

**UGC SPONSORED PROJECT**  
**ON**  
**IMPACT OF GANDHI ON WOMEN**  
**EMPOWERMENT**

**A Project submitted to the UGC sponsored  
Gandhian Study Centre,  
ADP College, Nagaon**



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# **IMPACT OF GANDHI ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

# **CHAPTER- I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

# IMPACT OF GANDHI ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

## Chapter- I INTRODUCTION

“To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it means injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then, indeed woman is less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man’s superior.

Gandhiji, *Young India*, April 10, 1930

Mahatma Gandhi is the name which represents the idealistic character of Indians so beautifully that we can easily know Indian philosophy through studying the diversified personality and strong humanity in Gandhi’s character. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi or popularly known as Gandhiji is known variously as the ‘father of the Nation’, ‘Mahatma’, ‘Apostle of non-violence’, ‘sacred warrior’, ‘Mahatma’, ‘Bapu’ etc. But sometimes he was also called disparagingly by some detractors as ‘the half naked fakir’ or Mahammad instead of Mahatma. However, he is the person who devoted his full life to truth, non violence, the promotion of communal harmony and cultural integrity. Certainly Gandhi has an extraordinary life and strong personality because of which he could easily conquer the hearts of millions of Indians even his enemies. It is not easy to write something about Gandhi with true analytical strategy because of his diversified contributions for the sake of humanity.

In this context J. L. Nehru, the first prime minister of India and a prolific writer rightly observed “No man can write a real life of Gandhi unless he is as big as Gandhi” Nehru again remarked “Many pictures rise in my mind of this man, whose eyes were often full of laughter and yet were pools of infinite sadness. But the picture that is dominant and most significant is as I saw him marching, staff in hand, to Dandi on the Salt March in 1930 there was the

pilgrim on his quest of truth, quite peaceful, determined and fearless, who would continue the quest and pilgrimage, regardless, of consequences.

It is true that Gandhi's valuable ideas have application wherever there are poor, oppressed people even in the richest country in the world. The great leaders like Martin Luther king Jr. Cesar Chaveg etc. were greatly influenced by the ideas of Gandhi. Gandhi was true fighter, a saint of great thoughts, clever politician, true and efficient leader of Modern world and what not. He was rightly named as 'seditious fakir' by British Prime Minister Winston Churchil and it is true from the contributions of Gandhi that he certainly and truly knew how to fight against the wrong and illegal system created by human force. Gandhi was India's foremost representative of the "crusade for civil rights and individual liberties".

Gandhi was the real 'Satyagrahi', the true follower of truth. From his great writings and contributions sometimes we get little bit inconsistency about his views on different facts. But it is very simple for Gandhi because he was attached with so many subjects with their wide spectrum that in the changing world and global perspective, environment allows to do that. In his own words, "People say I have changed my views, that I say today something different from that what I said yesterday, The fact of the matter is the condition have changed. I am the same. My work and deeds are dictated by prevailing conditions. There has been a gradual evolution in my environment and I react to it as a Satyagrahi" Gandhi had a world-wide view in each and every idea related to mankind. He was a true worker who believed hard working for establishment of truth. Humanity, equality, Equity, Love, Truth, nonviolence, fraternity, secularism etc are the great values which are beautifully explained by Gandhi for the sake of mankind in the world.

Gandhi is not a Preacher, but a doer. He engaged in Political activity with the objective of achieving specific goals. He believed that every age has its 'yugadharma', and the dharma of his age was politics . His singular aim in life was to attain 'moksha', and he firmly

believed that his moksha lay in the practice of politics. He did not attach any importance to his speeches and sermons, and said, "As a matter of fact my writings shall be cremated with my body. What I have done will endure, not what I have said or written." Gandhi stands in a category very different from that of the Buddha and Christ and has to be appraised very differently. When he said, "My life is my message," he meant that he had delivered his message through his praxis. (Ray, B.N. , Reading Gandhi, 2008).

Gandhi was the true believer in the view that all are equal in the eyes of the God. In Gandhi's word, "of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity – to me, the female sex , not the weaker sex." It is true that in Indian society man and woman are not equal in their respective status. Gandhi was a strong worker for empowerment and upliftment of women because almost half of the total population in our country is constituted by woman population and they are seen as oppressed community of our society. The proper development of our country can be ensured through the upliftment and empowerment of women. In the fervent ideas of Gandhi like modernity, nationalism, satyagrah, untouchability, communal harmony, non-violence, humanity etc. he always tried to establish the equal status of man and woman in our social norms. Gandhi's impact on women empowerment was so vibrant that the mass participation of women in national movement was ensured strongly. According to Veena Mazumdar, "Gandhi facilitated the acceptance of the women cause by the nationalists, particularly in the public life." Gandhi believed that women have their role to have strong, purifying and controlling influential role on family and society. He considered that the ideal woman was Sita or Draupadi having all the traits of morality .

Addressing women Gandhi explained in his own words "The economic and moral salvation of India rests mainly on you . The future of India lies on your knees for you

will nurture generation. You can bring up the children of India to become simple, God fearing and brave men and women.”

In the Gandhian period, women were given due importance as per their capacity and needs. Gandhi wanted the women force to participate in the movement on a large scale in various activities like satyagraha campaigns, processions and public meetings, organized demonstration in front of wine shop and foreign cloth shops etc. Gandhi was a true Indian leader who acted as a reformist as well as revivalist under Indian ideology, not western. Gandhi believed that in ancient period women occupied a respectable position in India. From the epithets like ‘ardhangini’, ‘sahadharmini’, ‘sahayatri’ etc. it is clear that women enjoyed a respectable position in India .But Gandhi himself realized that the status and position of women declined gradually in our country and because of which he tried to offer the equal status of man and women. Gandhi said, “women has a right to participate in the every minutest detail in activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him.”

Prof. J.N. Sharma, Dept of Gandhian studies, Punjab University (2006) rightly observed, “a passionate lover of humanity an implacable foe of injustice in whatsoever form or sphere, it is small wonder that Gandhiji early espoused the woman’s cause. And as in everything that he has preached, he began the reform at own home. Being as harsh as truth and merciless critic of himself, the moment he realized he was a “slave holder” as he has called himself, his attitude to his wife changed, and with that change began his work for the emancipation of womankind as a whole. With his masterly pen and from every platform, he throughout his long life of service, preached against the wrongs done to women in the name of law, tradition and even religion. He has spoken out fearlessly against enforced widowhood, Purdah, the dedications of girls to temples, prostitution, early marriage, the dowry system, the economic bondage and marital slavery of women. “Man and woman are equal in status”.

Gandhi was really uncompromising in women's rights. "I am uncompromising in the matter of woman's rights. In my opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality." It is said to think that the Smritis contain texts which can command no respect from men who cherish the liberty of woman as their own and who regard her as the mother of the race." "The saying attributes to Manu "for woman there can be no freedom" is not to me sacrosanct- are but a few lines from the many he has written on behalf of suppressed woman and are enough witness, if witness were indeed, of his burning desire to see woman restored to her natural and rightful place in society."<sup>1</sup>

Gandhi unequivocally affirmed his uncompromising stand in the matter of gender equality. He believed that women are also individuals as men and should be given the liberty to make their own moral claims. But somehow or other man has dominated woman from ages past and the view imposed on them with regard to their inferiority, was part of the "self interested teaching men," which had left women in the state of helplessness and dependence. He opposed such excessive subordination of the fair sex and wanted mutual consultation and cooperation between men and women<sup>2</sup>. Further Gandhi considered women not only equal to men, but in many ways superior to them. He accorded the high value to the qualities of suffering, sacrifice, humility, penance and tolerance.<sup>3</sup>

It is true that Gandhi considered bravery is recognized not in killing, dying or fighting, but it is assessed in highest sense of suffering. Women were treated by Gandhi as honoured comrades in woman life and service and he sought to forward that view to the common people of his Ram Rajya. He legitimizes the different social, cultural economic and political roles of men and women in terms of natural difference. He duly regarded the culturally conditioned patterns of behavior as belonging to the eternal and immutable essence of women.

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1. Thakur Bharti Women in Gandhi's Mass Movements, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi, 2006, P. Prasad XII, XII.
  2. Ibid, P. 25
  3. Bharti loccit

Gandhiji rightly emphasized upon the need of or compulsory education for girls for “enabling women to assert their natural right, to exercise them wisely and to work for their expansion also to achieve emancipation from male domination.”<sup>4</sup>

From the wide spectrum of life works of Gandhi, it is clearly observed that he is a true worker for women’s emancipation from the male dominated society. He really understood the concepts like women development, women empowerment, gender equality, gender friendliness etc. which have earned a global challenge in the present days competitive world with the massive popularity towards L.P.G. (Liberation Privalization and Globalization). Gandhi’s ideas and works were multidimensional in nature for overall development process of women. He carried out the parallel sessions of revolution and one among them is the women empowerment and in which he declared the war against the most destructive forces like compulsory widowhood, child marriage, satidahpratha, dowry system, purdah system, female prostitution, devdasi system, illiteracy among women, poverty among women, ignorance among women etc. □

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4. Gandhi M.K., Women, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1958, P.12

**CHAPTER II**  
**OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY**

## CHAPTER II

### Objectives and Methodology

“I believe in the proper education of women. But I do believe that woman will not make her contribution to the world by mimicking or running a race with men. She can run the race, but she will not rise to the great heights she is able of by mimicking man. She has to be the complement of man”.

*Harijan, Feb 27, 1937*

True Indian reformer and revolutionist Gandhiji is not simply an individual, rather he represented a great institution with Indian Ideology and resources which has global linkage with universal fraternity. His thoughts and works are important for all the oppressed people of the world invariably their motherland- rich or poor, colour- white or black, sex- male or female, religion- Hinduism, Islam or Christian or race. Gandhi's humanity has its worldwide fame not because of its great idealistic status, but it is important because of its common usage for the poor and oppressed people for the all places of the universe. Gandhi rightly observed that humanity is lost in the world at a large scale. The various evil forces under the name of some isms like capitalism or imperialism, Fascism or Nazism, Class conflict, exploitation of human being, materialism, consumerism etc. are nothing but the symptoms of the fatal disease of mankind. They may be the caused of by earth's, anxiety but actually they are created by man's "Lobhavada", "Avarice", "Prabhutavada", Power, "Pratishodhavada", revenge, "Bhogavada", Hedonism and "swarthavada", Selfishness. They are the outcome of these causes of which are becoming the cause of human anguish and destruction.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Tripathi Kamalapati, Gandhi and Humanity Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 1993, p. 130

Hence, humanity is the greatest force, by which the enemies of mankind can be detected. Gandhi who is the magnificence of humanity in its servant, who is anxious to liberate mankind from misery and who has the luminous message to illuminate the darkened path of human society.<sup>2</sup> In the present era of massive destruction of human values and loss of humanity, Gandhi showed us the right path of life by establishing equality between men and women. Atrocities against women are increasing in our Indian Society and it indicates another war between man and woman. Hence the equality between man and woman is the essential precondition for a bold humanistic Society with all values in tact. Gandhi was a stern supporter of Gender equality. He declared “I am firmly of opinion that India’s salvation depends on the sacrifice and enlightenment of her woman.”(Harijan,June,27,1936). In fact Gandhian studies are very much akin to the development of women force of the globe.

