

Mahatma Gandhi Perception Of Women

Dr. Malika Nadda

Seema Thakur

Abstract: The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient time through the low points of the medieval period to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers one of them is Mahatma Gandhi. The history of women in India has been eventful. The Indian women's position in the society further deteriorated during the mediaeval period when sati among some communities, child marriage and a ban on widow remarriage become part of social life among some communities in India.¹ Today the development of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But practically women development is still an illusion of reality. We observe in our day to day life how women become victimized by various social evils. Undoubtedly the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi experimented in this field a century ago and he had shown the way for the development of the status of women. The upliftment of women does not form part of Gandhi's main agenda, nevertheless is one of his concerns as a part of social reform. He worked for the progress and upliftment of women. He stressed on the whole course of human evolution and the place which nature has given to women. When nature has given equal potentials to both, he argued men need not think of himself as superior to a women.

Keywords: Women Gandhi and Upliftment

Woman is more fitted than man to make exploration and take bolder action in nonviolence... There is no occasion for women to consider themselves subordinate or inferior to men....Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity....If by development is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior....If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with women...

M.K. Gandhi

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient time through the low points of the medieval period to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers one of them is Mahatma Gandhi. The history of women in India has been eventful. The Indian women's position in the society further deteriorated during the mediaeval period when sati among some communities, child marriage and a ban on widow remarriage become part of social life among some communities in India. Today the development of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century. But practically women development is still an illusion of reality. We observe in our day to day life

how women become victimized by various social evils. Undoubtedly the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi experimented in this field a century ago and he had shown the way for the development of the status of women. The upliftment of women does not form part of Gandhi's main agenda, nevertheless is one of his concerns as a part of social reform. He worked for the progress and upliftment of women. He stressed on the whole course of human evolution and the place which nature has given to women. When nature has given equal potentials to both, he argued men need not think of himself as superior to a women.

Gandhi was of the opinion that until and unless women, on the basis of education and knowledge do not find their proper place in social and economic fields, they could not achieve self- respect for themselves. Nor they could become self- dependent in any of the walks of life. In his lifetime Gandhi inspired Indians to take concrete and practical initiatives regarding women education which will bring them out of these centuries' old conservative customs and rules, which were responsible for their mental and social slavery.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, as a major social and political reformer, played an important role in attempting to eradicate the social wrongs committed against the women of the country through ages. He strongly believed that a society can develop rapidly if takes all sections of the people together into its fold, rich and poor, high society people and low caste people and both men and women.

Madhu Kishwar in her book wrote that any approach to understand Gandhi on women must include: (a) an evaluation of Gandhi's general understanding of the nature of women's oppression in India and his views on the role of women in society; (b) an evaluation of Gandhi's role in bringing a large number of women into the mainstream of the national movement and of politics, and the quality of women's participation under the leadership of Gandhi. This is the most important aspects because more than anything else, this has had the most lasting impact on the situation of women even in free India; and (c) the place that women found in this life, the experimental nature of these relationships as embodiments of his attitudes towards women and of his views of an ideal man-women relationship, as these views themselves went through an arduous process of change.

Any stand of Gandhi including on women, or his philosophy cannot be appreciated without understanding his views on religion. Gandhi attitude to religion holds the key to the understanding of his life and thought. For him religion is an indissoluble whole which cannot be separated from other spheres of life. Gandhi asserted, "I do not conceive religion as one of the many activities of mankind.... for me every, (even) the tiniest, activity is governed by what I consider to be my religion.

Gandhi was more sure of God's existence than of anything else. For him there is no other God than truth and the only means for realization of truth is non-violence or love: truth meant the goal of life, self realization. Gandhi was one of the forceful personalities of modern India who believed that religion was a great creative force in human life. He was deeply influenced by the profoundly philosophical and ethical teaching of the Gita. Religion to him symbolized the attainment of moral perfection through the instrumentality of absolute truth. The reason for such deep influence of religion was due to Gandhi's being born in a deeply religious family. His parents were followers of the largely devotional Hindu cult of Vishnu. His mother belonged to the Pranami sect, which combined Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs, gave equal honour to the sacred books of the Vaishnavites and the Koran, and preached religious harmony. Her religious fasts and vows observed without exception all her life, left an abiding impression on her son.

