

Women's Empowerment Through The Lens of Gandhian Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The way Gandhi felt about women was quite progressive. Along with tolerating women's social impairments, Gandhi was skeptical of prevalent notions of inequality, such as male-child performances, preconceptions about women's shyness, exploitative attitudes about men's sexuality, and the relegation of women to the house. This study delves at the ways in which modern discussions on women's empowerment are influenced by Gandhian philosophy. According to the results, Gandhi's ideas are still very relevant for developing models of inclusive development, empowering women, and making India self-sufficient. Sustainably empowering women in the twenty-first century may be achieved by incorporating Gandhian ideas into existing policies, educational programs, and gender-sensitive initiatives, according to the paper's conclusion.

Keywords: *Women, Gandhian, Satyagraha, Non-violence, Philosophy.*

I. Introduction

Gandhian philosophy aims to promote universal principles like cooperation and peace and harmony, which are essential to human life. India has the ability to solve world problems via truth and nonviolence since it has always advocated for oneness. Mahatma Gandhi's interactions with faith and community in South Africa (1893–1914) and subsequently India informed the development of Gandhian thought. It stands as a compilation of thoughts prompted by Gandhi's purpose, goal, and struggle for Indian freedom. The works of great thinkers such as John Ruskin, Leo Tolstoy, and Henry David Thoreau profoundly impacted his ideas. Gandhian philosophy incorporates parts of Western, Eastern, and Indian philosophical traditions; yet, it lacks Marxism's systematic framework, which centers on society and nature.

Despite its idealistic foundations, Gandhian thought has practical aspects, particularly via Sarvodaya and Satyagraha. The best way to explain Gandhi's ideology, which combines spiritual ideals with practical methods to build a better society, is as "practical idealism," which emphasizes these concepts. The conventional wisdom is that all people descended from apes and eventually became a

heavenly, benevolent species. Within this framework, Gandhi said that humans are born with a natural rule of nonviolence, while animals are born with a law of aggression. Society and the experiences it provides to everyday life, in his view, mold human nature.

There are four main schools of thought among philosophers, and they are as follows: optimists, pessimists, idealists, and materialists. But Gandhi was an optimist and an idealist who believed in the goodness of people at their core. According to him, people had to be able to change with the times and come up with creative solutions to problems if they were to stay alive in society. His second insights were that people's desires for power, whether indirect or direct, were often the source of evil.

By putting an emphasis on compassion, interdependence, and nonviolence, Gandhi proposed a novel perspective on human nature that was revolutionary for his day. Being an avid reader, he immersed himself in the writings of great minds from many fields, including philosophy, psychology, physics, biology, and the social sciences. Human nature and the complex processes of social life were shed light on by his research. Human nature and social situations have changed drastically throughout history, undergoing constant transformation as a result of historical and social growth. Gandhi became famous as an ardent champion for human dignity and freedom by stressing their significance.

Gandhi thought that human nature was a complex web of good and evil, despite the seeming simplicity and speculative of his thoughts on the matter. He said that the possibility for progress via truth and nonviolence is highlighted by this equilibrium, which in turn highlights the complexity of human life. Instead of putting more focus on individual freedom, Gandhi vehemently criticized Marxism's state-centric views. His emphasis on individual freedom led some to accuse him of being an anarchist. Once they put evil out of their minds and hearts, he thought, everyone can be good.

Up until around the time he was thirteen or fourteen years old, Gandhi's life was ordinary and full of hardship. His remarkable nature was on display, nevertheless, throughout the last half of his life. Following Lord Buddha and Emperor Ashoka in the pantheon of renowned Indian figures, he is often considered the third. The natural world and the social world are two sides of the same coin, according to Gandhi. In order to succeed, people need to maintain a steady equilibrium between the two. His ideology was based on truth and nonviolence, and his view of human nature prioritized the universal self over the individual self. Like Socrates and Buddha, Gandhi was an inspired teacher and spiritual leader, but he lacked the methodical thinking of academics in domains like political philosophy and metaphysics. Unlike thinkers like Shankara or Kant, Gandhi spoke from the heart about the truth he had discovered through his own life's deep experiences.

