

Perspectives Of Mahatma Gandhi On Women's Empowerment And The Present Context

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Abstract:

Women's empowerment is one of the most pressing issues facing the globe today and a popular subject of conversation. Many nations have successfully resolved this problem, at least to some degree. This is a problem that has not gone away and remains significant in India since women still experience discrimination in our mostly patriarchal society. Women are stereotyped as being weaker and less capable of making independent judgments than males. They are supposed to behave in a subservient manner and follow the lead of their male counterparts. The man who came to be recognized as India's "Father of the Nation" advocated strongly for women's equality. We honour Mahatma Gandhi. In this article, an effort is made to comprehend Mahatma Gandhi's perspectives on the status of women and to speculate on the continued applicability of his philosophies in India in the "twenty-first century." The time has come to inform and empower women so they can gain their rights but also to change the way men think about women from a position of weakness to one of power. These needs must be met to meet the needs of the hour. Despite the existence of laws that protect women from some forms of violence, such as "child marriage, rape, domestic abuse, sex-selective abortion, honour killing, trafficking, sexual harassment, and dowry," these forms of violence still occur. Other forms of violence include honour killing. Indian women are more likely to become victims of crime as a result of their increased freedom to pursue occupations outside the home. This is partly because existing laws are unable to manage the issue adequately. The answer is for society as a

whole to become more compassionate and liberal when it comes to problems that are connected to gender. It is certain that if we adhered to the beliefs and practices of Mahatma Gandhi, we would have been able to win our independence under his leadership. Similarly, if we did so now, we could liberate ourselves from the constraints of gender prejudices.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi, Women, Empowerment, liberals, helpmate, humanity.

Introduction:

When we talk about empowerment, Wåhlin, (2017) refer to "...the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights..." According to UNICEF (2006), "the goal of empowering women is to build a system in which women contribute to the growth of society, and the political climate is such that it allows them to live and thrive free from exploitation, anxiety, and oppression. Providing women in India with the opportunity to make their own decisions and take charge of their own lives, regardless of their gender, is what we mean when we talk about empowering them." Mahatma Gandhi was an ardent supporter of "gender equality and advocated for the liberalization and empowerment of women." He was also a supporter of women's rights. Mahatma Gandhi, in his capacity as a social and political reformer, was instrumental in the elimination of age-old societal problems that pertained to women. He played a leading role in this regard. "As a social activist, he desired to streamline society and make India" competitive in the global arena; yet, it is possible that his ideal would not come true if, "even after seventy five decades, fifty percent" of the population of women were still oppressed. According to Sastry, V. V. L. N. (2020), the current contribution of Indian women to the country's gross domestic product is "just 17 percent, which is less than half of the average contribution to GDP worldwide, which is 37 percent."

The Perspectives of "Mahatma Gandhi" Towards Women

In the first fifty years of the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi was an essential figure in the movement that brought about dramatic improvements in the position of women. "He believed in the liberalization and overall growth of humanity, both of which were not feasible without the liberation of Indian

women, who were and still are the most repressed and oppressed sector of society from different facets of social life.” (Brown, J. M: 1969). He thought that the emancipation of Indian women was necessary for the liberalization and overall development of humanity. Gandhi placed a strong emphasis throughout his life on the freedom of women since they made up the portion of society accountable for India's future inhabitants. (Kishwar, M: 1985). Putlibai, Mahatma Gandhi's mother, is credited with having inadvertently influenced Gandhi to see women in the roles of 'Ardhangani,' which means "the better half," and 'Sadadharmini,' which means "the helpmate," throughout Gandhi's life. According to Gandhi, women have higher standards of morality and spirituality than males have (Mukherjee, M: 2010) Gandhi was convinced without a shadow of a doubt that women should play a more significant part in “the political, economic, and social liberation of the nation.” According to Wolpert, S. (2001), Gandhi was strongly confident that women have an “inbuilt ability for nonviolence. Therefore, from the beginning of Gandhi's fight for Indian independence, Gandhi aggressively encouraged Indian women to join the freedom movement.” This call to action continued throughout Gandhi's lifetime. As a result, the number of women who participated in the struggle against corporations was relatively high, and they were instrumental in disseminating the 'Khadi' ideology.