### **THE MAIN OBJECTIVES :**

1. To study the interrelationship between woman development and human development with reference to Gandhian studies.
2. To study the Gandhian thought regarding the emancipation of women.
3. To study the problems relating to woman empowerment in contemporary Indian society
4. To study the diversified role of Gandhi for development of our values with a goal of holistic development of human society.
5. To study about the goal of establishment of equality between men and women in our society.

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2. Tripathi Kamalapati, Gandhi and Humanity, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, p.-244

- 6) To study the extra ordinary impact of Gandhi on various developmental issues of woman which can ensure women empowerment.

### **Methodology :**

The study on impact of Gandhi on Women Empowerment is a study based on the secondary sources. It is true that Gandhiji is the second to none who devoted his life for the sake of humanity. Hence it is not an easy task to draw out the suggestions to the present society based on his works on women empowerment. Thousands of books have already been written by different scholars from different viewpoints and idealistic angles of Gandhiji.

Our present study is based on two sources namely (i) Gandhi's own books, writings and speeches on the theme of our study. (ii) Some books written by some other scholars on the related theme on women Empowerment and women development.

Apart from the books the contemporary impact of Gandhiji on the issue like women Development and emancipation is drawn on the basis of some critical studies and articles published in newspapers for the goal of gender equality and sustainable Development of the society based on human values.

### **Limitations of the study :**

The present study is designed as an analytical study on women empowerment in the light of Gandhiji. The works of Gandhi are so diversified that all the issues of women empowerment with a consistent idea cannot be easily incorporated in a single study. The present study is prepared to cover the common issues attached to common women in Indian society. Gandhiji, the father of Nation was closely associated with all classes of women in our society and worked hard for the removal of all types of injustice against them. As a True

worker for human development Gandhi was very strong for establishment of equality between men and women. The main limitations of the study are:-

- (i) The study is confined to Indian women.
- (ii) The study specially goes through the goal of women empowerment for holistic development of the society.
- (iii) The study is based on secondary sources like writings and reviews.
- (iv) Critical analysis based on primary sources under the influence of industrial result at the present era of liberalization, privatization and globalization on the presumption of materialism is given due importance at the time of our study.

**Period of study: Early Part of 2011.**

For the purpose of the project the studies are condensed.

Considering the need of woman Empowerment for establishment of the strong human society in the world the study is designed. Under the impact of MDG (Millennium Development Goals), the study draws its importance. □

**CHAPTER III**  
**OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE**

## Chapter III

### Overview of Literature

My mission is not merely brotherhood of Indian humanity. My mission is not merely freedom of India, though today it undoubtedly engrosses practically the whole of my life and whole of my time. But through realization of freedom of India I hope to realize and carry on the mission of the brotherhood of man. My patriotism is not on exclusive thing. It is all embracing and I should reject that patriotism which sought to mount upon the distress or the exploitation of other nationalities. M.K. Gandhi-Young India, April 4,1929.

Gandhi, the internationally honoured personality did a lot for the liberation of women of the world. His ideas for the thoughts are very much important for development of women. Gandhi strongly believed that holding women to be inferior to man is an insult to the whole womanhood. He said, "if by power we mean sheer animal power, then man, no doubt are superior to women. But if by power is meant moral strength than women's strength is unparalleled. Is it not true that as compared to men, women have greater common sense, are more sacrificing, more tolerant and more courageous? If the basic principles of life are nonviolence, the future definitely belongs to women."

*M.Gandhi, Young India, April,10'1930*

In different works done by different scholars and academicians, gandhiji's strong role on women empowerment was clearly discussed. Some of them are mentioned below.

1. Agarwal SumanKhanna (1999) in the famous book Gandhian Vision (ed.) published by B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi 52 explained various important issues made by Gandhi on women empowerment. In the articles like perspective on women, Gandhi and India today by

Devaka Jains, JoyaJailey, Krishna Bisht; Models of Development, Gandhian and contemporary India by S,K, Aggarwal clear ideas were given on development issues. Gandhi wanted women to be capable enough in these significant senses. He held self reliance to be extremely important as that makes a person, family and country truly free and self confident. The basis of our economy has been these self reliance and the key to it is self employment- such an employment as is located within ones village or house. In such an order, woman was free because she was self employed . Indian rural women were engaged in Traditional cottage industries. But today, as a result of industrial polities, the latter have ceased to be the domain of women. Instead of, mill-made things have captioned but only big but small rural markets too and handicrafts have simply disappeared.<sup>1</sup>

The issue of women's liberation, development and her rights and giving her rightful place in society is a very important one. Gandhi himself said, " A life based on non-violence will give as much right to woman as to man for shaping her future." But such rights can only be acquired by doing one's duty and following one's religion."

Gandhi was convinced that if a struggle against injustice and inequality has to be fought, with non-violence, then women will have a greater role to play in it. Gandhi was really a role model, who made lots of troubles for overall growth and development of our country and for attaining development both men and women should be equally developed. Aggarwal S.K. explained different issues relating to women development in our country.

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1. Aggarwal S.K. (1998) Gandhian vision, p-354.

2.. Pabla A.,S.(2009) in his work "*Gandhian thoughts views and Reviews*" published by cyber Tech. Publications, New Delhi explained different thoughts, views and reviews of Gandhian philosophy reasonably. The various issues related to Gandhi were elaborately discussed in the book. In the Chapter "Gandhian Social Issues" the writer explained the valuable views of Gandhi n woman's rights and duties for sustainable. Human development in the world. Gandhi's ideas on women's problems- like marriages- child marriage, widow marriage, divorce etc. dowry system, the choice of mates and social interferences, marriage and love, the married estate, widow the marriage, the Purdah system, coeducation, contraception etc. were elaborately discussed in the book.

In the field of women empowerment Gandhi's valuable ideas helped us immensely to have a clear cut idea about the necessity of equality between man and women. Gandhiji emphasized on education especially coeducation for removal of all the maladies which are adversely affecting the women force. Gandhi advised the parents that they should not be very much crazy for marriage of their little girls, rather they should try for their education. The thoughts, views and reviews of Gandhian philosophy can give the answer of each and every critical question relating to women's emancipation as well as empowerment. Gandhi deeply realized that without women's development a society can not leap forward for a better way which is acceptable for the countries of the world.

3.Tripathi Kamalapati (1993) "*Gandhi and Huminity*" published by Atlantic Publishers and distributors explained the thought and system of Mahatma Gandhi. The author explained Gandhi in a reasonable way pointing towards a new direction a new path and a new system. His ideas are different from European thoughts; his path is different from the prevailing modern schools. The book analyses the experiments that have been used in Europe during the last two decades. An attempt has also been made to compare those ideologies with that of Gandhi's. It is obvious that Gandhi looks at world problems with a different view and

accordingly propounds a new system. Now is the time that the 'Manishis', servants and thinkers and thoughtful classes of society who wish for the world welfare analyse Gandhian thought and path and to evaluate intellectually whether they are capable of leading the world towards that objective. They should also find out whether Gandhian thoughts are helpful in removing modern flaws and to solve current problems.

It is humanity which can reconstruct our society with a strong base with men and women along with their equal status. For establishing a bold society flavoured by humanity both men and women should be equally treated and duly regarded.

4. Lal Basant Kumar (2005) in his famous book "*Contemporary Indian Philosophy*" published by Motilalbanarsidass publishers Pvt. Ltd. explained the various thinker's explanations and their philosophical ideas including Gandhi. The book shows how the contemporary Indian thinkers are struggling with the old problems of the ancient Indian philosophy, for example the concepts of karma, rebirth, immortality and salvation, in a manner quite different from that of the thinkers of ancient India. In the present author's opinion it is true that the philosophers of 20<sup>th</sup> century India are closely connected with the relating these notions to actual life and experience.

In the chapter 'Mahtma Gandhi' the various ideas of Gandhi relating to the society were discussed. Gandhi's ideas on men and women relationship were clearly discussed. Gandhi recommends that the goal of marriage must be the same as the goal of life itself. Marriage must also be a mean for realizing a spiritual life." The ideal that marriage aims at is that of spiritual union through the physical. The human love that it incarnates is intended to serve as a stepping stone to divine or universal love."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Lal B.K. *Contemporary Indian Philosophy* (2005), p-146

That is why Gandhi says that the object of sexual relation must be nothing else but preservation of race, that is, getting a child. Therefore, marriage life must be a training in spiritual love, the husband and wife must cultivate a sense of companionship and a pattern for cooperative living.

5.Thakur Bharti (2006) in her famous book 'women in Gandhi's mass Movements' published by Deep and Deep Publication Pvt. Ltd. explained the strong role and valuable contributions of Gandhiji for women's upliftment and participation of women in Gandhi's mass movements.

Thakur's book analyses various issues of women elaborately. Women who constitute nearly half of population of Indian society, were suffering from various oppressive, dehumanizing and exploitative social practices. Gandhi profoundly distressed by this degenerated condition made relentless efforts for ameliorating their position in private as well as public life as he believed that the real swaraj could not be attained without the upliftment and consequent awakening of vast mass of women.

"While Gandhi's utterances and writings on behalf of the women's cause should evoke a responsive chord in every well wisher of humanity and even in the most hardened conservative, they are meant primarily for woman, for they touch on every department of her life and can serve as an unerring guide to her in times of stress and strain. Above all they call to her for service utter and devoted- for her own kind, for the country humanity at large" Sarma J.N., in the foreword of the book women in Gandhi's mass movements)

Gandhi unequivocally affirmed his uncompromising stand in the matter of gender equality. He believed that women are also individuals as in on who should be given the liberty to make their own moral claims. The book is a resourceful one which includes the important issues like position of women in Indian society and Gandhi's

perception, women's participation in civil disobedience movement, role of women in the quit India movement, women's involvement in the constructive programmes etc.