Gandhi held that a truly religious person could not afford to keep out of any field of activity. He did not believe in leading the life of a recluse or an isolated individual. This meant for Gandhi that there could not be a complete realization of Godhead until he devoted himself to the service of humanity. He said, For me the road to salvation lies through incessant toll in the services of my country and of humanity. I want to identify myself with everything that lives.

Women's influence on Mahatma Gandhi:

Women's urban and rural, educated and uneducated, Indian and foreign, were also influenced his ideas and deeds.

Gandhi admired his father who clearly had qualities of leadership and was greatly respected in the community, but his mother had the strongest moral and spiritual influence upon him. Mahatma Gandhi vision of women was also gratefully influenced by his wife, Kasturba Gandhi. While referring to his carnal desires, Gandhi candidly admits that he had inflicted innumerable tortures upon his wife who bore them with remarkable forbearance and fortitude.

In a letter written to Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur from Wardha on 20-10-1936 Gandhi Wrote "if you women would only realize your dignity and privilege and make full use of it for mankind you will make it much better than it is. But man has delighted in enslaving you and you have proved willing slaves till the slave and the slave holders have become one in the crime of degrading humanity. My special function from childhood, you might say, has been to make women realize her dignity. I was once slave holder myself but Ba proved an unwilling slave and thus "opened my eyes to my mission."

Gandhi was fully aware of the exploitation of women in and outside their homes but he also thought that a person cannot be exploited without his or her will or participation. Gandhi himself admitted that he learnt the technique of non-violent passive resistance from women, especially from his wife and mother. It was kasturba's passive resistance against Gandhi's unreasonable actions and attitudes, both as a man and husband that compelled him to change himself from a domineering husband to an understanding one; thereby realizing the spirit of equality and acting upon the principle of mutual consideration. In his autobiography, My experiment with truth, he has discussed at length about his inner transformation from an authoritarian husband to an understanding companion. This Gandhi admitted did not easily. He exercised authority on Ba not only physically but mentally as well. At one point Gandhi forced Ba to clean the toilet of his visitor and Kasturba refused and there was a violent conflict between the two. Mahatma Gandhi had almost threatened to throw Ba out of the house. When she admonished Babu in firm and measured tone, it brought Babu to his senses and he realized his fault. Thus Gandhi's own admission on his immense faith in women's Shakti comes from his experience of his mother and his wife. He observed and studied women in his own home and society, not merely as wives and mothers.

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 influenced Mahatma Gandhi. It was due to the influenced of various women's which made Mahatma Gandhi a true friend of women. His ideas and vision was clearly realistic and women's learnt the meaning of liberation from him and contributed with all their energy to the struggle for independence. Life sketches and recollections of women freedom-fighters give us glimpses of their struggle against injustice and inequality.

It may also be noted that during the course of his political career Gandhi had interacted with a large number of women who were his close associates, notable example is Annie Besant, Oliver Schriener, Millie Graham Pollock, Mirabhen, Sarojini Naidu, Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Amrit kaur, Kamla Devi Chattopadhyay, Sushila Nayyar, and so on.

In their own humble ways, the women mentioned above did contribute to a certain extent in the framing of Mahatma Gandhi perception of women.

WOMEN AND SOCIAL WORK

Gandhi believed in the welfare of all human beings irrespective of their Sex, religion and Nationality. Sarvodaya, a concept that Gandhi popularized aimed at the good of all Human beings. The fundamental fact of sarvodaya is the belief in the spiritual and ethical unity of man. His concept of social welfare was apiece with his general approach to life and was not an isolated or a compartmental view of merely one of the many activities of life.