Gandhi on Societal Problems that Affect Women

Remarriage of a Widow:

Mahatma Gandhi opposed any societal barriers, norms, or laws that restricted “individual freedom and were imposed by the community or the law in a coercive manner.” According to Mahatma Gandhi, a widow caring for her children should not change her marital vows, but she should have the freedom to do so if that is what she desires. (Brown, J. M: 1969). On the other hand, Gandhi believed this principle should be applied uniformly to both men and women (Kripalani, 1970, page 393). The opinions that Mahatma Gandhi had about child widows were unwavering. According to Garai (2015), if the widow is a kid, that child should be legally wed since a widower would vehemently refuse a “first marriage in the event of a child widow. ...We cry out for cow protection in the name of religion, but we refuse protection to the human cow in the shape of the girl widow,” Mahatma Gandhi once stated. We would object

when religion was used to coerce others. However, "in the name of religion, we compel our girl widows who were not capable of comprehending the significance of the wedding ceremony to live out their lives as widows." Little girls should not be forced to become widows against their will; this is a heinous practice for which Hindus pay a high price every day. (Kripalani: 1970).

Marriage of Children:

The inhumane habit of marrying children off at a young age was something that Mahatma Gandhi vehemently opposed. He believed weddings of this kind to be 'ab initio' invalid and void, and as such, he did not consider them to be marriages at all. According to what Mahatma Gandhi had to say about the matter, "The reform must begin by those who have girl widows taking courage in both of their hands and seeing that the child widows in their charge are duly and well married rather than remarried. "They only went through the motions, but they were never really married." (Kripalani, 1970). According to Gandhi (quoted in Anuradha, 2016), child marriage is a contributor to both the moral and physical deterioration of society.

The Purdah Method:

Mahatma Gandhi abolished the practice of purdah. He believed that the veil, also known as the "Pardhah" or the "Purdah," was an unnecessary obstacle that stood in the way of women as they went about their daily activities. According to the Mahatma, chastity results from the cleanliness of both the mind and the body, and it is only possible to maintain chastity by exercising self-control rather than hiding behind "a veil (Garai, 2015)." He said that "chastity is not a growth that occurs in a greenhouse." It is not possible to safeguard it with the wall that the purdah has built around it. It must develop from the inside out, and for it to be of any use, it must be able to resist any temptation that is not sought out (Bose). Gandhi, in reality, disregarded the 'Purdah' system and requested that he be led to "the sanctum sanctorum of the family, which was the ladies' quarters in Hindu and Muslim households" (Kripalani, 1970, page 394).

The Dowry Method:

The practice of paying a bride's family a dowry was one that Mahatma Gandhi disapproved of and saw as a direct result of the caste system. In his paper "Campbell, D., & Dass, P. L. (2019) Mahatma Gandhi" asserts that doing away with the caste system would eventually result in the elimination of the dowry system. As a result, the birth of a girl in and of herself "becomes a burden, which provides a platform for gender discrimination across society as a whole." The dowry system was a nightmare for women in the middle class and the lower classes. As a result of this, one may find festivities on the occasion of the birth of a male kid, while one might find silence and grief on the experience of "the birth of a female child (Kripalani, 1970)." According to "Mahatma Gandhi", a man should be excommunicated from society if he demands a dowry, and the "parents of girls should not be impressed by English degrees." In addition, the parents of girls should not be afraid to enter marriage with someone from a different caste or province to find a person who is a good match for their daughter.

Getting a divorce:

Mahatma Gandhi disapproved of the extravagant spending that was done for wedding ceremonies. He preferred marriages with little complications. When a married connection is in a condition of suspension, Gandhi believed that the only alternative answer was not to end the marriage and seek a divorce. The institution of marriage was something that Mahatma Gandhi saw as a kind of discipline. This level of self-control may be maintained by adhering to moral standards and practicing repentance. Therefore, moral constraint should be exercised to retain a marital connection unspoiled and to avoid the unplanned circumstance of getting a divorce "(Garai, 2015, p. 106)."