6. Tandon Vishwanathan (2006) in his book '*studies in Gandhian thought and Marxism*' published by Radha Publications New Delhi explained the relevance of Gandhiji in ,modern years. The thinkers like Gandhi, Karl Marx and Vinoba Bhave have their similar ideas which go in favour of a modern society with humanistic ideas and progressive thinking. The author explains the different issues relating to the development of our country. The book deals with the changing perception of Gandhi among Russian Marxists and the Indian communists. It examines the validity of their criticism of the Gandhian thought. The book shows the relevance of Gandhian thinking to solve the critical problems of the age. Gandhian thought has the global impact for the solution of the critical problems of the countries.

7. Ray B.N. (2008) in the book '*Reading Gandhi*' published by Authors Press, New Delhi vividly explained many issues related to Gandhian thought. It is true that Gandhi was one of the greatest leaders of mankind. Few could attain his moral stature. As a mass communicator he reached and influenced more people in his life time than any other person in history. And he was a organizational genius. Yet practically none of his major projects succeeded. He led two great satyagrahas, and neither could achieve any of the declared objectives. He gave Hindu-Muslim Unity the highest priority. But he failed to large extent. He strove all his life to remove untouchability, but the untouchability did not accept him as their saviour. In fact a re-evaluation of Gandhi for refreshing in sights into his life and work is made in the book. In the different contents like critique of modernity, nationalism, swaraj, satyagraha, Feminism, untouchability, communal harmony etc. the author very strongly writes the relevant ideas of Gandhi in a critical way. The writer shows Gandhi as a feminist thinkers. Regarding the portrayal of Gandhi as a feminist the

writer explains feminism elaborately. Feminism does not derive its theoretical or conceptual base from any single theoretical position and perspective. There has been no specific abstract definition of feminism applicable to all feminist movements at all times.

An analysis of Gandhi's fundamental ideas reveals that Gandhi's social order based on justice and equality, there was no place for competition and confrontation between man and woman and he did not want to ignore the duty as housekeepers, mothers, moulders of future generations and building of the nation. Gandhi hoped that independence would ensure freedom to the country men and it would improve the condition of women.

8. '*All are equal in the eyes of god*' (2005) the selections from Mahatma Gandhi's writings, a book on equality published by Publications Division, Ministry of I & B, GOI analyses the equality status in the society. According to Gandhi, untouchability is a snake with a thousand mouths through each of which shows its poisonous fangs. Gandhiji always believed in the removal of untouchability as an indispensable condition of attainment of Swaraj. He used every platform to condemn this social evil prevailing among the Indian masses. This book presents Gandhiji's perception on untouchability and its various manifestations, its socio-economic implications and the ways and means to remove it.

9. Krishnamurthy J (edited) (1989) in his book '*women in colonial India, Essays on survival, work and the state*' analyses the condition and status of women during the colonial period. In different essays like law, custom and statutory social reform, the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856, Limitations on female life chances in rural central Gujarat, Muslim women and the control of property, family and factory; women in the Bombay Cotton textiles industry, in spite of modernization on women's occupation etc the writers explained the status of Indian women. It is true that in India a lower position is always seen in case of the female force, both in the domestic and working place. They

enjoy a lower status. In the work place, women can enjoy less remuneration and fewer amounts of wages as compared to man co-workers. This patriarchal mindset prevailing in Indian society should be removed for a strong human society. It was Gandhi who tried a lot for improving the condition of woman in our society.

The book raises the levels debate on women's issues in the area of modern Indian economic and social history. The book certainly goes on the woman's movement in India which was started before the colonial period.

10.Kripalini Krishna (compiled and Edited) 1960 '*All men are Brothers*' (introduced by Sarvepalliradhakrishnan) explained the unparalleled efforts of Gandhi for a strong nation. Plato said long ago "there always are in the world a few inspired men whose acquaintance is beyond price." Likewise Gandhi's contribution are really the greatest source of inspiration for human beings of the world with the goal of establishing a society with men and women with their equal status. Gandhi told that the Salvation of India depends on the women's actions.

In this way we get a strong theoretical background of our present work "impact of Mahatma Gandhi on Women Empowerment". □

**CHAPTER IV**

**ROLE OF GANDHI ON SOCIAL  
ISSUES RELATING TO WOMEN**

## Chapter IV

### Role of Gandhi on Social Issues Relating to Women

“My own opinion is that just as fundamentally man and woman are one; their problem must be one in essence. The soul in both is the same. The two live the same life, have the same feelings. Each is complement of the other. The one cannot live without the others active help. Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity- to me, the female sex, not the weaker sex. It is nobler of the two for it is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent, suffering, humanity, faith and knowledge”.

Young India, Sept, 15, 1921

No doubt the role and status of women, the almost half population of the country is a correct index for a country for the better measurement of its development. Gandhi's role towards women had linked with the global perspective of women development. He endeavored to establish a non violent decentralized society permeated by justice and free from exploitation.

In such a society, every social position has an equal value and women could be no exception. Gandhi, the implacable foe of injustice in all walks of life was instrumental in bringing a new dimension to the debate on women's question. He endeavored to improve their position not only by preaching the abolition of the social evils but also by introducing a revolutionary note- of treating them on a footing of perfect equality with men. He also tried to remove injustice under the pretext of religion, custom and law. No being satisfied by all this, he further invited them to participate in the freedom movement. Gandhi eulogized women by

bringing home to them the point that in a non-violent war, they were even superior to man. In fact he found their temperance to be in perfect harmony with the technique of fighting nonviolent war through love and self-suffering.<sup>1</sup>

Gandhi was strong force against child marriage. He supported that both the boy and girl should be physically and mentally fit before marriage. He pleaded of raising the age of marriage to 16 years for the girls. Besides he advocated that the girls should have their choice regarding their selection of life partners. Maternal mortality Rate was a result of early marriages of girls and Gandhi fought against that evil practice prevailed in our society. In 1931, the M.M.R. (Maternal Mortality Rate) in India was 24.5 per thousand as compared to 4.5 in England. For this he deeply realized that much works were lying to do for woman liberation.

Regarding widowhood Gandhi had very particular views. He considered re-marriage is an optional right for a widow. In case of the young widows they should be left free to decide for themselves whether to remarry or not. The voluntary widowhood was respected by Gandhi and it can be called as a boon in Hinduism.

He also considered "Satidahratha" as a very dangerous as well as barbarous in this present age of development. It is the result of gross ignorance from the part of the woman concerned as well as the society. Gandhi strongly believed that by dying on the Pyre of the husband can only destroy the body but not the soul. Hence, constant striving, constant immolation of the spirit will ascertain the purity of soul and it can surely determine satihood as an index of purity.

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1. Roy B.N. Reading Gandhi Authors Press, Delhi, 2008 P.239.

Dowry is another cruel as well as evil custom which can turn a woman into salable animals. Gandhi believed that by dowry a young man's education is discredited and dishonoured. Any rightly educated person can remove the evil dowry if he takes the matter seriously. In this regard public opinion is essential for removal of dowry. He was in favour of strong public opinion for removal of the dowry. He emphasized on the strong mindset of the young men and women to remove their evil practice of the society. He advised that the young men who support the practice of dowry should excommunicate from the society. He advised to the parents of girls not to be interested in the English degrees of the boys who are ready to marry at cost of dowry rather they should discard their false mentality and interest towards their own caste and province. It is better to go outside for other castes and provinces for broad minded young man for marriage of their daughters. Gandhi's advice to young women was to select the unmarried spinster life but not the married life created by dowry. In fact, education was considered as the faithful tool which can remove the ill practice of the society like dowry.

Purdah system, another barbarous custom prevailed in some parts of India occurred unreparable loss to the freedom of women in the country. Gandhi deeply believed that purdah can never keep a women in the midst of purity because Purdah cannot change the malicious intension. Chastity can not be protected by the surrounding wall of the purdah. Gandhi appealed to the people in general and women in particular to remove the purdah with a bold step of a dynamic and developed society.

Prostitution was considered by Gandhiji as a moral leprosy and it was strongly opposed. Interestingly, Gandhi did not condemn the prostitutes who were brutally forced to live in the midst of sins. He opined that the men who visit the places like brothel to encourage the prostitution are equally responsible because of their perpetuations of the evil. Gandhiji considered that men who indulge in the practice of prostitution are more dangerous and harmful for the society as compared to the female prostitutes.

“DevadasiPratha” was another unholy practice as well as immoral traffic in the holy places and it must be opposed by the society because it was a religious blackmailing process under the name of god. Gandhiji severely criticized the shameful systems like “devadasi” where women are forcefully used for sexual satisfaction under male domination. Gandhi was not silent in drawing the suggestions on the problem. He suggested two-fold suggestions. Gandhi called the women in the hateful net of ‘body-buying-selling’ to learn to control their passions and women were to be provided with some work to enable them to earn an honourable living. Gandhi wanted that the women should also be educated. But Gandhi complained men force for such type of mal-practice in our society. According to Gandhi, ‘Of all the evil for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking, or so brutal, as the abuse of the better half of humanity, to me the fairer sex, not the weaker sex’. Gandhi favoured two measures namely public opinion and legislation as remedies for many evil practice going on in our society. Gandhiji deeply considered women as individual human beings with full and equal right of self-development and blamed men for their inferior status. Gandhi said, “Women have as much right to shape her destiny as men have to shape his.” He also said, “Woman has a right to participate in the very minutest detail in the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him.” Gandhi gave us a very friendly approach between man and woman and he considered woman and man as supplementary to each other and emphasized that the well-being of one was bound to be influenced the life of the other.

Gandhi opined that though both (Man and woman) are equal in status and opportunities to develop their abilities, they are not identical. They are complementary to each other. They are not separable pair and one can not live without the other. But for him equality of sexes did not simply mean equality of occupation. They are different in nature, and aptitude and have varied interests and functions. Man is supreme in outward activities for a married

couple and he should have greater knowledge there of, on the other hand, home life is entirely the sphere of woman and therefore in domestic affairs women ought to have more knowledge. 'Woman' he said, "is essentially the distributor and keeper of bread. She is the caretaker in every sense of term".<sup>2</sup>

It is praiseworthy that all the social problems related to women were beautifully discussed and they were fruitfully solved by Gandhi. In Gandhi's words, " I had flattered myself that my contribution to women's cause definitely began with discovery of Satyagraha. But the writer of the letter is of opinion that the fair sex requires treatment different from men. It is so, I do not think any man will find the correct solution. No matter how much he tries, he must fail because nature has made him different from woman. Only the load under the harrow knows where he pinches him. Therefore ultimately women will have to determine with authority what she needs. My own opinion is that, just as fundamentally man and woman are one, their problem must be one in essence. The soul is both is the same. The two live the same life, have the same feelings. Each is a competent of the other. The one can not live without the others active help." (Harijan, 24-2-40)

Gandhi described discrimination against women as an anachronism. Gandhi said, " I fail to see any reason for jubilation over the birth of a son and for mourning over that of a daughter. Both are God's gift. They have an equal right to live and are equal necessary to keep the world going". Gandhi was very much broadminded in his personality. He further said, " I began work, among women when I was not even thirty years. There is not a women in South Africa who does not know me. But my work was among the poorest. The intellectuals I could not draw you cannot blame me for not having organized the intellectuals among man. I have not the gift but just as I never fear coldness on the part of the poor when I approach poor women. There is invisible bond between them and me."

