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## **Indian Women in the Scabbard of Gandhi Philosophy**

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### **Abstract**

*Mahatma Gandhi's eradication of social evils from Indian society was as important a task as liberation of India from British colonialism. Gandhiji kept the agenda of 'constructive work' always alive even during the peak of his political movements. He was worried to core of his heart about the plight of Indian women and for this reason he gave welfare of women no greater importance than his other concerns like removal of untouchability, promoting Hindu-Muslim unity and Khadi etc. He urged people to shun all prejudices against them and to provide her due place in society. It was because of his efforts that Indian women began participating in the political and social movement. The very bases of Gandhiji's thoughts were his arguments from the ancient texts and scriptures and arrived at the conclusions best suited to the contemporary Indian women needs. This paper attempts to describe his views and opinions about Indian women in the delineated above perspective.*

**Key Words:** *Eradication, British colonialism, untouchability, scriptures and arrived.*

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**Introduction:** The foremost gandhiji stalwart in the freedom struggle of India, who is known as father of India, and the 'The Nation Maker'. To gain freedom to India, National Congress Committees absorbed him as one of the major leader of that committee, India got freedom in 1947. After independence gandhiji had said that Indian National Congress Committee should be dissolved, and he put his views before other leaders. But the committee did not agree with a view of M.Gandhi. But however that committee was not dissolved and later on it was changed into a National Party known as National Congress Party. It is unfortunate that Gandhiji did not remain alive for further more years after the independence. But his views about Economy, Socio- Political and the condition of females in the Society his any books he had written which give continues to right direction for the changes in the society. But the researcher cannot include all his views on these different topics so he selected the role of Gandhian Philosophy in the Empowerment of Women. However, a researcher would not highlight all these gandhian dimensions and decided to restrict to gandhian philosophy on women liberation.

According to Plato the development and destruction of any nation depends upon the development of females in that nation. However according to Plato the society which keeps females away from the social work that society and that particular country cannot make any kind of progress in the future. From the beginning Gandhiji thought only about the development of females. His Synergetic efforts of mind and body made see the participation of Sarojini Naidu, Vijayalaxmi Pandit, Kasturba Gandhi, Durgabai Deshmukh, SuchitaKruplani with Gandhi in the freedom

struggle. With the help of these great ladies Gandhiji waged a warfooting a struggle to solve use realize and different problems of females.

India is a country made up of small villages. Villages tipify Indian Culture. Gandhiji's message 'Back to villages or go to villages' seem apt in the context of develop ment of Indian villages and country side. When villages in India develop the country will autometically make progress. To develop villages means to make overall developmentof males and females in that villages. Wgy did gandhiji attached so much impotence to village development, The only reason he cited and is true that 60% of indian papulation lives in those villages and villages constitute this nation. Therefore the nations development could be guaged trough villages development. This 60% of papulation involves half womwn folk and this should be invalved the overan prosperity of the village, in all, what he was that the village development would take care of family development and village development as well women is inseparabate part of the family and her empowment geninly lies participation in this development of villages. According to theexpectation of Gandhiji More than 60% of the population peoples lives in the villages today. We do notignore them. This is the view of Gandhi each and everywomen must be empowered without the overall development of females, they cannot develop their families wecan't deny that female is an inseparable part of a family.

According to Gandhi Indian women will hsve to make into social, political, regional & economical field. Every individual in a society and in a family retain the social reputation / status because of females are the incarnation of Goddesses according to mythology. Every person in a male dominated society must give her due respect and government should serious attention to them, according to Gandhiji though late the Indian government established social welfare department aimed at women and child development. Central and state government have committed to maintain social status of women in society.