"Sex, Methods of Contraception, and Sterilization:"

"Mahatma Gandhi believed that both men and women should exercise self-control and have sexual relations only to produce offspring (Kapadia)." Despite criticism from the women's movement, Mahatma Gandhi was against the use of contraceptives for birth control. Because he was their defender and intended to guide them toward a better way of life, it does not imply that he did not have a compassionate attitude toward women who suffered from repeated births. On the

contrary, it indicates that he did have such a view. His unspoken conviction was that reproductive organs should never be utilized for anything other than producing offspring and that any other use of these organs constituted unethical behavior. It is the responsibility of both the male and the woman to exercise self-control, which is the safest method for preventing unwanted pregnancies (Kaur R.A.). It's possible "that the ideas of self-control and purity clouded his judgment and hindered him from thinking about alternative, more effective techniques of birth control solutions for the problem of population growth." (Abu Baker, M. M : 2014).

"Mahatma Gandhi's Views on Women's Normative Roles"

"Mahatma Gandhi" believed that women were the true artisans of India since they were responsible for creating new citizens. "Man and woman are of equal rank, but they are not identical," Gandhi said. They are an unrivalled pair in that they are complementary to one another; each helps the other to the point that the existence of the other cannot be conceived of in the absence of the first. As a result of these facts, "it follows as a necessary corollary that anything that will diminish the status of either one of them will result in the equal and simultaneous destruction of both of them." When formulating any plan for the education of women, this fundamental reality must, at all times, be kept in mind. Because the "man is the dominant figure in the public activities of a married couple, it is appropriate for him to have a more in-depth understanding of these matters. On the other hand, home life is entirely the woman's province." As a result, women need more expertise in household matters, parenting and education of children, and other areas related to domestic life..." (Garai, 2015). a. Nonviolence was Gandhi's primary strategy for achieving Indian independence, and it was his faith in the inherent power of nonviolence that enabled him to include "Indian women in the campaign for Satyagraha effectively." He had high hopes that women's active engagement in the struggle for Indian independence would not only help them develop more moral fortitude on the inside but also assist them in discarding the age-old stereotypes that were prevalent in the culture of the time. According to Garai (2015), Mahatma Gandhi's leadership was essential in assisting women to regain and preserve their self-worth and dignity. According to Gandhi, women, due to their tendency toward conservatism, are better

at distinguishing between good and evil and appreciating the good. Women's power is limitless; all they need to do is identify and learn how to utilize it. Women play an essential part in the functioning of the family and have the ability to shape the morals and characteristics of their offspring for the benefit of society. Both boys and girls should get vocational training to be prepared to support themselves if forced to do so. Household chores should be distributed evenly between the sexes. Because women have been a class that has been oppressed for generations, they must broaden their perspective to include the whole of society and devote part of their time to helping the community recognize their value. It is time for women to step into their power, acknowledge their full standing, and participate in society at the same level as men. According to Gandhi, the immense potential of women for self-sacrifice might "play a significant role in the promotion of communal peace," the eradication of untouchability, and the dissemination of primary education (Kishwar, M. (1985). To combat societal ills such as "child marriage, dowry, sati, purdah, and prostitution (Mondal), Mahatma Gandhi advised committed" women to initiate conversations with men and women from a variety of cultures and begin a nationwide campaign against these practices. Mahatma Gandhi hoped that the people of India would internalize and practice the moral and ethical principles he advocated in "all aspects of life, including the political, social, economic, biological, and so on." According to Dalton, D. (2012), Mahatma Gandhi consistently used the same approach to the problem of advancing the status of women.

The Current Situation of Indian Women

According to Farooqui, S. (2021), the status that women had in later Vedic India was inferior to what they held during the Rig Vedic era. Since that time, women have been denied the right to remarry, education, and the ability to inherit property from their parents. The dowry system, child marriage, and the practice known as 'Sati Pratha' were all introduced into the culture at the same time, which made the situation much worse—before and after the country gained its independence, a significant number of advocates for social change worked to eliminate practices that were seen to be demeaning to women. Following the country's attainment of its independence, regulations were enacted to put a stop to and prohibit future

instances of abuses aimed at subjugating women. At this time, the situation has improved as a consequence of the efforts of reformers as well as laws and regulations implemented by the government; nevertheless, the outcomes are still a long way behind the expectations. According to the essay written by Pranav Dua, the status of “women in post-independence India is more respectable as compared to the predicament that women were in before India gained its freedom.” According to him, changes in people's attitudes about women have resulted from developments in “science and technology, the proliferation of education, social and political activities, and other aspects of modernity. Some problems, such as child marriages, the Sati Pratha, the exploitation of widows, the Devdasi System, and the Purdah System, have almost completely gone, which has helped women's morale and their sense of self-confidence (Pranav Dua). This could be true to some degree, but the economic standing of women is not even close to being the core of what it means for women to be empowered.” The ideals of equality and justice outlined in the Constitution's preamble have yet to come close to being realized here in the United States. According to Kumar (2020), just six percent of new businesses are managed by women.