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2. Ray B.N. *Reading Gandhi*, Authors Press, Delhi, 2008,

In great personalities among women like Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari, AmritKaur, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, Lakshmi N. Mennon, Anne Besant etc were deeply attracted by the strong personality of Gandhiji and plunged into the freedom movement and the awakening process of women's liberation. "Women could play a significant part in the freedom struggle under his inspiring leadership, his fostering care and his loving guidance."<sup>3</sup> One of the stalwarts of freedom movement RajkumariAmritKaur said, "of all the factors contributing to the awakening of women in India has been so potent as the field of non-violent action which Gandhi offered to women in his war against British domination of India. It brought them out in their hundreds from sheltered homes to stand the furnace of a fiery trial without flinching. It proved to the hilt that was as much as man to resist evil or aggression."

Gandhiji admitted the diversified role of women in the social construction process. "Gandhi said that women is the incarnation of ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love which means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, show his capacity in the highest measure? She shows it as she carries the infant and feeds it during nine months and derives joy in suffering involved. What can beat the suffering caused by the pangs of labour ? But she forgets them all in the joy of creation. Who, again suffers daily so that her baby may wax from day today? Let her transfer that love to the whole humanity, let her forget she ever was or can be the objects man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to trade her art of peace to the warring world thirsting for the nectar. She can become the leader in Satyagraha which does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith."<sup>4</sup>

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2. Ray B.N. Reading Gandhi, Authors Press, Delhi 2008, p.252.

4. Ibid, p- 253

Gandhiji's ideas and philosophical views were very much pertinent for the reconstruction and development of our society where the equal status of man and woman is rare to realize in the practical working field. Gandhi's social order was based on justice and equality where there is no place for competition and confrontation between man and woman. He considered that the society should never forget the role of woman as housekeepers, mothers, moulders of future generation and the builders of the nation. Gandhi invited women to take part in public and political life of the country even in 1920s and 1930s with a goal of complete gender equality considering the fitness of woman for all types of activities outside home. In Gandhis' Ashram, he treated man and woman as equals. He emphasized in education of girls and encouraged their parents to take the positive role in girls equation for their liberation. It was deeply hoped that independence would ensure freedom and equality for woman and ameliorate their conditions. The skeleton of the concept of "Empowerment of Women" was realized in Gandhi's valuable ideas on women and that was globally recognized.

For the development of the nation and reconstruction of the society, Gandhi deeply realized that the distortion and disequilibrium suffered by women should be removed completely. Gandhis ideas are greatly helpful in reconstruction the social order towards surroundings so that establishment of an equalitarian society based on social and gender justice, equality, fraternity and liberty can be possible.

Gandhi opined that the ideal approach is to regard marriage as a sacrament. Marriage should be a spiritual as well as physical union. He disapproved the arranged marriages on the basis of monetary settlements or dowries, or on the ground of caste. He also strongly disapproved and discarded of child marriages and drew his own experiences, fully documented in his autobiography, to show the folly or meritless status of such an institution. He regards child marriage as a cruel custom and considered it disgraceful that it should be given religious sanction. Gandhiji said, " But Brahmanism that can tolerate untouchability,

virgin widowhood, spoliation of virgins, slinks in my nostrils. Its a parody of Brahmanism. There is no knowledge on Brahman therein. Child marriage ought to be abolished. This would mean that there would be fewer widows because their restrictions of Hindu society concerning remarriage meant that there were far too many widows. Usually in the higher castes it was the custom for women who has lost their husbands to remain widows for the rest of their lives but in some custom did not apply men.” Gandhiji strongly advocated that the widows should be given the right to remarry as per their desire on the basis of sexual equality.

In case of purdah Gandhi was with the view that it was an attempt by husbands to protect their wives from marauding male predators; at worse it was a violation of basic human rights which resulted in wives being treated as slaves, or as property of their husbands. Gandhi opined it as a barbarous custom and he put arguments that females should be given the right to keep their purity from their inner spirit, not male created purdah system. Gandhi said, “Refuse to be the slave of your own shims and fancies, and the slaves of man. Refuse to decorate yourselves, don’t go in for scents and lavender waters. If you want to give out the proper scent, it must come out to your heart, and then you will captivate not man, but humanity. It is your birth right. Man is born of woman, he is flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone come to your own and deliver your message again.”

Gandhi deeply considered that women play the important role as wife and as mother. Gandhi said, “the essential function of women is to be the queens of the household running a home efficiently, caring for and educating children properly, steadily seeking to conceive and transmit new, proper and higher ideals before they come under the influence of others of the opposite sex. All of these things represent work of the highest, most important, and most difficult kind that can be performed in the world.”

Considering the proper role of women Gandhiji said “nature has made man and woman different. True, they are equals of life (in so far as they have to face the problems of

life unitedly); but their functions differ. It is women's right to rule the home. Man is master outside it and earner; woman saves, he spends. (Besides) looking after the feeding of the child. She is responsible for building its character and hence, mother to the nation. Man is not father (in this sense). After a certain period, a father ceases to influence his son; the mother never abdicates the place. The son, even after attaining manhood, will play with the mother even as the child does. He can not do this with his father. If this is the scheme of Nature, and it is just as it should be, woman should not have to earn her living."

**CHAPTER V**  
**GANDHI ON WOMEN'S**  
**PROBLEMS**

## Chapter V

### Gandhi on women's Problems

Each and every problem related to women's empowerment was deeply realized and analyzed scientifically by Gandhiji. Women's problems were taken by Gandhi with a great sensitivity which have global impact.

The views of Gandhiji on women's problems are mentioned below in his own words.

#### Women and India's Future :

In Gandhi's writings he clearly described that the future of India relies on women development. It is because of the population strength of women are important. Nearly fifty percentage of India's population are women. Hence India's future development largely depends on women's status and development.

"I am firmly of opinion that India's salvation depends on the sacrifice enlightenment of her women" – *Harijan*, 6-16- i53

I had flattered myself that my contribution to the women's cause definitely began with the discovery of satyagraha. But the writer of the letter is of opinion that the fair sex requires treatment different from men. It is so, I do not think any man will find the correct solution. No matter how much he tries, he must fail because nature has made him different from woman. Only the toad under the harrow knows where it pinches him. Therefore ultimately woman will have to determine with authority what she needs. My own opinion is that, just as fundamentally man and woman are one, their problem must be one in essence. The soul in

both is the same. The two live the same life, have the same feelings. Each is a complement of the other. The one can not live without the other's active help.

But somehow or other man has dominated woman from ages past, and so woman has developed an inferiority complex. She has believed in the truth of man's interested teaching that she is inferior to him. But the seers among men have recognized her equal status.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that at some point there is bifurcation. Whilst both are fundamentally one, it is also equally true that in the form there is a vital difference between the two. Hence, the vocations of the two must also be different. The duty of motherhood, which the vast majority of women will always undertake, requires qualities which man need not possess. She is passive, he is active. She is essentially mistress of the house. He is the breadwinner. She is the keeper and distributor of the bread. She is the caretaker in every sense of the term. The art of bringing up the infants of the race is her special and sole prerogative. Without her care the race must become extinct.

In my opinion it is degrading both for man and woman that woman should be called upon or induced to forsake the hearth and shoulder the rifle for the protection of that hearth. It is a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end. In trying to ride the horse that man rides, she brings herself and him down. The sin will be on man's head for tempting or compelling him companion to desert her special calling. There is as much bravery in keeping one's home in good order and condition as there is no defending it against attack from without.

As I have watched millions of peasants in their natural surroundings and as I watch them daily in little Segaoon, the natural division of spheres of work has forced itself on my attention. There are no women blacksmiths and carpenters. But men and women work on the

fields, the heaviest work being done by the males. The women deep and manage the homes. They supplement the meager resources of the family, but man remains the main breadwinner.

The divisions of the spheres of work being recognized, the general qualities and culture required are practically the same for both the sexes.

My contribution to the great problem lies in my presenting for acceptance 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, she will shed her inferiority complex. If she is able to do this successfully, she must resolutely refuse to believe in the modern teaching that everything is determined and regulated by the sex impulse. I fear I have put the proposition rather clumsily. But I hope my meaning is clear. I do not know that the millions of men who are taking an active part in the war are observed by the sex specter. Nor are the peasants working together in their fields worried or dominated by it. This is not to say or suggest that they are free from the instinct implanted in man and woman. But it most certainly does not dominate with the modern sex literature. Neither man nor woman has time for such things when he or she is faced with the hard fact of living life in its grim reality.

I have suggested in these columns that woman is the incarnation of ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? She shows it as she carries the infant and feeds it during nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved. What can beat the suffering caused by the pangs of labour? But she forgets them in the joy of creation. Who again suffers daily so that her babe may wax from day to day? Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget that she ever was or can be object of man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side on man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring would thirsting for that nectar. She

can become the leader in satyagraha which does not require the learning that books give but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.

My good nurse in the Sassoon Hospital, Poona, as I was lying on a sick bed years ago, told me the story of a woman who refused to take chloroform because she would not risk the life of the baby she was carrying. She had to undergo a painful operation. The only anesthetic she had was her love for the babe, to save whom no suffering was too great. Let not woman, who can count many such heroines among them, ever despise contemplation of that heroin often makes me envy woman the status that is hers, if she only knew. There is as much reason for man to wish that he was born a woman as for woman to do otherwise. But the wish is fruitless. Let us be happy in the state to which we are born and do the duty for which nature has destined us. – *Harijan*, 24-2-4, 13

### **The Problem : (Women's)**

Regarding the very particular problems of women Gandhi was always in favour of freedom of women. He was very serious for equality status of women. On the problem of women Gandhi opined-

I passionately desire the utmost freedom for our women. I detest child marriages. I shudder to see a child widow, and shiver with rage when a husband just widowed contracts with brutal indifference another marriage. I deplore the criminal indifference of parents who keep their daughters utterly ignorant and illiterate and bring them up only for the purpose of marrying them off to some young man of means. Notwithstanding all this grief and rage, I realize the difficulty of the problem. Women must have votes and an equal legal status. But the problem does not end there. It only commences at the point where women begin to affect the political deliberations of the nation. – *Young India*, 21-7-21, 229.

