsible for preparing India's future inhabitants. It is their responsibility to teach and instill gender equality in society. All women in society should be empowered; it shouldn't just be restricted to family members.

"The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi": This multi-volume collection includes Gandhi's speeches, writings, and letters that explore his thoughts on women's rights and empowerment. It is a comprehensive source for understanding Gandhi's philosophy and his advocacy for women, particularly in rural settings.

"Women and the Indian Freedom Struggle" by R. P. Anand: This book explores the significant role played by women in India's independence movement and how Gandhi's leadership empowered them. It highlights rural women's participation in the non-cooperation movement and their involvement in various social reforms.

"Gandhi and Women" by Raghunath Anant Joshi: This work offers insights into Gandhi's vision for women's emancipation and his belief that true liberation could only be achieved when women are treated equally in all aspects of life, including rural society. It discusses Gandhi's influence on women's political engagement and leadership.

"Gandhi: A Spiritual Biography" by Krishna Kripalani: This biography provides an in-depth exploration of Gandhi's thoughts on non-violence, spirituality, and how these principles applied to his views on women's empowerment.

In her paper "The Women's Question: Participation in the Indian National Movement and its impact," Singh N. (2015) examined women's participation in the National Movement, the women's organization that emerged in the early 20th century, and women's role during India's partition. In 1947. The study finds that colonial history demonstrated that the modern idea of sex rights in the public sphere in India had a public-private divide, which concealed and strengthened the granting of public rights to Indian women's subordination and private disenfranchisement. Even after independence, legislation were powerless to alter the way society perceived and treated women.

One of the best depictions of the political figure is seen in Ved Mehta's 1977 book on Gandhi. By visiting Gandhi's family, friends, and supporters around the globe and meticulously documenting his everyday activities, Mehta paints a complex and nuanced portrait of the great leader and makes him come to life.

III. Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the study is to:

1. Study Mahatma Gandhi's views on social customs.
2. Influence of women on Mahatma Gandhi's Life and Philosophy
3. The application of Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy for the Empowerment of the Women

IV. Research Methodology Applied for this Study:

This study is conducted based on the observation and focused group discussions with the women members of the different Self Help Groups of Rural Bengal. These groups are selected based on their philosophies of the empowerment of the women primarily based on Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy. Secondary data is also collected from the internet, different news papers, journals etc.

V. Findings and Discussions:

Gandhi's Opinions on Social Traditions:

Due to equal sex, education, marriage, love marriages, and widowhood, women's status was accepted in India during the Vedic era. However, women's position has declined over the previous two millennia. Gandhiji, a well-known Indian philosopher, denounced social ills that affected Indian women and concentrated on cultural renewal. He thought that in order to restructure social values that had dominated Indian women's perspectives, social reforms were essential. Gandhiji denounced a number of social ills and behaviors that were rationalized by their traditional penalties, including prostitution, child marriage, widowhood, Sati Pratha, and dowries. Gandhiji's work sought to encourage cultural renewal and restore the value of the person. Ganguli (1972).

Sati Pratha: Gandhiji chastised Sati Pratha, saying it was an indication of spirituality but soul ignorance. According to him, the soul is eternal, unchangeable, and imminent; it dies together with the body but rather along the journey from one moral state to another. Gandhiji suggested that renunciation, self-denial, sacrifice, and devotion to one's spouse, family, and nation are ways for women to exhibit Satihood. He did not, however, contest the unequal distribution of property, which allowed widows to obtain resources for subsistence.

Balya Bibaha(Child Marriage): Gandhiji was against child marriage because he believed it to be inhumane and unethical, leading to moral decay and physical degeneration. Early marriage prohibitions, he contended,

should be dismissed as interpolation since they did not reflect the fundamental nature of Hinduism. In order to ensure that both boys and girls were fully matured and had a say in their life partner choices, he argued for girls to be 16 years old. Gandhiji thought that since the majority of limitations were caused by the evil in the marriage institution, women's advancement could only be achieved via drastic changes to the system. In order to help young girls who had been sold by their parents or fallen prey to lustful males, he promoted the founding of Mahila Ashramas.

Dowry System: Gandhiji was against the dowry system, calling it a "hatred system," "marriage by purchase," and a practice that dehumanizes people. In addition to criticizing the customary age of marriage for females, he contended that dowries degrade women's education. He urged educated men and women to fight wickedness, advising young men to wait until they are 25 or 30 years old to get married and ladies to wait until they find grooms who won't seek for favors. Additionally, he supported arranged marriages, but cautioned parents to talk to their children over 25 about it.

Widowhood: Gandhiji denounced the harsh circumstances that Indian widows, especially those who were thought to be slave children, had to endure. According to him, young widows should have the freedom to decide whether to get married again or stay widowed, and their parents should marry them off. He looked at in Hinduism, forced widowhood was viewed as a curse, whereas voluntary widowhood was considered a blessing. He maintained that being a forced widow was an intolerable burden, corrupted by religion and tainted by hidden vices.