The number of women in India's population is much lower than the number of males, creating a very unequal gender ratio. According to census 2011, the gender ratio is 940 women for every 1000 men, which slightly improved from census 2001, when the ratio was 933 women for every 1000 men (census2011.co.in). The literacy rate in India for women is just 65.46 percent. In comparison, the literacy rate for males is “82.14 percent (www.census2011.co.in),” making the perspective that Mahatma Gandhi had on the need for women to receive an education all the more significant. According to Bansal (2016), the “school education system in India is failing in terms of quality compared” to the school education systems in its neighbours Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. According to Kumar (2017), several factors prevent women from taking part in economic growth, including the risk of sexual assault, unequal pay, the ethics of working outside, and societal prejudice.

An Overview of the Efforts Made in Post-Independence India to Improve the Position of Women in Society

Women's empowerment is a vital component of a robust foundation for the family, community, and country. Even though there are government policies aimed at empowering women at the national, state, and local levels in many different fields, such as "health, education, economic opportunity, laws for gender-based violence, political participation, right to work, proper to poverty, etc., there is a significant gap between the actual and expected results. According to Panda (2017), articles 14, 15, and 42 of the Constitution of India all offer equality between the sexes" and give women unique responsibilities to help them become more robust. After 1947, "several constitutional and legal rights have been established to protect women better. Prominent among them are The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006; Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961; Maternity Benefit Act, 1961; Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013," Indecent Representation of Women (Prevention) Act, 1986, National Commission for Women Act, 1990, Equal Remuneration Act, 1976, etc. (Dubey, 2016). According to edugeneral.org (2017), a few instances of relevant legislation include the "Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act (1994), the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (2005), the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (1956), and the Mines Act (1952)."

In addition to the initiatives above, the government has implemented several other women's empowerment programs to advance women's rights. Some of these schemes include the Working Women Hostel Scheme from 1972, "the Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP) from 1986, UJJAWALA (A Comprehensive Scheme for Prevention of Trafficking and Rescue, Rehabilitation, and Re-integration of Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation) from 2014, the 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' Scheme from 2015, One Stop Centre Scheme from 2015, Women Helpline Scheme from 2015, 'Mahila Shakti Kendras' (MSK) 2017, Mahila Police Volunteers 2019, etc. (<http://www.wcd.nic.in>)."

Conclusion

As a result of patriarchal ideology, women are still primarily seen as caregivers rather than active participants in the

economic and social advancement of their countries. This may be readily proved by the fact that there are very few women who have started their businesses in India. The idea that women should have economic autonomy was essential to Mahatma Gandhi. However, the current state of affairs is far different from what our nation's founders envisioned for the country. Every step of women's emancipation brings with it a new set of challenges and obstacles. In the past, prevalent problems included child marriage, child widowhood, the Sati Pratha system, and the Purdah system. However, after independence and entering "the post-modern period, these problems have become more insignificant."

Since women began leaving their homes, however, new problems have surfaced. The increasing prevalence of crimes such as sexual assault, eve-teasing, harassment, attacks with acid, murder by honor, sexual harassment in the workplace, and other forms of violence against women creates new barriers to the achievement of the elusive goal of women's empowerment. The crux of the situation is that Indian families demand contemporary times, but only for themselves and their daughters, as well as their own families. The thinking remains redundant, however, when the topic shifts to the social standing of girls from other homes. The Indian family must not lose sight of the larger community. Empowerment for women should not be limited to the women in one's immediate family but should extend to all women in society. In the guise of moral policing, many members of the community not only place restrictions on their daughters but also engage in illegal behavior. Governments do adopt legislation to prevent violence against women, but what is really needed now is a change in the mindset of the general public. Gandhi believed that women should be held accountable for promoting gender equality in their communities since they are the primary caretakers of future Indian citizens. They should begin in early infancy to educate their children to respect and honor the dignity of not just the women in their household but also women in general. There will be a true revolution, and only then can the ideal of women's empowerment be achieved.

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