### The Ideal of Marriage :

Gandhi deeply realized that marriage is the spiritual bondage between two sacred hearts. He opined “the ideal that marriage aims at is that of spiritual union through the physical. The human love that it incarnates is intended to serve as a stepping stone to divine or universal love”. S.F.G.-18.

“The wife is not the husband’s bond slave, but his companion and his helpmate, and an equal partner in all his joys and sorrows – as free as the husband to choose her own path”– *Autobiography*, 38.

### Child Marriage :

Gandhi was a strong activist against child marriage. He opined What is kanaka in the case of little children? Has a father any right of property over his children? He is their protector not owner. And he forfeits the privilege of protection when he abuses it by seeking to garter away the liberty of the ward.

“The least that a parent, who has so abused his trust as to give in marriage an infant to an old man in his dotage or to a boy hardly in his teens, can do, is to purge himself of his sin by remarrying his daughter when she becomes widowed. As I have said in a previous note, such marriages should be declared null and void from the beginning”. -*Young India*, 11-11-26, 388.

“You must be able surely to control your lust to this extent that you are not going to marry a girl that us under 16 years ago. If I could do so I would lay down 20 as the minimum. Twenty years is early enough even in India. It is we who are responsible for the precocity of the girls, not even the Indian climate, because I know girls of the age of twenty who are pure and undefiled and able to stand the storm that may rage round. Let us not hug that precocity to ourselves. Some Brahman students tell me that they can not follow this principle, that they can

not get Brahman girls sixteen years old, very few Brahmans keep their daughters unmarried till that age, the Brahman girls are married mostly before 10, 12 and 13 years. Then I say to the Brahman youth, "Cease to be a Brahman, if you can not possibly control yourself. Choose a grown up girl of 16 who became a widow who has reached that age, then go and take any girl you like. And I tell you that the God of the Hindus will pardon that boy who has preferred to marry out of his caste rather than ravish a girl of twelve. When your heart is not pure and you can not master your passions, you cease to be an educated man. You have called your institutions a premier institution. I want you to leave up to the name of the premier institution which must produce boys who will occupy the front rank in character. And what is education without character and what is character without elementary personal purity ? Brahmanism I adore. I have defended Varnashrama Dharma. But Brahmanism that can tolerate untouchability, virgin widowhood, spoliation of virgins, stinks of my nostrils, it is a parody of Brahmanism. There is no knowledge of Brahman therein. There is no true interpretation of the scriptures. It is undiluted animalism; Brahmanism is made of sterner stuff". – *Young India* – 15-9-27, 314.

### **The Dowry System :**

Dowry system is a dreadful symptom of our society which occur brings lots of problems to our society. On Dowry system Gandhi put his strong views.

"The system has to go. Marriage must cease to be a matter of arrangement made by parents for money. The system is intimately connected with caste. So long as the choice is restricted to a few hundred young men or young women of a particular caste, the system, will persist no matter what is said against it. The girl or boys or their parents will have to break the bonds of caste if the evil is to be eradicated. All this means education of a character that will revolutionize the mentality of the youth of the nation. – *Harijan*, 23-5-36, 117.

There should be work done in the schools and colleges and amongst the parents of girls. The parents should so educate their daughters that they would refuse to marry a young man who wanted a price for marrying and would rather remain spinsters than be party to the degrading terms. The only honourable terms in marriage are mutual love and mutual consent".  
 - *Young India*, 27-12-28, 431.

On Dowry System Gandhi's views on the relevant question was very much clear. The questions and the answers also reflect the ideology of Gandhi.

Q. Namasudra girls are generally married at the age of 12 or 13, formerly the usual age was 8 or 9. The bridegroom has to pay a dowry of Rs. 150 for the bride. The average differences of age between the two is about 12 to 15 years. As a result of this the number of widows in namashudra society is rather large. Among one section of the caste, widow remarriage was prevalent. But in imitation of another section which was looked upon as superior, the former are giving up that practice. What is your advice regarding child marriage and widow remarriage ?

A. Dealing with the question Gandhiji said that his opinion was definite. In the first, instance there should be possibility of child widows. He was averse to child marriages. It was an evil custom unfortunately the namashudras had perhaps taken from the so-called higher castes.

Gandhiji was also against the system of dowry. It was nothing but the sale of girls. That there should be castes even amongst namashudras was deplorable and he would strongly advise them to abolish all caste-distinctions amongst themselves. And in this, they should bear in mind the opinion the speaker had often expressed that all caste-distinctions should be abolished, and there should be only one caste, namely, bhangis and all Hindus should take pride in being called bhangis and nothing else. This applied to the namashudras as well.

When child marriages were abolished, naturally there would be few, if any, young widows. As a general rule he was for one man one wife for life, and one woman one husband for life. Custom had familiarized women in the so-called higher castes with enforced widowhood. Contrary was the rule with men. He called it a disgrace, but whilst society was in that pitiable condition, he advocated widow remarriage for all young widows. He believed in equality of the sexes and, therefore he could only think of the same rights for women as men.- 16-3-47, 67.

### **The Choice of Mates and Social Interference :**

In a crucial matter of life choice of Mates and Social Interference Gandhi has clear views in support of efficient mates for a peaceful and productive life.

Referring to a case of suicide, Gandhiji wrote :

“In my opinion such marriages as are interdicted in a particular society can not be recognized all at once or at the will of the individual. Nor has society or relatives of parties concerned any right to impose their will upon and forcibly curtail the liberty of action of the young people who may want to contract such marriages. In the instance cited by the correspondent both the parties had fully attained maturity. They could well think for themselves. No one had a right forcibly to prevent them for themselves. No one had a right forcibly to prevent them from marrying each other if they wanted to. Society could at the most refuse to recognize the marriages, but it was the height of tyranny to drive them to suicide. Marriage taboos are not universal and are largely based on social usage. The usage varies from province and as between different divisions. This does not mean that the youth may ride roughshod over all established social customs and inhabitants. Before they decide to do so, they must convert public opinion to their side. In the meantime, the individuals concerned ought patiently to bide their time, or if they can not do that calmly and quietly to face the

consequences of social ostracism. At the same time it is equally the duty of society not to take up a heartless, step motherly attitude towards those who might be described by my correspondent rests on the shoulders of society if the version that is before me is correct". – *Harijan*, 29-5-

37. In case of inter-caste marriages Gandhi was asked:

Q. You advocate inter-caste marriages. Do you also favour marriages between Indians professing different religions ? Should they declare themselves as belonging to no denomination, or can they continue their old religious practices and yet intermarry ? If so, what form should the marriage ceremony take ? Is it to be a civil function or a religious functions ?

Do you consider religion to be exclusively a personal matter ?

In the following answer Gandhi's broad outlook is coming out.

A. Though Gandhiji admitted that he had not always held the view, he had come to the view, he had come to the conclusion long ago that an inter-religious marriage was a welcome event whenever it took place. His stipulation was that such connection was not a product of lust. In his opinion it was no marriage. It was illicit intercourse. Marriage in his estimation was a sacred institution. Hence there must be mutual friendship, either party having equal respect for the religion of the other. There must be mutual friendship, either party having equal respect for the religion of the other. There was no question in this of conversion. Hence the marriage ceremony would be performed by the priests belonging to either faith. This happy event could take place when the communities shed mutual enmity and had regard for the religions of the world. – *Harijan*, 16-3-47, 63.

Again through the question-answer process Gandhi beautifully explained the importance of inter religious marriage.

Q. You say that you are in favour of inter religious marriages, but at the same time you say that each party should retain his or her own religion and, therefore, you said, you tolerated even civil marriages. Are there any instances of parties belonging to different religions keeping up their own religions to the end of their lives ? And is not the institution of civil marriage a negation of religion and does it not tend towards laxity of religion ?

A. Gandhiji said that the questions were appropriate. He had no instances in mind where the parties had clung to their respective faiths up to death, because these friends whom he knew had not yet died. He had, however, under his observation men and women professing different religions and each clinging to his or her own faith without abatement. But he would go so far as to say that they need not wait for the discovery of past instances. They should create new ones so that timid ones may shed their timidity.

### **Marriage and Love :**

Marriage and love should not exist separately for the married couple. Marriage must flourish love. In this regard Gandhi explained his views -

As to civil marriages, he did not believe in them, but he welcomed the institution of civil marriage as a much needed reform for the sake of the reform. – *Harijan*, 16-3-47, 67.

A correspondent laid down the following conditions of marriage : (1) Mutual attraction or love ; (2) Eugenic fitness; (3) Approval and consent of the respective families concerned; and consideration for the interest of the social order to which one belongs; (4) Spiritual development.

I accept generally the conditions for an ideal marriage enumerated by my correspondent. But I would change their order of importance and put 'love' last in the list. By giving it the first place, the other conditions are liable to be overshadowed by it altogether and rendered more or less nugatory. Therefore, spiritual development ought to be given the first

place in the choice for marriage. Service should come next, family considerations and the interest of the social order should have the third place. This means that 'love' alone, where the other three conditions are not fulfilled, should not be held as a valid reason for marriage. At the same time, marriage where there is no love should equally be ruled out even though all the other conditions are fully complied with. I should score out the condition of eugenic fitness, because the begetting of offspring being the central purpose of marriage, eugenic fitness can not be treated as a 'condition'; it is the sine qua non of marriage. – *Harijan*, 5-6-37, 131.

### **The Married Estate :**

In case of married estate Gandhi's views are not only strong but reasonable also. He explained very logically-

“ A sister, who is a good worker, and was anxious to remain celibate in order to serve better the country's cause, has recently married having met the mate of her dreams. But she imagines that in doing so she has done wrong and fallen from the high ideal which she had set before herself. I have tried to rid her mind of this delusion. It is no doubt an excellent thing for girls to remain unmarried for the sake of service, but the fact is that only one in a million is able to do so. Marriage is a natural thing in life, and to consider it derogatory in any sense is wholly wrong. When one imagines any act a fall it is difficult, however hard one tries, to raise oneself. The ideal is to look upon marriage as a sacrament and therefore to lead a life of self-restraint in the married estate. Marriage in Hinduism is one of the four ashrams. In fact the other three are based on it”.