After independence the economic conditionof women in their family was pitiable and it is an issue of which the national leader of that time was very serious. Due to literacy, addictions, wilde family matters femalesbecome very weak. They had to think only about the daily bread and butter. The leader of the family was engaged in earning. But due to overburden of family tensions females always fell sick and because of many a time they lost their little dear ones. Females do not have any kind of economic source, they don't have any right to discuss the economical matters of their family. According to Gandhiji if you don't give a chance to become her economically sound. She would never make her family progressive in any field. So in this it is very essential that government and society should together give prioritised attention to the empowerment of women. With this in background Maharashtra Government started various policies such as women saving groups, self-help groups, small industries, sewing machine project etc.for their empowerment in economic sector. Government gave grant to various societies and also gave training to females of various nues & businesses to further their self – dependantned. Government started special projects for primitive people and economically affected elements in the society and they implemented such kinds of programme for females as per the expectations of Gandhiji. To empower femalesand make them self dependant. The participation off emales in Panchayat Raj system is one of the important thing. Gandhi thought that Local Government Bodies are the soul of democracy, he also added that decentralization is very important for the success of democracy.Due to decentralization the power comes inthe hands of common people and the direct participation of the people in politics would increase, he thought. And the common people decide about thaier aim, objectives and politics of the government and in this process females should be involved. Unless females actively participated in the political process their political development was not possible. According M. Gandhi Maharashtra State and India's central Government studied Gandhiji's views about females

participation in politics and made an amendments in the construction in the year 1992 that females should be given 33% reservation in the Panchayat Raj system and made decentralization of the system. A successful one It means that the ladies are given a the chance to participate in politics and it is successful due to 73 amendment in the constitution. Females were actively participated in the parliament of India and no.of females in the Indian parliament is also increased.

Gandhi worked not only for the political emancipation of the nation, but truth, with the same zeal he fought for liberation of all the suppressed and oppressed sections of society. But of the noteworthy feature of his struggle in variegated fields that his conscientious battle for overthrowing all the hamstringing elements that had since time immemorial miscalculated the women life and create awaking among them, which made them shed their deep-rooted sense of inferiority and rise to dignity and self-esteem. For Gandhi, "When woman, whom we all call *bala* becomes *sabala*, all those who are helpless will become powerful". The welfare of the weaker sections of society was dear to his heart Women, urban and rural, educated and uneducated, Indian and foreign, were attracted to his ideas and deeds. While some like Sarojini Naidu, Lakshmi Menon, Sushila Nayyar and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur rose to prominence, there were thousands of unsung and unnoticed heroines of India who learnt the meaning of liberation from him and contributed with all their energy to the struggle for independence. Life sketches and reminiscences of women freedom-fighters give us glimpses of their crusade against injustice and inequality. An attempt is made in the present paper to understand Gandhi's views on women in the context of social, economic and political issues.

**Reconstruction:** Gandhi respected traditions of Indian society, but not at the cost of individual dignity. His practical and dynamic advice was "It is good to swim in the waters of tradition, but to sink in them is suicide". He never hesitated to criticize the evils which had crept in the Indian society, and tried to mobilize public opinion against such evils. He realised that there were deep-rooted customs hampering the development of women, and women's freedom from such shackles was necessary for the emancipation of the nation. According to Gandhi, the custom of child-marriage is both a moral as well as a physical evil, for it undermines our morals and induces physical degeneration. The *purdah* system was "vicious, brutal and barbarous". He questioned the basis of the practice of pushing women in seclusion: "Why is there 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 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. He called prostitution "moral leprosy" and despised the fact that "the beast in man has made the detestable crime a lucrative profession". He appealed to prostitutes to give up their "unworthy profession" and become "*sanyasinis*" of India. Gandhi viewed marriage as a sacrament imposing discipline on both the partners, not a license for physical union and emphasized spiritual union in marriage. He insisted on monogamous marriages and put forward a plea for inter communal marriages between caste Hindus and Harijans. In his opinion, "Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the very minutes details in the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him. She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity as man is in his". Gandhi was clear that "Woman must cease to consider she the object of man's lust.

The remedy is more in her hands than men. She must refuse to adorn herself for men including her husband, if she will be an equal partner with man". When Gandhi was asked whether a wife could go against the will of her husband to take up national service, he supported the claim of a wife to devote herself to a noble courses purpose. He cited the example of Mirabei in support of his