There is a consistent theme and few conflicts throughout Gandhi's works beginning in 1908. In a world when the destructive powers of war and weapons of mass devastation are under assault on human values, his message takes on added significance. Human dignity and universal principles are eternally important, and Gandhi's appeal for nonviolence, truth, and peace is a potent reminder of this. By promoting an ethical and spiritual perspective on political issues, Gandhi might be seen as a contemporary Plato or Cicero. He accomplished much for the cause of racial equality in South Africa during the years 1893–1914. Although he started out trying to help the local Indian population, his

fight was about much more than that. Rather, it was based on a fact that applies to everyone: that they are all equal and free. Famous Christian of the century and ardent supporter of Gandhi during the Satyagraha campaign in South Africa, Rev. C.F. Andrews, was profoundly moved by this sermon.

Gandhi devoted his life to the fight for Indian independence from 1915 until his death in 1948. Although he freed a country, he was much more than that. His impact went beyond the 400 million Indians' political freedom, but his patriotism puts him in the same league as George Washington, Giuseppe Mazzini, and Dr. Sun Yatsen. For millions of people throughout the globe, Gandhi's teachings on the need of living a creative, peaceful, spiritual life in order to unite one's emotions and integrate one's personality hit close to home. The major spiritual classics, such as the Bhagavad Gita, found a live testimony in Gandhi's life. The power of even a single grain of truth is stronger than that of mountains of lies, as he demonstrated. Those who are looking for spiritual enlightenment, world peace, and harmony find inspiration in his words. Gandhian philosophy is based on the Bhagavad Gita, often called its "Bible." Truth, nonviolence, satyagraha, and sarvodaya (benefit of everyone) are the four cornerstones of Gandhian ideology. Gandhian philosophy differs from Marxist and other ideologies in three key respects: truth, goodness, love, and beauty. By adhering to these ideals, Gandhi cemented his position as a leading 20th-century intellectual idealist.

II. Gandhi's Philosophy and Its Appeal to Women

As a prominent figure in India's independence struggle, Mahatma Gandhi promulgated a revolutionary philosophy that strongly connected with women's desires for respect, autonomy, and parity. Ahimsa (nonviolence), satyagraha (truth-force), and swaraj (self-rule) were the three pillars upon which Gandhi's ideology rested. These pillars placed an emphasis on collective action and moral integrity rather than force or compulsion.

The compelling foundation for women to participate in political engagement was given by Gandhi's call for peaceful resistance. He spoke about women's oppression and marginalization via his advocacy of satyagraha as a strategy to challenge injustice. In a political environment where males predominated, Gandhi paved the way for women to have a say by portraying the independence movement as a moral battle against colonial domination. "If we want to establish true equality, we must first make women our friends," he said, emphasizing the importance of women as allies in the fight for national independence.

When he spoke of an independent India that included social justice as well as political freedom, Gandhi went out of his way to include women in the struggle, something that many of his contemporaries failed to achieve. Since his perspective was that real swaraj could only be achieved with the active involvement of women, he cried out to them to join the nationalist movement. After hearing Gandhi preach on women's independence and dignity, this speech struck a chord with many of them.

Not only did Gandhi's lifestyle choices—such as living simply, being self-sufficient, and wearing khadi (hand-spun cloth)—symbolize a break from colonial economic patterns, but they also empowered women. Abolition of British goods boycotts and the encouragement of women to spin their own cloth were examples of civil disobedience that broke down barriers between sexes. By

taking part in the struggle for independence, women were able to reimagine themselves within the nationalist framework, moving from the role of passive observer to that of an integral part of it.

The conviction that women's societal inequities had to be addressed before genuine freedom could be achieved was the foundation of Gandhi's comprehensive approach to empowerment. In an effort to break down the patriarchal systems that had kept women at a historical disadvantage, he spearheaded programs to educate them and get them involved in village government. Gandhi paved the way for a feminist discourse to develop in the years after the independence struggle and beyond by advocating for women's involvement in the public arena.

III. Gandhi's Philosophy on Women in Shaping A Self-Reliant India

It is very concerning to see that women in India are still not treated equally to men, despite the fact that this century has witnessed advancements in every aspect of life. Given the abundance of opportunities to intervene with the present issues pertaining to women, it follows that Gandhi's theory has undeniable relevance to women. From 1990 to 2018; about 15.8 million girls disappeared as a result of prenatal gender selection, according to devastating figures uncovered by India's Population Research Institute. Because of his long-held belief that women are equal to men, Gandhi will forever have a place in the conversation about achieving gender parity. The promotion of equal respect for sons and daughters might be greatly advanced by his views on gender equality.