The duty of the above-mentioned and other sisters who think like her is, therefore, not to look down upon marriage but to give it its due place and make of it the sacrament it is. If they exercise the necessary self-restraint, they will find growing within themselves a greater

strength for service. She who wishes to serve will naturally choose a partner in life who is of the same mind, and their joint service will be the country's gain. – *Harijan*, 22-3-42, 88.

### **Divorce :**

In case of divorce Gandhi put his very particular views. Presently divorce has become a fashion among the couples. Without logical ground and spirituality divorce cannot solve the problem.

“Marriage confirms the right of union between two partners to the exclusion of all the others when in their joint opinion they consider such union to be desirable, but it confers no right upon one partner to demand obedience of the other to one's wish for union. What should be done when one partner on moral or other grounds can not conform to the wishes of the others is a separate question. Personally, if divorce was the only alternative, I should not hesitate to accept it, rather than interrupt my moral progress, assuming that I want to restrain myself on purely moral grounds”. – *Young India*, 8-10-25, 346.

### **Widow Remarriage :**

In case of widow remarriage Gandhi's views are very much commanding with great influences.

“The total of 1921 is a trifle higher than for the two (previous) decades. They only demonstrate still further the enormity of the wrong done to the Hindu girl widows. We cry out for cow-protection in the name of religion, but we refuse protection to the girl widow. In the name of religion we force widowhood upon our three lakhs of girl widows who could not understand the importance of the marriage before 15, let alone widowhood, and we would declare that three lakhs of girls were never married. Voluntary widowhood consciously adopted by a woman who has left the affection of a partner adds grace and dignity to life, sanctifies the home and uplifts religions itself. Widowhood imposed by religion or custom is

an unbearable yoke and defiles the home by secret vice and degrades religion. If we would be pure, if we would save Hinduism, we must rid ourselves of this poison of enforced widowhood. The reform must begin by those who have girl widows in their charge are duly and well married-not married. They were never really married. *Young India*, 5-8-26, 276.

Widow-remarriage is no sin- if it be, it is as much a sin as the marriage of a widower is all widowhood is not holy. It is an adornment to her who can observe it. If this sister has the courage ,then let her speak out her mind to her uncle and brothers and seek their help. If they cannot assist in the marriage, then the sister will have to quit their house and take refuge in some widow-remarriage institution. (Translated from the Hindi Navajivan of 9-5-29)

Some Brahman students told me that they cannot follow this principle , that they cannot get Brahman girls Sixteen years old very few Brahmans keep their daughters unmarried till that age, the Brahman girls are married mostly before 10, 12 and 13 years. Then I say to the Brahman Youth , 'Cease to be Brahman if you can not possibly control yourself. Choose a grown up girl of 16 who became a widow when she was a child. If you cannot get a Brahman widow who has reached that age, then go and take any girl you like. And I tell you that the God of Hinduism will pardon that boy who has preferred to marry out of his caste rather than ravish a girl of twelve". ' *Young India*' .

### **The Purdah**

Purdah system is a dangerous system which can damage the empowerment and status of women. It was protested by Gandhi in an aggressive way. In case of purdah Gandhi views were important.

"Chastity is not a hot-house growth. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of the purdah. It must grow from within , and to be worth anything it must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation". ' *Young India*' , 3-2-27,37.

And why is the all this morbid anxiety about female purity? Have women any say in the matter of male purity? We hear nothing of women's anxiety about men's anxiety about men's chastity. Why should men arrogate to themselves the right to regulate female purity? It cannot be superimposed from without. It is a matter of evolution from within and therefore of individual self effort. 'Young India', 25-11-26,415.

Through question answer process Gandhi's fight against purdah and it was beautifully expressed, in the following way.

Do you not think that a strict enforcement of the purdah system would improve the moral condition of women?

Gandhi was warned by some Muslim critics against speaking on the purdah. He had therefore some hesitation in speaking about it. But he took heart when he turned round and saw that many Hindu Women observed it and that numerous Malaya Muslim women of whom he had many friends did not observe the purdah . He also knew many distinguished Muslim woman of India Who did not observe it. Lastly the real purdah was of the heart. A Woman who peeped through the purdah and contemplated a male on whom her gaze fell violated the sprit behind it. If a woman observe it in sprit, she was truly carrying out what the great prophet had said.-*Harijan*, 23-3-47,98.

### **Coeducation**

Gandhi strongly supported coeducation which will increase the cooperative thinking between boys and girls. He explained –

“I cannot definitely state as yet whether it will be successful or not. It does not seem to have succeeded in the west. I tried it my self years ago when I even made boys and girls sleep in the same verandah with no partition between them, Mrs. Gandhi and myself sharing the Varandah with them. I must say it brought undesirable results”.

Through the process of question answer Gandhi opined against purdah.

Q. But do not worse things happen in purdah-ridden communities?

A. Yes, of course, but co education is still in an experimental stage and we cannot definitely say one way or the other as to its results. I think we should begin with the family first. There boys and girls should grow together freely and naturally. Then coeducation will come of itself. *Autobiography* 12-1-35

In all the views, Gandhi's revolutionary approaches in favour of women's empowerment and emancipation was beautifully reflected and they can certainly establish a progressive society with equality of men and women.

**CHAPTER VI**  
**WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: ITS**  
**ANATOMY**

## Chapter VI

### Women Empowerment: Its Anatomy

Women empowerment can be widely used in the context of women development. Empowerment is a way for overcoming the barriers in life to reshape one's life and environment.

Empowerment implies :

- A state of mind and attitude of a person. An empowered woman has a positive self image and takes an active part in decision making related to herself, her family and the community.
- Greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making and greater ability to overcome restrictions imposed by customs, beliefs and practices.
- Self confidence and understanding of the importance of human values, rights and privileges, conducive for a more dignified and satisfactory way of life.

(DevadasP.Rajammal, 1999).<sup>1</sup>

Women play the dynamic role in the development process of a country. Women are the real partners in development. The positive role of women depends on their relevant education and training. Women play the significant role in family, society and professional spheres. The

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1. Devadas P. Rajakamal, 1999

equality status between men and women is a right judgment, drawn from the Indian Constitution and it keeps away the Indian Women from The 'Purdah' bondage of middle ages when women became completely illiterate and entirely dependent on men-father, husband and so, economically, Socially and culturally. The Social reformers of 19<sup>th</sup> Century established education to remove the social evils like Child marriage, sati, Polygamy enforced widowhood, dowry system etc., to awaken the consciousness of the nation.

The national policy on Education (NPE-1986) is a milestone in the approach to women's education. In NPE 1986, it is stated that education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women.<sup>2</sup> In order to neutralize the accumulated distortions of the past, there will be a well- conceived edge in favour of women. The national education system will play a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of woman. It will foster the development of new values through redesigned curricula, textbooks, training and orientation of teachers, decision makers and administrators.

The Women Education is undoubtedly an effective factor of empowerment. Hence the illiteracy among women should be removed from our society, the participation of women in vocational, technical and professional education at different levels as also to promote women's participation in modern technologies should be popularized for overall women development mentioned in POA, NEP, 1986-

- Building a positive self image and self-confidence,
- Developing ability to think critically,
- Building up group cohesion and fostering decision making about change in society,
- Encouraging group action in order to bring about change in society.
- Providing the wherewithal for economic for economic independence.

## WOMEN EDUCATION FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: RATIONALE

India is a country where the heterogeneous characteristics are present in the development process like strong recourse base, low work participation. Illiteracy, low level of technology etc. If we go through the literacy rates in various census reports, we get a discouraging picture that women literacy is much more below than the male literacy. If we look at the situation of women around our country, we get a discouraging picture. Almost 63 years after Independence, we still have illiteracy, malnutrition, exploitation and discrimination, offence of rape, dowry deaths, violence in the home and outside, violence in the office etc. We have repeated child births, over work and neglect of their health care requirement puts them highest mortality rate and lowest literacy rates. If we look at the literacy rates, we get a picture which is full of anomalies. And the rural illiteracy shows more dangerous situation.

The following table shows the literacy rate of India by Rural- Urban Division (in %)

Year	Rural Male	Rural Female	Urban Male	Urban Female	Male	Female
1951	19.02	4.87	45.6	22.23	27.10	8.86
1961	34.3	10.1	66.0	40.5	40.4	15.35
1971	48.6	15.5	69.8	48.8	45.95	21.97
1981	49.6	21.7	76.7	56.3	56.38	39.76
1991	57.9	30.6	81.1	64.0	64.13	39.23
2001	71.4	46.7	86.7	73.2	75.85	54.16

*Source : Economic Survey, 2001-02, Economic Division, GOI,*

The rural female section of India shows more than 53% illiteracy which gives an adverse effect on empowerment of women.

The Need of women education for women's empowerment is considered for the nation building. The UNESCO conference in 1962, underline the importance of the access of girls and women to technical and vocational education for social and economic development. According to Gunnar Myrdal (1969), education has an independent as well as 'instrumental' value, i.e. the purpose of education must be to rationalize attitude as well as to impart knowledge and skills. Education for national development should include education for self reliance , personal development, social development, productive capacity, Social integration and political understanding. Empowerment of women consists of greater access to knowledge and resources greater autonomy in decision making, greater ability to plan their lives, greater control over the over circumstances, that influence their lives and free them from shackles imposed on them by customs, belief and practice.

The women's empowerment is an active, multi- dimensional, fruitful and need-based mechanism which can be enumerated with the help of the following ways-

- Higher literacy among the women and education both general and technical for women force.
- Improved health care facilities for women and their children.
- The marriage of women at their higher ages.
- Greater work participation and increase of labour force in modernized sector.
- Necessary financial aid and service support.
- Development of higher position of power (both the political and administrative sector)
- Better consciousness of their rights and duties.
- Self-reliance, Self-respect and dignity among the women.

It is education which can create a strong environment for the development of human recourse of a country. Only the formal education cannot perform this great task. Our educational institutions are existing presently as the 'certificate factories'. If the 'mindset' of people does not change and the psychological state does not go towards the women's empowerment, the proper development will not be achieved. The curriculum of the institutions should be designed in a different way so that the girls may take their part in the development process. In this regard, we have to remember that development of rural woman should be the priority area non-formal, adult and continuing education programmes.

J.L. Nehru the first Prime Minister of India said, "Education of boy is education of one person, but education of girls is education of the whole family." Education is the best means of empowerment and in our country the major portion of rural women are not getting the benefits of education. Our constitution in Article 29(2) mentions special provisions for the advancement of women and children. At this critical juncture of 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the women education and women empowerment should be really utilized for the development of the nation.

