

Influence of Mahatma Gandhi on Women's Political Empowerment in India

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ABSTRACT

During the time of Gandhi, women in India began to play an active role in politics. In his ideal nonviolent society, which Gandhi envisioned, women would be the natural leaders and peacemakers. Gandhi had complete faith in women's abilities. There is no one like her, and she has the potential to change the world in profound ways. In his patriarchal ideals and social and political views, Gandhi is a feminism. This research delves at how Gandhi's teachings, leadership, and positive initiatives impacted women's political awareness and engagement. It emphasizes how Gandhi pushed women to challenge gender norms, join social movements, assume leadership positions, and make significant political contributions. The present political empowerment of women in India may be traced back to his efforts, which included encouraging female education, galvanizing them in civil disobedience actions, and championing gender equality. According to the research, modern campaigns to increase women's political engagement, leadership roles, and representation in parliament still draw heavily on Gandhian ideas.

Keywords: *Political, Education, Equality, Freedom, Gender.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the early nineteenth century, when First Wave feminism was fighting for women's suffrage and equality with the motto "Personal is political," Indian women were silently suffering from oppression, abuse, and exploitation. Their belief was that they are destined to endure hardship and be subjugated by males from birth. They were oppressed because of their ambivalent social standing, which could lead to either veneration as a goddess (Sakti or Durga) or exploitation (torture). Simon de Bouvier refers to women as "the other" when they are viewed objectively. Patriarchy is a male-centered system of gender roles that represses women's rights and identities via social norms and cultural practices. The majority of women do not realize the extent to which they are oppressed, disadvantaged, and cruelly treated, with a few notable exceptions. During the time of Gandhi, women in India began to play an active role in politics. In his ideal, nonviolent society, which Gandhi envisioned, women would be the natural leaders and peacemakers. Gandhi had complete faith in women's abilities. There is no one like her, and she has the potential to change the world in profound ways. In his patriarchal ideals and social and political views, Gandhi is a feminism.

Women are revered as goddesses throughout India's magnificent civilization, which is based on its own intellectual systems. Women represented the tri-devata (three goddesses) notion in ancient India, which meant strength, kindness, and knowledge. Some have said that women have achieved more freedom, equality, and education than males. They have a special place of honor in all faiths because of their long history of service as intermediaries between humans and the spiritual and material realms. The advancement of women has been steadily declining throughout history, and at some point in the past, the

society underwent a radical shift towards patriarchy. Despite the fact that Indian women have gone through the ups and downs of the country's shifting sociocultural landscape, the 18th century is considered a gloomy period in Indian history. Female infanticide, Sati, child marriage, and purdah were among the heinous social ills and inhumane practices that plagued women's lives. Without a voice, an identity, or even the most fundamental human rights, she was rendered a non-entity. A scathing campaign against societal ills was initiated by social reformers. They did everything they could to help women regain the respect and dignity that was rightfully theirs. In a remarkable shift, Gandhi raised the position of women in India. Men and women should not see themselves as subservient or inferior, he said. Among the world's greatest revolutionary leaders, he led his people to freedom from British imperial rule by peaceful methods. He made an effort to restore the established social hierarchy. Truth and nonviolence were central to Gandhi's life and work, and his philosophy evolved from these experiences. He was a feminist activist and philosopher who specialized in social and political theory. He was living by his principles rather than trying to preach them. A message to mankind, his life itself.

His distinctive advocacy for freedom and equality as an activist philosopher resonated with people everywhere. An ideal woman, according to Gandhi, is one who can have a profound impact on both men and society. The most downtrodden segment of Indian society, he recognized, were the women. The establishment and maintenance of societal standards that empower women to live fulfilling lives was a central tenet of Gandhi's movement. British colonizers saw the plight of Indian women as emblematic of their own people's inherent backwardness. In this region, nationalists—and Gandhi in particular—saw the liberation of women and social reform as ancillary goals of the nationalist cause. If India is to be saved, it will be through the sacrifice and redemption of her women, according to Gandhi. 1 Traditional practices were valued by Gandhi, yet he would not abide by them if they meant sacrificing people's inherent worth. He gave the lively and practical piece of advise that although it's nice to swim in tradition, it's suicidal to drown. In his patriarchal ideals and social and political views, Gandhi is a feminism.

II. WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND POLITICAL ENTRY

"Education is that which liberates." Gandhi sought to foster independence, self-sufficiency, and individual growth via education. Gandhi had the firm belief that women might achieve spiritual, bodily, and mental liberation via education. A new society founded on truth and nonviolence must be the goal of education, he argues. Education for women is the key to societal advancement, in his view. "Educate a man, you educate an individual; educate a woman, you educate a family," he preached. The concepts of equality and equal position were taught to women via education. A liberated woman might use it as a tool to break free of established gender preconceptions. It was the male leaders of the nationalist movement, most notably M.K. Gandhi, who took the initiative to make women political participants. Selfless leader. He firmly believed that Indian women should have the same opportunities as males to obtain swaraj. Women may likely outpace males by a significant margin in this nonviolent conflict. We are aware that her level of religious commitment is higher than that of males. Her gender is represented by gracefully silent suffering. He is banking on the idea that Indian women would rise to the occasion and form a union now that the government has brought them into the fire. These were Gandhi's last remarks before he died, and they inspired Indian women to join the fight for independence. When the Gandhian period began, women finally began to make a big splash in nationalist politics.

People of all income levels were drawn to Gandhi's widely disseminated appeal for women's involvement in the national cause. He believed that women were ideal advocates of Satyagraha because of their nonviolence and selflessness, which he emphasized in his message. His appeal was successful because he was reinforcing preexisting sexual norms rather than challenging them. Families rallied behind their

women's nonviolent protest involvement in the rapidly evolving self-rule atmosphere; they sold jewelry for the Motherland and boycotted foreign products. Because Satyagraha instantly lifted Indian women out of their obscurity, Gandhi included women's service into the constructive agenda. In Gandhi's nonviolent worldview, women have the same agency as men in determining their own fate. Collaborative effort and consensus are required to establish norms of social behavior. When it came to women's concerns, Gandhi dug deep. To alleviate the many problems that women face, he put out several solutions. With Ela Bhatt at the helm as General Secretary (and a recipient of the esteemed Magsaysay Award for her services to women in India), SEWA was born as an organization dedicated to women's leadership, initiative, and self-help. In an effort to inspire the next generation, Gandhi held canvassing events at universities in India. Ignorance without nonviolence, in his view, is not truth, but falsehood. An individual's moral compass, according to Gandhi, is the building block of a peaceful nation (Satya) and the most effective tool for social reconstruction. The moral ideals espoused by Gandhi, which include truth, nonviolence (Ahimsa), nonstealing (Astheya), nonpossession (Aparigraha), and celibacy (Brahmacharya), should be upheld as vows. First and foremost, in his life and beliefs, is truth. "Truth as God" is what Gandhi calls it. When it comes to women's issues, the Gandhian principle of Ahimsa, or nonviolence, is the best course of action. Although the principle of Satyagraha, as articulated by Gandhi, is a potent tool for ending societal injustices faced by women, Gandhi did not advocate for women to actively engage in ways that would unleash their latent abilities. On the other side, he thinks that the best way to deal with an oppressor who is obstinate is to have moral strength and personal values like honesty, magnanimity, and nonviolence. Dignified conduct, in his view, may soften even the most savage and vicious individual. Women, in Gandhi's view, were capable of great things, including public service, politics, and military. Gandhi was asked directly at many European gatherings how women might contribute to the battle against militarism. "I have no doubt that women can do infinitely more than men against war," Gandhi said. "If only women will forget that they belong to the weaker sex."

III. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

No matter the field—politics, society, economics, biology, etc.—Gandhi wished to infuse moral and ethical components into everything. When it came to concerns of women's empowerment, Gandhi used the same approach. Gandhi may learn that women may join the political struggle for Swaraj via Satyagraha and salt agitation spinning. These, Gandhi recognized, are the simple, nonviolent ways that women may participate in the fight for India's independence. When it comes to achieving gender equality, satyagraha is the morally superior, most effective, and nonviolent tactic. Among the few who were able to successfully include women in the Satyagraha movement that sought Indian independence, Gandhi stood out. Gandhi had unwavering trust in women's innate ability to practice nonviolence and could see that they are the most dedicated Satyagraha followers. The success that women achieved in South Africa's political struggle and their active engagement in it strengthened Gandhi's belief in women's inherent power. Some of the most famous things that South African women have done, either directly or indirectly, include making and selling Khadi, organizing public gatherings, protesting the import of alcoholic beverages and other foreign products, going to jail, and even giving away their own money and possessions. Not only did women's direct and indirect involvement in political activities strengthen their moral fiber, but it also assisted them in shedding the long-held biases that pervaded society at that era. In addition, the nationalist movement was feminized by the active involvement of women in political activities and the Indian liberation fight. Thus, it can be concluded that Gandhi's guidance for women enabled them to preserve their dignity and self-respect.

IV. ROLE OF MAHATMA GANDHI IN WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

In the 1930s, when the liberation movement was at its height, Gandhiji urged women to join the Satyagraha movement just as much as men. It is noteworthy that women played an equal role under the Mahatma's guidance, as 17,000 out of about 30,000 participants in the Salt Satyagraha voluntarily sought arrest. In response to Gandhi's message, Indian women did something they had never done before; it was a really revolutionary message. His activities of civil disobedience brought to a significant increase in the participation of women in India's public life. The liberation of women in our nation began with these events. The fact that women's empowerment was prioritized in Gandhi's constructive agenda is evident. After hearing his rallying cry, many women left their homes and communities to participate in the national movement. The ladies of the aristocracy joyfully wore homemade chappals and coarse handspun khadi as they joyfully marched to jail, discarding their jewels and other ornaments. Notable women who were involved in the Gandhian movement include Miraben, Anasuya Sarabhai, Sarojini Naidu, Sarmala Nehru, and Sushila Nayyar. The political awakening of the pace of national life in all domains has been primarily credited with the liberation of the Indian woman. In the 1930s, women were the ones who almost single-handedly picketed stores selling booze, opium, and foreign clothing.

An significant aspect of Gandhi's legacy is the encouragement she gave to women to take part in politics and the liberation fight. Distinct from the reformers of the twentieth century, Gandhi advocated for equal political participation for women. In his vision of a new social and political order, women might be a powerful driving force. He made an effort to bring women into the independence fight by articulating the links between public and private life. But he couldn't accept that oppression is a historical and social phenomenon connected to production relations, and not a moral state. However, he played a significant role in establishing circumstances that allowed women to break out of domesticity, despite his insistence that a woman's true domain was the house.

V. THOUGHTS OF MAHATMA GANDHI ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Satyagrah

Gandhiji advocated for mass involvement in the first and primary approach, which did not need any special selection or process and was open to everyone. It was an effort when women took to the streets and other public spaces to make a statement about their freedom.

The depth and innovation of Mahatma Gandhi's political philosophy were intimately related to his deeds. The ability to put plans into motion was not his only strength. He got a handle on certain fundamental facts and realities about politics while attempting to make satyagraha useful. Politics in the street, in the maidan, and in the village—not philosophy for and by cavemen.

The founder of satyagraha, Gandhi was the most important figure in the development of contemporary politics. He aspired to make satyagraha a worldwide political movement, drawing inspiration from Tolstoy's non-resistance and Thoreau's civil disobedience. However, transforming satyagraha into a new kind of popular politics was Gandhi's most groundbreaking achievement. Its effectiveness as a weapon of resistance was at its peak when used on a massive scale. For its practice and who did it, its mass quality was crucial. In a second sense, satyagraha was global since anybody could participate.