Tragically, child marriage is still very much a part of life in our nation. A 2017 UNICEF report found that 27% of girls get married before they become 18 and 7% before they turn 7. Particular emphasis is placed on Gandhi's worry over the plight of children in early marriages. Particularly noteworthy is his callousness toward the practice of child marriage by drawing attention to the dangers posed by variables such as lack of education and health problems. Parents of the girls may have their views changed if they are made more aware of these issues via various channels.

The practice of paying a dowry to a bride is one of the most inhumane aspects of Indian weddings. The fact that over 7,000 people died in 2017 as a result of dowry is tragic, according to the National Crime Bureau of India. Additionally, statistics reveal that dowry-related harassment claims the lives of around 20 women in India daily. It is crucial to adhere to Gandhi's calls for parents to educate their daughters and make them aware of the need of self-decency in this matter. To put an end to this societal ill, it is necessary to follow his suggestion that educated ladies should resist dowry by saying no to demanding grooms.

The plight of women is becoming even direr as the number of reported incidents of sexual assault against them in India continues to rise. A research conducted by the National Health Survey revealed that out of all women aged 15–49, 30% had been victims of physical abuse beginning at the age of 15. In addressing these issues, Gandhi's view of "women as mother" becomes pertinent. In order to try to influence men's attitudes towards women, the social and cultural atmosphere of the country must be inculcated with Mahatma's teachings that advocate for the cherished position of women, as reflected via his ideas and deeds. From the early years of formal education all the way into the development of personal values and ethics in later life, this might be accomplished via a variety of curricular and co-curricular interventions at places of learning and employment.

The country's women may benefit from all these measures if they were implemented. The primary means by which Gandhi's goal of social reconstruction via women's liberation could be accomplished would be for women to become economically independent. It is crucial to prioritize reorienting the education system and empowering underprivileged women, such as those living in rural areas, women from culturally and geographically isolated zones, and impoverished women, in order to achieve this goal. One significant step towards ending the dehumanizing practice of prostitution among women may be to follow Gandhi's lead and rehabilitate sex workers by teaching them skills. Incorporating these interventions into the lives of impacted women over time has the potential to increase India's GDP and pave the way for a more independent India in the future, when "the noble sex" may work side by side with men.

IV. Relevance of Gandhian's Philosophy for The Empowerment of Women

Gandhiji was an upright human being with strong opinions on issues affecting women. He guided his peaceful philosophy to revolutionary heights, elevating it from the realm of the fiction. With his unadulterated beliefs and genuine intentions, he stood out as one of the most upright and holy figures in contemporary history. The expansive perspective of Gandhian literature, which encourages a more profound understanding of life and each other, will continue to be beneficial to men and women alike. A powerful tool against violence, Gandhiji's nonviolence has less impact when used by the powerless. From despair to self-reflection and slavery to freedom, it helps individuals go through it all. Since Gandhiji is the most influential progenitor of this ideology, the power of nonviolence stems from the fact that it is the principal and most potent sculptor of the human spirit.

When it came to women, Gandhiji had a different opinion than other progressive reformers. Education, in his view, was crucial to women's moral development and parity with men in achieving their goals. The only choice, in Gandhiji's view, was for women to endure hardship, and he emphasized this in his satyagraha principles. Because of his ahimsa ideology's focus on the distortion of pain, women find it difficult to adhere to. Women, in Gandhiji's view, were crucial to the spread of nonviolence. Satyagraha was the most effective nonviolent weapon in Mahatma Gandhi's arsenal, notwithstanding its flaws. A "violation of the law" would be a description of peaceful but unjust actions such as picketing and campaigning. While Gandhiji's vision of a perfect society remains unfulfilled, it is possible that women have used this opportunity to fight for equality and justice. Satyagraha is a signifier for academicians, elites, and feminists from the middle class whose dialectic is different from Gandhiji's. Women who are less fortunate. When it came to women's concerns, Gandhiji had a keen understanding and empathy for marginalized groups. In a hallowed pantheon, he dealt with gender and caste difficulties, regardless of one's political leanings. The need of understanding and helping neglected individuals was underlined in his vision, which was influenced by women leaders. For Gandhiji, the struggle for independence for India was ultimately about giving women more agencies. Despite societal disparities, men and women are on equal ground. When it came to societal conflicts, such those between men and women or between capitalists and workers, Gandhiji believed that satyagraha was the way to go. Since there is no silver bullet for women's problems, they must reevaluate their goals via satyagraha. By offering a peaceful way for women to join the Swaraj political movement in 1940, Gandhiji demonstrated that he grasped societal dynamics.