Purdah: Gandhiji was chastised for the Pardha tradition because he thought it lacked protection from temptation. Even when compelled to do so, he exhorted men to believe their ladies and stay loyal to themselves. He rejected Purdah as an Indian custom and felt that Sita was essential to Rama's freedom and independence. He suggested that all Indians destroy the Purdah with the lord because he thought that if women were kept inside their homes, humanity would suffer.

Prostitution: Gandhiji did not denounce prostitution, but he did reject it, claiming it was moral leprosy. He thought that men who went to these locations had equal responsibility for the growth of evil. He admitted that if the profession grew, guys would become just as low as women. He thought everything as long as unmarried women were devoted to lust, males should bend their heads in shame.

Divorce: Mahatma Gandhi saw marriage as a condition of practice that necessitated moral observance and repentance, and he highlighted the value of straightforward unions. He felt that moral constraint should be followed in order to preserve a married relationship and that divorce is not the only way to do so keep your marriage strong and avoid unplanned divorces.

Economic Freedom of the Women: Mahatma Gandhi had always advocated for the economic freedom of the women in their personal, social and professional lives.

Social Position of the Women: Mahatma Gandhi in his philosophy has always advocated for the upliftment of the women in the society with high level of respect and value. It is a burning example of the empowerment of the women based on Gandhian philosophy.

Influence of Women on Gandhiji's Life:

Motivated by his mother Putlibai and his wife Kasturba, Gandhiji married at the age of thirteen. She was a loyal and self-reliant woman who supported his endeavors and gave him insightful advice. Gandhiji abandoned her spiritual bent and joined him as an equal partner, supporting his projects. Being a mother has become a symbol of India's emancipation, as a mother gives her everything to her child till they are self-sufficient. They still collaborate despite their development. Cultivating his mother's heart was essential for societal transformation and purification from ills, he learned in his social reform activities. This model illustrates how crucial motherhood is to bringing about social transformation. Mehta (2013). Geraldine Forbes talks on the principles Sarojini Naidu created while serving as President of the Indian National Congress, emphasizing the Indian people as "members of the common family," India as the "house," and the Indian woman as the mother, inspired by Gandhiji colleague Sarojini Naidu and British feminist activist Annie Besant. Gandhi, Naidu, and other proponents of women's and national freedom concurred that women and India will cooperate to carry out India's national model. Gandhiji thought that women could drastically change India and that a just social structure required more than just equal rights.

Relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy for the Empowerment of Women:

Gandhiji was a good man who had a distinct viewpoint on the problems facing women in society. Under his guidance, his nonviolent philosophy—which was not novel—became revolutionary. He was one of the most moral and godly historical characters of the modern era because of his purity of thinking and sincere goals. Both men and women will continue to benefit from Gandhian literature's broader viewpoint, which promotes a deeper comprehension of life and one another. Gandhiji's nonviolence is a potent weapon against violence, but it is less successful when applied by the weak. It enables people to move from hopelessness to introspection and from enslavement to liberation. Since Gandhiji is the greatest founder of this philosophy, non-violence is the primary and most effective sculptor of the human spirit, which is the source of non-violence's strength. (Nadkarni, Sivanna, & Suresh, 2017).

Unlike other progressive reformers who viewed women as equals to men, Gandhiji took a different stance on women. He thought that women's moral growth and ability to accomplish the same objectives as men depended heavily on their education. Gandhiji highlighted the value of women's attributes in satyagraha ideals and felt that their only viable option was to put up with suffering. Women struggle with his ahimsa ideology, which placed emphasis on the distortion of suffering. Gandhiji thought that women were essential to the advancement of nonviolence. Although it has drawbacks, Mahatma Gandhi thought that satyagraha was the most potent nonviolent weapon. "Violation of the law" describes nonviolent, unfair activities like campaigning and picketing. Although Gandhiji's goal of a comprehensive society has not been achieved, women may have used this to strive for justice and equality. For middle-class feminists, professors, and elites, whose dialectic is distinct from Gandhiji's, satyagraha functions as a signifier. disadvantaged ladies. Gandhiji was sympathetic to underrepresented groups and had a profound awareness of the issues facing women. Whether liberal or conservative, he addressed gender and caste issues in a sacred pantheon. Women leaders had an impact on his vision, which emphasized the value of comprehending and assisting neglected people. Gandhiji saw the fight for India's freedom as a means of empowering women. Men and women are equal in spite of social inequities. Gandhiji thought that the best way to resolve social issues, such as those involving men and women or capitalists and workers, was via satyagraha. Women must rethink their objectives through satyagraha because there is no one solution to their challenges. By 1940, Gandhiji had shown that he understood the dynamics of society by providing a nonviolent means of women's participation in the Swaraj political movement. Women's