argument In his opinion, every wife" has a perfect right to take her own course and meekly brave the consequences when she knows herself to be in the right and when her resistance is for a nobler purpose". According to him, the only honourable terms in marriage are mutual love and mutual consent. Sexuality, according to him ought to be kept at the minimum inside marriage and totally eliminated outside it. The method of birth-control, he favoured, exercising self-restraint in life and restricting physical union only for getting children. Referring to his own life, he observed that he began to enjoy his married life only after he abandoned sex. For him, "the conquest of lust is the highest endeavour of a man's or a woman's existence whereas physical union for the sake of carnal satisfaction is reversion to animality which has to be avoided by both." Gandhi realised the miseries of widowhood for a woman as "men have ordained perpetual widowhood for women and conferred on themselves the right to fix marriage with another partner on cremation-ground itself". For him, "Voluntary widowhood consciously adopted by a woman who has felt the affection of the partner, adds grace and dignity to life, sanctifies the home and uplifts religion itself. Widowhood imposed by religion or custom is an unbearable like and defiles the home by secret vice and degrades religion. He believed that it is better for a widow to remarry openly rather than commit sin secretly. Gandhi sees these widows as a strong reservoir of energy, which could be put to use to bring light to the dark comers of the nation. In his opinion, "It is worth considering carefully in what way the country can avail itself of the services of hundreds of widows, young and old". As Gandhi respected widows who dedicated themselves to the service of humanity, he had great regard for women who chose the path of staying single to serve society and the nation. In his opinion, not every Indian girl is born to marry. There are many girls willing to dedicate themselves to service instead of servicing one man. Gandhi had visualized a great role for women in eradicating the evil of communalism. His appeal to women was to refuse to cook, and to starve them in protest so long as their men "do not wash their hand of these dirty communal squabbles". Gandhi's appeal reached women everywhere in India. He expected great things from them in the areas of work concerning purity of life, removal of untouchability, propagation of *Khadi*. Communal harmony and *Swadeshi*. His logic was simple: "If Kaikeyi could obtain all that she wanted from Dashrath by dint of *Duragraha*, what they could not achieve with the help of *Satyagraha*?" Gandhi's own experience of Kasturba's resistance to acceptance of untouchables as members of the family perhaps made him aware of the role that women can play in the removal of untouchability. "If the Hindu heart is to be cured of the taint of untouchability, women must do the lion's share of the work". His appeal to women was "If you consider *Harijans* untouchables because they perform sanitary service, what mother has not performed such service for her children." When Gandhi told women that the economic and the moral salvation of India rested mainly with them, he was not paying mere lip-service to them. He was evoking a creative and constructive spirit that was suppressed in them. A simple factor like their choice of clothes and jewellery was transformed by Gandhi into a force for *Swadeshi*. *Khadi* came to be identified with opposition against foreign rule and love for the nation, and giving away her jewellery means that a woman is shedding her own shackles.

**Women in Economic-self-reticence:** Gandhi had a dream of a humane society, free from exploitation and in justice, built by responsible men and women. Gandhi, however, maintained that the spheres of work for woman and man were different. "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." Gandhi was of the firm opinion that if women have to work outside the home, they should do so without disturbing it. They can take up some work, which would supplement the income of the family, and of spinning, he said to him, was perhaps the best work they could undertake. Spinning and weaving for women were "the first lesson

in the school of industry". The spinning wheel can be the "widow's loving companion", of livelihood for the poor family and a means to supplement the income of the family of -Pie middle class, and for the well-to-do women, it would be a means to relate their lives to those country s poor women. Though women had no direct control over economic matters, they were the managers of homes. Gandhi was quick to grasp this fact. So, to popularize the message of *Swadeshi*, a cardinal economic principle for him, he demanded the support of women. In his opinion, the *Swadeshi* vow cannot be kept without the help of women. "Men alone will be able to do nothing in the matter. They have no control over the children that is the woman's sphere. To look after children, to dress them, is the mother's duty and, therefore, it is necessary that women should be fired with the spirit of *Swadeshi*."