Focusing on women's ideals and desires elevates Women's Content beyond egotism. Party performances, involvement in decision-making bodies, and the creation of demand-representative manifestos are all necessities. Women have a crucial role in societal and economic progress, and they are also active in political groups like Mahatma Gandhi's India. While men in politics often fail to see the social justice-gender connections, women are able to reconnect with the national cause and rediscover their individuality via Gandhiji's writings. A new tradition established by Mahatma Gandhi's revolutionary principles enabled indigenous women to leave their families and join the independence movement. They gained faith and the will to fight patriarchal rule when they were on an equal footing with men and took part in liberation activities. Fighting for women's rights and efficiency, Gandhiji was driven by her belief in moral conduct. Aiming to provide equal opportunity for men and women, the 1931 Fundamental Right Resolution of the Indian National Congress emphasized fair wage distribution. In addition to fighting for the political emancipation of all oppressed groups, Gandhiji fought tirelessly for the emancipation of women. Empowering women via education was her life's mission. Gandhiji and Khadi, two Indian heroines who opposed injustice and advocated for women's liberation, played a crucial role in the struggle for independence. Indian women throughout the country have connected with depictions of Gandhiji's life and the strength of Swadeshi, and Khadi's nonviolent defiance of colonial rule changed the way women saw the world and participated in local politics. Gandhiji and Khadi, two champions of women's rights, fought inequality and injustice via their distinct ways of living and dressing. Women throughout India have heard Gandhiji's message, and Khadi's peaceful approach changed their views of reality and their engagement in national politics. The invitation Gandhiji extended to women to participate in the fight for freedom led to major changes. Disobeying male-dominated political conventions and protesting injustice were ingrained in women's minds. They triumphed over the early difficulties caused by their lack of knowledge and independence because of their bravery and determination. Many Indian women found a renewed sense of identity as a result of Gandhiji's teachings.

The principles of nonviolence, equality, and self-sufficiency form the basis of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophies toward the emancipation of women, especially in rural areas. In his teachings, Mahatma Gandhi stressed the importance of women in all aspects of society, from the home to political and social activism. In his larger goals for India's freedom, social change, and rural development, he included ideas about women's empowerment. With an emphasis on rural women, the following are some important allusions and ideas connected to Gandhi's ideology of women's empowerment:

- **Equality and Dignity:** When it came to politics, social norms, and education, Gandhi was a staunch supporter for women's equality. The empowerment of women, particularly in rural regions, was, in his view, crucial to achieving genuine independence.
- **Non-violence and Self-reliance (Ahimsa and Swaraj):** An important part of Gandhi's plan to empower rural women was his teachings on nonviolence (ahimsa) and self-reliance (swaraj). Women, in his view, need to be allowed to participate fully in all spheres of society and the economy, without being subjected to any kind of exploitation.

- **Education for Empowerment:** In order to empower women, Gandhi stressed the need of education, especially for those living in rural regions. He fought for education that was grounded in reality and could equip rural women to be independent and strong leaders.
- **Role in Social and Political Movements:** Women were given possibilities to join in political activity via Gandhi's leadership of India's independence struggle. Nonviolent demonstrations, led by rural women in particular, were essential in paving the way for India's independence.
- **Revival of Traditional Roles:** Gandhi advocated for women's emancipation via returning to their historical duties as caretakers while also assuming new responsibilities in farming, manufacturing, and government.

V. Conclusion

Following in the footsteps of great personalities like Christ and Lord Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi is considered the greatest contemporary apostle and herald of peace. Truth, nonviolence, social justice, gender equality, and sustainable development are some of the tenets upon which his peace philosophy rests. The goal of achieving world peace is for all countries and people to live in tranquility and contentment. Gandhi, in his heart, was a peacemaker who saw truth as the ultimate goal and nonviolence as the means to that end. As a follower of Gandhi's teachings, he thought that the aims and the methods are inseparable. To paraphrase Mahatma Gandhi, a woman is a "long-suffering, selfless, and self-effacing being." On the other hand, Gandhiji's eminent ability to endure pain in silence may be a key indicator of her enslavement and a reason why she is often left out of family decisions. Outside of it, there exists "a sanctified religion of Everlasting Femininity."

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