Content transcends selfishness by concentrating on their wants and values. They have to perform for parties, actively participate in decision-making bodies, and draft manifestos that represent their demands. In addition to being involved in political organizations like Mahatma Gandhi's India, women are essential to social and economic advancement. However, women outside of Gandhiji's works struggle to successfully carry out these objectives, while males in politics frequently overlook social justice-gender links. women, allowing them to link with the national movement and regain their uniqueness. Mahatma Gandhi's revolutionary ideas created a new custom that let native women to join the nationalist cause and leave their homes. Being on an equal basis with men and actively participating in freedom, built trust and gave them the strength to resist patriarchal control. Gandhiji believed in moral behavior, which drove her to fight for women's rights and efficiency. With a focus on equal pay distribution, the Indian National Congress's 1931 Fundamental Right Resolution sought to provide equal opportunity for men and women. Gandhiji advocated for women's liberation and sought political liberation for all marginalized groups in society. Her life's work was to educate women and help them feel better about themselves. Indian heroines who taught women about emancipation and fought injustice, such as Gandhiji and Khadi, were instrumental in the fight for freedom. Sketches of Gandhiji's life and Swadeshi power have struck a chord with Indian women everywhere, and Khadi's peaceful resistance to foreign domination transformed women's perceptions of the world and involvement in domestic politics. Through their respective life styles and attire, women's rights advocates Gandhiji and Khadi have battled against injustice and inequity. While Khadi's nonviolent method transformed women's perceptions of reality and involvement in national politics, Gandhiji's message has reached women all over India. Significant developments resulted from Gandhiji's call for women to join the struggle for independence. Women were taught to demonstrate against injustice and defy male-dominated political norms. Their courage and resolve enabled them to overcome their initial struggles brought on by ignorance and lack of autonomy. Thousands of Indian women were inspired by Gandhiji's ideas, which helped them develop a new sense of self. (Dalton and Gandhi, 1996).

Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy on the empowerment of women, particularly in rural settings, is rooted in his ideas of equality, self-reliance, and non-violence. Gandhi viewed women as the foundation of society and emphasized their roles in both the domestic sphere and in social and political movements. His thoughts on women's empowerment were interwoven with his broader vision for India's independence, social reform, and rural development. Below are some key references and themes related to Gandhi's philosophy of women empowerment, with a focus on rural women:

Key Areas:

1. **Equality and Dignity:** Gandhi consistently advocated for the equal treatment of women in all aspects of life, including education, social practices, and politics. He believed that true independence could not be achieved without the upliftment of women, especially those in rural areas.
2. **Non-violence and Self-reliance (Ahimsa and Swaraj):** Gandhi's concepts of non-violence (ahimsa) and self-reliance (swaraj) were essential to his vision of empowering rural women. He believed that women should be able to live independently, free from exploitation, and play an active role in economic and social activities.
3. **Education for Empowerment:** Gandhi emphasized the importance of education for women, particularly in rural areas, as a means of empowerment. He advocated for practical, life-oriented education that could provide rural women with skills for self-sufficiency and leadership.
4. **Role in Social and Political Movements:** Gandhi's leadership in India's independence movement provided women with opportunities to participate in political action. Rural women, in particular, were engaged in non-violent protests, and their contributions helped shape India's path to independence.
5. **Revival of Traditional Roles:** Gandhi promoted the idea that women could be empowered by reconnecting with their traditional roles as caregivers, but also by embracing new roles in agriculture, industry, and governance.

VI. Conclusion:

Gandhiji had a major impact on women's rights and equality in the struggle for national independence because of his denunciation of social problems and faith in the moral strength of women. Women changed the lives of Indian women by taking part in Gandhi's mass movements. The National Congress of India was founded in 1885, and Jawaharlal Nehru concurred that economic freedom was essential to women's legal status after being influenced by liberal ideas. The researcher maintained that if women were kept apart from social, political, and economic fights, their efforts would continue to be restricted to the top classes. Organizations such as the Women's India Association, Indian Women's National Council, and All India Women's Conference were established as a result of the Indian National Congress' 1931 Fundamental Rights Resolution, which upheld gender equality (Kuriakose & Gandhi, 1995). Women took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement in the 1920s and 1930s, which resulted in hundreds of arrests. Gandhiji's patriarchal ideology viewed women as wives and mothers, blurring their roles. In spite of everything he acknowledged the functions of women, he thought that the partition of society into Varnas only applied to labor divisions and that the differences between men and women were found within their functional departments. Gandhiji emphasized women's duties in household matters and varied training, and he fought for equal rights and potential for men and women. He suggested part-time work and underlined that women shouldn't limit themselves to managing the home or raising children. Gandhiji wanted women to be financially independent and help support their families by doing household chores and spinning. With a mother educating a kid, Mahatma Gandhi founded an elementary school and promoted equal education for men and women as well as the dignity of domestic work. In order to reduce women's workload, Gandhiji promoted men taking on household duties. He valued women's autonomy and acknowledged their innate tendencies. Mahatma Gandhi believed that women's male sexuality made them more moral and disciplined, but they were against contraception because they believed that women's libido was weaker than men's. Instead, he believed that in order for the woman—the exact embodiment of Shakti—and her husband to lead a restrained life, they needed to acknowledge the moral potential that was concealed within them. A woman, according to Mahatma Gandhi, is a "long-suffering, selfless, and self-effacing being." However, Gandhiji's exalted capacity for quiet suffering can be one of the main signs of her subjugation and a major factor in her exclusion from family decision-making processes. Outside of it, there is "a glorified cult of Eternal Womanhood." Prabhath (2010).

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