Children, women, and peasants were ideal satyagrahis in Gandhi's mind at different points. The constructive objective of satyagraha also relied on the participation of various classes. The elite would actively connect with the poor via satyagraha, unlearning privilege and engaging in village seva (service) and spinning, two of the most well-known forms of manual labor. The downtrodden and powerless would also find independence and respect if they could conquer their fear of those in positions of power.

Inclusive Approach

Gandhiji was quoted as saying, "I would boycott that legislature which will not have a proper share of women members" in his script. It expresses the inclusivity of women's political engagement.

Gandhiji's Concept of Equality

In addition to being an essential tenet of Gandhian philosophy, equality is also a much sought-after ideal. It ingrains the values of equality of treatment and equality of character. The term "equality" has a wide range of definitions, including (a) fairness, (b) sharing equally amongst everyone, and (c) between equals. (d) fair distribution according to relative strengths; (e) uneven distribution taking into account material disparities.

Equal Rights in Indian Democracy

In a democratic society, men and women are considered equal. Women are disproportionately underrepresented in many fields, especially politics, which runs counter to this fundamental principle of democracy.

Women's Representation in Legislature

When the birth of a girl is celebrated with as much delight as the birth of a boy, then and only then will man and woman achieve equality, Mahatma Gandhi stated. [Volume 87, page 229, Mahatma Gandhi's Collected Works] On top of that, it will be crucial for women's involvement in politics and beyond.

Need of Women Participation

During a crucial 1940 Santiniketan summit speech, Gandhiji laid forth an essential idea: "Thank God!" he said with a laugh because Sarojini Naidu had been selected to be a delegate. There was no demand for a reserved number of legislative seats or a special electorate from the women there!

Women Participation on Merit Basis

"Equality or any other proportion in such matters does not captivate me," Gandhiji stated. The only criterion ought to be merit. But because it's traditional to belittle women, the new norm should be to give them precedence over males, everything else being equal, even if it means women eventually supersede men completely.

Requiring membership based just on gender would be a risky move. Patronage is something that any group, including women, should despise. Justice, not favor, should be their pursuit. Consequently, it is just as important for women as it is for males to promote the dissemination of generalized education along provincial lines via their languages, one that will prepare them for the many responsibilities that come with being a citizen. It is not a question of favoritism but of delayed justice owed to women for males to spearhead this much needed change.

Women Participation for Strengthening Panchyat

The idea that women should be forced to leave the house and take up weapons to defend the hearth is degrading to both men and women, according to Gandhiji. This is the last chapter, a descent into barbarism. With the goal of helping the people rather than engaging in party politics, Gandhi urged women to join legislatures during the constructive workers' convention in Madras on January 27, 1946.

However, he did wonder how many of them would have the altruistic motivation to join the legislature and bolster the panchayat's foundation. In order to provide a solid foundation and proper structure for the panchayat, they must work from the bottom up. It would be easy to fix any mistakes made when starting from the bottom, so the damage would not be too severe.

VI. CONCLUSION

When it comes to laws and policies that support women, India is light years ahead. It was one of the first countries to implement the universal franchise. Still, males in positions of power deny the interconnected nature of social and gender justice, and women on the outside are unable to advance any of these two formidable national and global agendas. Caste and criminal gangs' use of enormous amounts of untraceable wealth and nasty physical force, together with the growing criminalization of politics, creates a very unfavorable atmosphere for women who aspire to a career in politics. The purpose of Gandhi and the ambitions of women remain unfulfilled as gender and caste divides persist in both the present and the past, and western technology supplant local human resources. Women in India have a very low status when compared to other nations. Women are still seen as little more than domestic help in certain rural communities. We need to modify this kind of thinking. However, women nowadays are far more outspoken and involved in every industry than they were in the past. This bodes well for the advancement and empowerment of women. Knowing Gandhiji's views on women's empowerment is so important now as well.

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