It is important that Gandhi had the worldwide views on woman empowerment. He deeply believed that if we fail to take the women out of the trap of overburdened situations, the liberation of women will not be enjoyed. As a result the development will be adversely affected. Gandhi put emphasis on coeducation and he tried to keep the women out of the purdah system. Gandhi said, "woman has a right to participate in the very minutest detail in the activities of man and she has an equal right to freedom and liberty with him."

For generating women education and women's empowerment the following measures can be recommended:

- Awareness regarding the women's education needs to be generated so as to prepare them to contribute to the socio-economic development of the country.
- A successful relationship between the community at large and the teachers and other education personal should be made effectively.
- The involvement of local political and non-political leaders, voluntary organizations, women groups, and conscious citizen's forum is also necessary. They should try for cent percent enrolment of girls.
- School curricula should be arranged in such a way that these can create sense of self reliance and self confidence among women. Besides the skill up gradation, vocational and technical subjects should be introduced for the job facilities of the girls students.
- School timings should be flexible and fixed to suit the local conditions. The incentives like textbooks, uniforms, scholarships, mid-day meals etc. should be given along with proper school building at the nearest distance from the villages.
- People in mass media, Folk media, functionaries of NGOs, performing artists and creative workers should be sanitized to promote the identified values of women's empowerment.
- Entrepreneurship development programmers should be organized among women. Such programmers should have the objectives like to spread the awareness for self employment, to make them conscious regarding the opportunities, spread the knowledge regarding financial facilities etc.

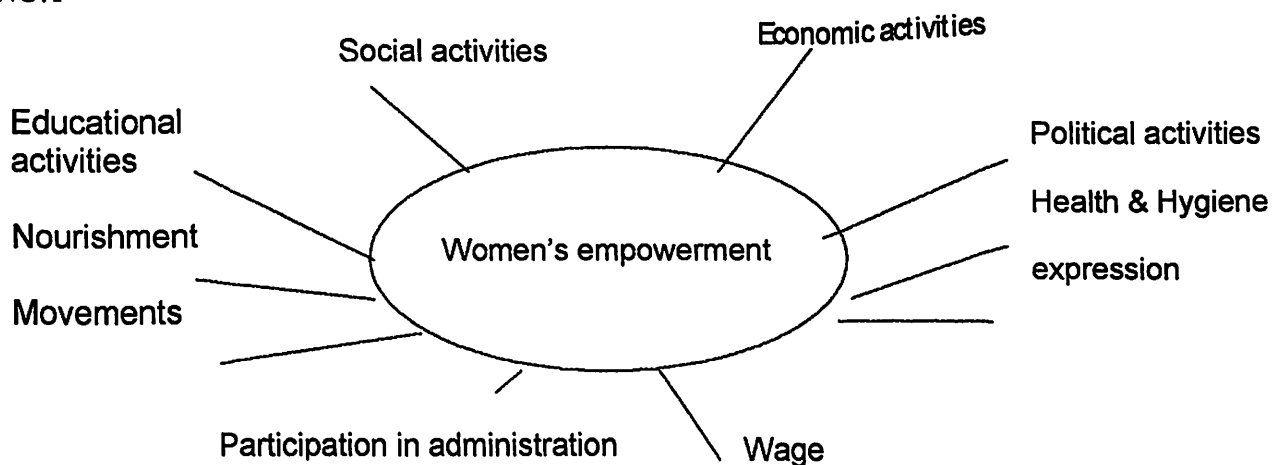
However, the women's empowerment through women education can build up the nation with a new dynamism.

### **Women Empowerment : A global concern:**

Women play the significant role in the family and society. Recently, the women studies regarding women development try to focus on the status and role of women and to0

develop their Status. Women has the equal rights and responsibilities like men and women can reconstruct the society in a systematic way. Gender equality through women Empowerment is regarded as the basic tool free development in the present world. The proposal 'removal of a kinds of discrimination on woman' was accepted by the General Body of the U.N.O. in 1979. The great thinkers from the east and the west are always in favour of equal status of man and woman. But in India we get a damaged picture of women through various factors like sex ratio, literacy rate, political participation, work participation and damaging of wage, internal and international migration etc. According to the report of world economic forum (2005) , India occupies 53<sup>rd</sup> position on women empowerment out of 85 countries under the study. The study includes economic opportunity. Participation in woks, political and educational activities, maternity etc. In the list Sweden occupies the first position and it is followed by Norway. But in case of political Participation, India occupies 24<sup>th</sup> position.

Women's Empowerment is a global issue. Empowerment can be realized in the various spheres of activities like social, economic and political activities like social, economic and political activities, women's health and hygiene, mothers and children's status, participation in job market, demanding wages, movements, expression of views etc. Women's empowerment is a combined result of the multidimensional efforts as per Resolution of the UNO.1




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1. Resolution of general body, UNO, 1979

Women's Empowerment should be the goal of the nation to achieve the all round balanced development of a nation, like India, Where women development is not in a balanced pace. The statistics of the world on women give a smoky picture of the status of women. The statistics explain – (a) 2/3<sup>rd</sup> part of the total matured population of the world is female. (b) 70% out of the total poor of the world of the women, (c) Vast gender inequality during adolescence, (d) The mortality rate among mother and children is higher, (e) Illiteracy rate among women is higher, (f) The drop out rate of girls is among women is higher, (g) Violence against women are more (Bhagyalaxmi,2004).<sup>1</sup>

It is lamentable fact that India has comparatively low sex ratio. In most of the developed countries male births for every 1000 female births are reported to be around 1015-1060. Women are found to live longer than men, if both enjoy the same level of opportunities. In those countries where men and women are equally treated sex ratio is found to be in favour of women. Brazil has 1025, the U.S.A. has 1030, Japan has 1040, but India has 933 women population for 1000 male population.

In 1901 India's Sex ratio was 972 but it is decreased 927 in 1991 and it is 933 in 2001.<sup>2</sup>

In case of literacy , women literacy rate is found to be low. The following table shows India's literacy rate.

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1. Bhagyalaxmi, 2004, Yojana.
  2. Economic Survey, govt. of India, 2001-02.

For male and female literacy in various census reports:

Year	Male	Female
1951	27.10	08.86
1961	40.40	15.35
1971	45.96	21.97
1981	56.38	29.76
1991	64.13	39.29
2001	75.85	54.16

*Source: Economic Survey 2001-02, GOI*

But some positive indices like life expectancy rate at birth, the sex ratio, the age of marriage etc. show a better portion for women and the programmes relating to women have been shifted from welfare to development and empowerment.

### **Women's Empowerment: Towards New Direction**

But it is my firm conviction that if the men and women of India cultivate in themselves the courage to face death bravely and non violently, they can laugh to scorn the power of ornaments and realize the ideal of unadulterated independence in terms of the masses which would serve as an example to the world. In that women can take the lead for they are a Personification of the power of self suffering.

Gandhi, M.K. *The last phase* 10/11/1947

It was a great hope that independence would ensure freedom and equality for women and provide a higher status of women. The constitution of India pledge to achieve the notion of a just society based on the principle of dignity of individual and political and legal quality in the form of fundamental Rights but even after more than 63 years of independence, no significant improvement is enjoyed by lots of women in our society.

The multidimensional issues relating to women's role in development and decision making which was started in the 1970s, have gained the importance shown by the planners administrators and policy makers. Unfortunately, the recognition of women's participation in different aspects of development is found at an infant stage because of lower participation of women in policies and implementation process. Recently, various women conferences have taken place in various parts of the world for development of women. In Beijing, China the participants from almost all the countries of the world raises the issue of 'Empowerment of Women'. And this conception was beautifully explained by Gandhi before 1920s.

A Survey of Gandhi's Social ideas makes it clear that Gandhi aims at the establishment of a society in which peace and happiness will reign supreme. He feels that this would be possible only when men and women realize this status and duties in society. It is a fact that women today are crying to compact with men in every walk of life by limiting the ways of men. Gandhi is also aware that men are not prepared to give up their sense of mastery over women. This appears to Gandhi as unfortunate. He feels that in ideal society duties and functions are distributed not only among the different parts, but also among men and women. Both men and women have the same soul, and therefore are equal. The work assigned to one is not inferior to the work assigned to the other. Man by nature, is physically strong, and therefore he outs in hard labour to support and protect the family. Women, by nature are loving and therefore, they are equipped by nature to play the role of a mother and the caretaker of home. Both these duties are equally important and necessary; this must be realized by both men and women."<sup>1</sup>

Hence, we must honour the concept "Empowerment of Women" for a strong and developed Human Society.

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1. Lal Basantkumar, contemporary Indian Philosophy, M.B. Pub. Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, P.145, 146.

**CHAPTER VII**  
**FINDINGS& CONCLUSION**

## Chapter VII

### Findings & Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi deeply realized that the real swaraj could not be attained without the upliftment and consequent awakening of the vast mass of women and therefore, Gandhi could not involve the women issue in his strategy for lending India towards freedom. It is an inspiring issue to make his bold and mighty conscious step "To familiarize the national movement by inducting women in large number". Gandhi's views of women in emancipation were scientific as well as internationally approved. Gandhi believed that women clearly have a positive role to offer is regeneration and reconstruction of society. He opined for a shared vision of tasks between men and women. Gandhi believed that women clearly have a positive role to offer in regeneration of Society. He opined for a Shared vision of tasks between men and woman. Gandhi gave powerful support to the cause of woman emancipation and vehemently criticized various evil practices afflicting India womanhood. For ameliorating the condition of women Gandhi sought and found support from classical tradition. Gandhi frequently emphasized on historical evidence which established that woman's lives were less restricted in ancient times and often argued for broader social role for women in modern times on this basis. (S. Shridev, 1969).

According to Gandhi "I am uncompromising in the matter of women's rights. In my opinion we should treat daughters and sons on a footing of equality. AS women begin to realize their strength, as they must in proportion to the education they receiver, they will naturally resent the glaring inequalities to which they are subjected."

Gandhi, through his public life preached against the wrong done to women in the name of law, tradition and even religion. According to Gandhi, "I am uncompromising in the matter

of women's rights. In my opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality".

"Man has converted her into a domestic drudge and an instrument of his pleasure. The result is a semi paralysis of our society".

"To me this domestic slavery of women is a symbol of our barbarism. It is high time that our womankind was freed from this incubus. Domestic work ought not to take the whole of a women's time.

Today the role occupation of women amongst us was supposed to be to bear children, to look after her husband and otherwise to drudge for the household. This was shame. Not only was a woman condemned to domestic slavery but when she went out as a labourer to earn wages, though she worked harder than men she was paid less".