**Ideal Specimen:** Gandhi often placed ideals before women, derived from Indian traditions, mythology and history. He often talked about Sita, Draupadi, Damayanti and Mirabai as great women. There is enough for a social reformer to draw inspiration from the tradition. What is new here is the fact that this unique interpretation of these characters gives a glimpse of the dynamic element in his thinking. He rejected the negative elements of the Hindu tradition. He visualized the Indian women as new Sitas, Draupadis and Damayantis, "pure, firm and self- controlled". For Gandhi, Sita was not a weak and dependent creature, but a strong woman conveying the message of *Swadeshi*, who only wore "cloth made in India" and thus kept her heart and body pure. Moreover, she could defy the might of Ravana by sheer moral courage and she would not waste "a single moment on pleasing Rama by physical charms". Implying thereby that a woman could assert herself in doing what she considered right even if the husband thought otherwise. Another ideal model presented by Gandhi was Draupadi who was not dependent on men and saved herself by an appeal to Krishna when the Pandavas failed to protect her. Here the appeal to Krishna is to be understood as following one's own conscience. He saw Mirabai, as a symbol of courage, who followed her chosen path by defying the social norms of the time. It is interesting to note that Gandhi does not advise a woman to be an ideal wife or ideal mother. Deviating from the traditional framework, he advises women to be sisters. Pointing out the greatness of a sister over a wife, he maintained that a sister is to the entire world, while a wife hands herself over to one man. Moreover, it is possible to become the world's sister only by making *Brahmacharya* "a natural condition" and being 'fired by the spirit of service'. Women have the potential to do immense service to the unfortunate, by doing this they can be "Sisters of Mercy". Though Gandhi gave the traditional role a new vigour, he had undaunted faith in the chastity and purity of woman. He was sure that the "dazzling purity" of a woman could disarm even the most beastly of men. In his opinion, an ideal woman would rather give up her life than her purity.

Gandhi often sounds here to be very idealistic about women. I feel some time, that too much of idealisation leads to translocation of women sanctity. To me it appears to be that were adoration of women might create passion thing feelings in man rather than reframing women by sermonising her of broadening the horizon of her own understanding in the changing socio-political satiation, likening women to geodes does not solve the problem, this is what we are witnessing in the current context.

Gandhi in his enclosing women tend to forget to reform men folk, he should have had some efficacious and no with one for too mould himself to lead A congenial family and social life. It does not mean that i am appearing Gandhi's ideals of women but at limiting to sift this space gandhijis has sickened to ponderoner, despite this fact, gandhiji has made horrendous efforts to create socially useful consciousness and remit the Indian society. According to Madhu Kishwar, "Gandhi's very vocabulary, and as statements one such as 'sisters of mercy' and 'mothers of entire humanity' reveals the bias of a benevolent patriarch." And yet, there is something in his ideas that is essentially radical.

He did not see women as helpless objects of reform. Neither did he think of bringing change only in some spheres of life, such as marriage or education. His vision of change was comprehensive. He connected the moral with the political, the social and the economic, presenting an eclectic view of life. For him the means had to be identified with the ends; similarly, he did not differentiate between the private and the public worlds of women.

Gandhi by poetising himself the work of women, he did convey the message that there should not be any division of work and the work is always of sharing nature. All works should be undertaken by both men and women without any it will, all works are guts waves and have dignity and thus by saying so, in gandhiji wanted both sexes to working united and feels that they are equal beings, this message has strong inchoation for men rather than women. He also enhanced the dignity of woman's housework, advising his men followers to take to spinning and to do ordinary works in everyday life. He himself imbibed so many of a woman's qualities that he became 'mother' to many. Gandhi saw that the low status of women was the result of prejudices and adverse traditions, which were centuries old. It was difficult to get women interested in the larger problems of life and society because they knew nothing of them, having never been allowed to breathe the fresh air of freedom. The only factor that would enable women to come out of this situation was the determination and strength of the women themselves. In Gandhi's philosophy; the women of India found a new identity. His words and deeds have inspired thousands of women, and will continue to do so, in their struggle against injustice and inequality.

**Conclusion:** Due to different programmes like women self helpgroups etc. started by the government female becomes independent economically. Females have become socially empowered because of the different social laws made by the state and central government. Panchayat Raj system proved to be boon for the females. In three ties Panchayat Raj system females participation is increased. Due to the Participation of females in the Panchayat Raj system new faces and new faces would emerge in due course of time and a chance for women to prove her mettle/talant to be not only equal to men but will go for beyond to prove this world that she is more impartent as the nourshner of humanity and humen kind and by enlighting the male sex of her seghfican in the perpetnithy sustence of this great planet.

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