The above statements share with women's movement the goals underlying women's struggle for liberation, equality and development. For women (as for other oppressed groups) freedom from oppression involved not only equality but also the right of women to freedom of choice and the power to control their own lives and bodies. Such control feminist's claim is essential to ensure a sense of dignity and autonomy for every woman. (Gain, May, 1981) Gandhiji had a universal response to the denouncement of women who deviated from patriarchal fixes, the given stereotyping of male-female roles and codes of behaviour. He suggested to women that they resist this male- order and refuse to marry, to have sex, refuse jewelry and even refuse to cook. He believed that such collective resistance by women would be the only way to liberate themselves from the chains of gender – apartheid. (Join in Times of India, Aug 1995 and H.D.R. 1995) It is true that Gandhi gave an equal status to women as he perceived women as equal but morally different.

Gandhi held women to be superior soldiers in the war of non- violence. Gandhi believed that holding to be inferior to men is an insult to the whole womanhood. Gandhi wrote in young India, 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1930, “If by power we mean sheer animal power, then men, no doubt are superior to women. But, if by power is meant moral strength then women’s strength is unparalleled,. It is not true that as compared to men, women have greatest common sense, are more sacrificing, more to learnt and more courageous ? It the basic principal of life is non- violence, then the future definitely belongs to women.” From the different writings on women’s equality Gandhi showed his great understanding and in depth knowledge about a strong Indian Society which is strengthened by both male and female force of people .

“In today’s context, there are different dimensions of women’s development and common, basic principle underlying all of them is equality of men and women should start aping men, masking their own distinctive, women will have to ask for equal rights. Secondly, the fact is that neither men nor women are free in the sense of being totally in dependent of each other. In stead they are neither independent. Creation itself is mutual dependence . Similarly an ideal society will have to comply with balanced mutual inter- dependence of men and women. Gandhi writes in Hindi Navajivan: “The world can be managed neither by man nor women alone. The only way to sum it is by the operation of the two. If, and when a woman gets angry, she can destroy the whole world. For this reason, she has been held to use the great power (Maha Shakti)” (Bisht Krishna, 1999)

Gandhi’s roles and responsibilities towards women’s empowerment were not only praiseworthy but also encouraging for upcoming generations. Gandhi’s pains taking imaginative steps to invite women in the nationalist movement on such a large scale was undoubtedly a unique phenomenon in the history of the country, It would be no exaggeration to say that no one in recent times in India has done more than Gandhi for ameliorating

women's position in private as well as public life and certainly no man evoked such wholehearted devotion from women (Thakur Bharti, 2006)

He (Gandhi) was profoundly distressed by the degenerated condition of India women who were suffering from various oppressive, dehumanizing and exploitation by social practices like child marriage, satipratha, ban on widow remarriage, purdah system, prostitution, devdasi system etc. and aimed at eradicating these evils from Indian society. He therefore worked ceaselessly for the regeneration of Indian women and reconstruction of Indian society in which women would be able to rediscover her individuality. They had lost through years of subjection. In this process he vehemently criticized the weakness, dependence and subjugation and emphasized upon the courage, strength, self-confidence and self reliance among women needed to break these chains of slavery (Thakur Bharti 2006)

In fact Gandhi's diversified role in Indian society was in favour of women's empowerment this approach towards emancipation of women was an integrated approach encompassing economic, psychological, social, political, spiritual, cultural and moral aspects of human life. He deeply realized that emancipation is an essential pre-requisite for fighting against oppression and distortions faced by women and for empowering them for a bold Indian society. From the strong and diversified role of Gandhi it was clear that he could change the situation of Indian society and the empowerment of women could gain a new dynamism. From the views of the contemporary women leaders of freedom movement it becomes clear that Gandhi had the influential role for emancipation of women. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, a reputed social worker during freedom movement remarked that Gandhi's influence was the biggest influence in her life. She said, "From the time Gandhi's leadership arose, I became much more attracted towards a political question, before that of course I was reading a lot about the other leaders and about the political question..... but there was a difference in the message that he brought to me. Until then, the whole idea of self

government for India meant replacing the British by the Indian..... But he brought a new factor is to the old question and that was his interpretation of freedom, in terms of changing the life of the people”.

She further added, “socially I was much more simulated and perhaps I may use the word agitated, why there should be caste distinctions, why there should be rich and poor.... And it was the first time he directed his attention towards this question and I felt that here were the answers that political changes must mean also social and economic changes”.

Another important women leader during freedom movement Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, who served as Gandhi’s secretary remarked, “What drew one to Gandhiji was his desire to have women in his nonviolent army and his faith in womankind. This was an irresistible appeal to a human in land where women were looked upon as only fit for producing children and serving their words and masters.” She further added, “She found in him not only a ‘Bapu’, a wise father, but what is far more precious, a mother, before whose embracing and understanding, all fear and restraint vanished,”

Aruna Asaf Ali observed Gandhi in a different views “Gandhiji’s appeal was something elemental. At last, a woman was made to feel the equal of man, that feeling dominated us all, educated and non-educated ..... Earlier there had been many influences at work, many social reformers had gone ahead and it was all in the air. But no single act could have done what Gandhiji did when he first called upon women to join and said that they are the better symbols of mankind. They have all the virtues of satyagrahis. All that puffed us up enormously and gave us a great deal of self confidence”. She further remarked,” his saintly personality helped to overcome the resistance of man in the male dominated families of the upper and middle classes and in bringing women outside the domestic walls to take part in public life.”

Sucheta Kripalini observed, "Gandhi's personality was such that it inspired confidence not only in women but in the guardians of women, their husbands, fathers and brothers. The standard of conduct that he laid down for his work was so high that when he came out and worked in the political field their family members knew that they were quite secure, quite protected. Had Gandhiji's leadership not been there, such a large number of women would not have come."

Sushila Nayar observed, "I learned about Gandhiji the time I was a small child. Not having a father, he was something like a father to me."

Other women like Swarooprani Nehru, Kamala Neheru, Parvati Devi, Basanti Devi, Manibehn Patel, Lilabati Nunshi, Janaki Devi Bajaj, Mrs. Hasan Imam, Begum Allam etc plunged in to non violent movement because of the great influential role of Gandhi among thousands of Indian women and their acceptance of Gandhi's leadership. According to Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay, "the greatest achievement of Gandhiji's role was to bring change in women lives which further resulted in their empowerment."

It is true that women empowerment has great role to change the society with a new dynamism. Women Empowerment can bring two positive changes to the society. Firstly, it brings the productive mainstream to one half of a nation's population. Secondly, women by their very nature are better and more effective agents for social change than man. The impact of Gandhi on the particular issue of women empowerment is a great event to Indian society as well as culture. The diversified role Gandhi was so influential and innovative that it gained due importance in the development planning since independence. Development of women had been the central focus in development planning since independence. For attaining the empowerment of women in India the government of India took a number of initiatives. In the present day situation the policy of women empowerment was considered as a major agenda for development.

The main goals of national policy on empowerment of women in India were:-

- Creating an environment through positive economic and social policies for all development of women to enable them to realize their full potential.
- Equal access to participation and decision making of women in social, political and economic life of the nation, also in health care, quality education, career and vocational guidance, employment ,safety etc.
- De-jure and defacto enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on equal basis with men.
- Elimination of discrimination and all forms of violence against women and girl child.
- Strengthening legal system aimed at elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Regarding empowerment of women once Gandhi said, “Where capable women have been left out, men should make amends. It is their duty to give such encouragement to women as will enable them to outshine men.” In this context Prof Bharti Thakur in her master piece on “women in Gandhi’s mass movement” wrote. “The ultimate goal of empowerment of women based on Gandhi’s vision is Sarvodaya, the welfare of all through cooperation and trusteeship in the economic sphere and mutual aid in the social sphere without regard to gender, casts or class. In brief, empowering women Socio-economically through increased awareness of their rights and duties as well as well to access to resources is decisive step towards greater security for them. Gandhi asserted, Ganges of rights flow from the Himalaya of duties.” (Thakur Bharti, 2006)

Hence, it is worth while for the young generation of our country that it is the land of Gandhi where the equality between men and women is preached and greatly honoured under the influence of Gandhi, the father of this holy land.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

In this era of tremendous economic development and ICT revolution influenced by the L.P.G. policy (Liberalization, Privatization and Globalization), it is a lamentable fact that the condition of women in our society is yet to develop. In recent years, there is a dangerous increase of dowry deaths, female feticide, rape, sexual harassment, family violence, domestic unrest, wife battering and harassment of women which show a large-scale societal breakdown'. In India we are not getting an environment of workplace where males and females are equally paid. The condition of rural women is found at a miserable condition. The women take less food and less sleep for making a peaceful domestic life. They activity participate in domestic productive activities but they get scarcely recognized as co workers. In the fields of education and employment also they could not shine them properly due to their ignorance and lack of importance given by the society.

In our country at least half of total population is women. The contributions of this of the total population would be maximum if they are given an environment of healthy living and healthy working. For attaining the goal of reconstruction of Indian society the disequilibrium of women should be removed completely.

It was popularized by Gandhi that the women rights should be duly considered as human rights by our government Gandhi strongly advocated the education and employment of women, widows re marriage, equal status of women and rejected the early marriage, forced prostitution and domestic slavery. For the active and dynamic role of Gandhi the freedom movement during 1920s and 1930s, the women's participation was not only encouraging but

fruit bearing also. In this way the empowerment of women was highlighted by Gandhi in India.

For a progressive society the equality between man and woman is an essential prerequisite. For this a change in the attitude of the society, cultural transformation and a paradigm shift in the status of woman are required. Each and every woman of our society should know about their inner strength and inner potential for the changes. In this context Gandhi said "If she learns satyagraha she can be perfectly independent and self-supporting. She will not have to feel dependent upon other. This does not mean that she shall not take only help from other. She will certainly, but if such help be not forth coming. She will not feel destitute." Such type of comment intensifies the inner strength of women through moral courage and a strong mind set for positive changes for the greater of our society.

It is true that Gandhi was a determinant fighter to establish the equality status of man and women in our society. In his entire life he tried a lot for bringing women empowerment to our society. But the present generation has to tread a long path of agitation to attain complete enjoyment of social, political, economic and cultural freedom. It is the need of the hour.

To conclude, the greatest words of Gandhi are important. He said "I believe in the proper education of women. But I do believe that women will not make her contribution to the world by mimicking or running a race with man. She can run the race, but she will not rise to the great heights she is capable of by mimicking man. She has to be complement of man,"

For a strong and developed society the equality between men and women is the essential pre-condition. For removal of all kinds of discriminations against women each and every person of our society should step forward keeping the great mantras of our Bapu Gandhi, the father of the Nation in our minds.

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