Gandhi did not believe social change was subject to factors such as "collective consciousness, class struggle," or "the moral priority of any collective agency over the individual." His indictment of modern civilization and his repudiation of the collectivist view of society, were predicated upon his faith that "the individual is the one supreme consideration"

Mahatma Gandhi rote, "The women certainly do social work, but as individuals. I should like them to assume responsibility as a body, for some social service. This will create in them capacity for organization. When such capacity has been created, individuals may come and go but the organization will remain. God has given such capacity only to human beings. In our country, women have not cultivated it so far. The blame for this lies with the men. But that is a question with which we need not concern ourselves just now. If we believe that women must acquire this capacity for organization, we should try to cultivate it in them. It does not matter if we believe that women must acquire this capacity for organization, we should try to cultivate it in them. It does not matter if we commence only with my writing a letter to their Association and their replying to me. Slowly (no matter, if very slowly) we may take up other activities. If you have fully understood what I have suggested and if the suggestion has appealed to you, if the other women also approve of it and if they are ready to take interest in carrying it out, you may take up this work. If, however, you see difficulties in carrying it out or see no meaning in it, you may drop the idea."

Mahatma Gandhi political ideologies are strongly based on humanitarian values, which were a reflection of his spiritual self. For him, politics could not be divorced from social factors. To Gandhi, social emancipation was as critical as political emancipation.

His whole programme of constructive work and his philosophy is one integrated picture of his ideas and action in the field of social welfare.

MAHATMA GANDHI CONDEMNATION OF SOCIAL EVIL

Mahatma Gandhi always thought of raising the status of women through his advice and utterances, and writings in his journals, young India and Harijan. He invited the women to come forward to participate in his various movements against the raj. He made them realise that they possessed virtues which made them superior to men in a non violent fight which

required infinite patience and uncomplaining and silent suffering. He was confident that they could become leaders in the non violent satyagraha which did not require the learning that books give but did require the stout heart that came from suffering and faith.

Gandhi had ruthlessly condemned the various social evils which made the condition of women even more pathetic. He was very severe in his criticism of the preference for sons among the Indian families. To quote him: I make no distinction between son and daughter. Such distinction is in my opinion invidious and wrong. The birth of a son or a daughter should be welcome alike.

Birth of a female child was not welcome mainly because of the inevitable wedding expenses and the hateful system of dowry. Gandhi sharply criticized these abhorrent practices saying that even though women are the ardhgini or the better half, yet they are "reduced to the position of a mere chattel to be bought and sold".

Another social evil which deeply pained Gandhi was child marriage, particularly ill matched marriages in which young girls were married to men good enough to be their grandfather. Gandhi was so vehement in his criticism of child marriage that he called it "an immoral and inhuman act", and he considered it "a crime against god and man to call the union of the children a married state...."

Gandhi was of the opinion that such a widespread evil could not be cured through mere legislation. Gandhi also believed that the barbarous custom of purdah was causing immense harm to the country. He stressed: "let us not live with one limb completely or partially paralyzed.... By seeking today to interfere with the free growth of the womanhood of India we are interfering with the growth of free an independent spirited men....it accounts for our own weakness, indecision, narrowness and helplessness. Let us then tear down the purdha with one mighty effort. Gandhi opposed child marriage, evil system (Purdah) or husband's domination over his wife. He had supported widow remarriage, advocated women's education. Gandhi believed that lack of education and information was the roots cause of all the evils against women.

GENDER EQUALITY

Gandhi unequivocally affirmed his uncompromising stand in the matter of gender equality. He believed that women are also individuals as men who should be given the liberty to make their own moral claims. But somehow or the other men has dominated women from ages past and the view imposed on them with regard to their inferiority, was part of the self interested teaching of men, which had left women in a state of helplessness and dependence. Gandhi was totally opposed to gender discrimination. Gandhi advocated a society which will be free of exploitation, establishing equality in all sphere of life which would not discriminate against human being on the basis of birth, colour, sex or nation. Today there is gross economic inequality. The basis of socialism is economic equality. There can be no Ram Rajya in the present state of iniquitous inequalities in which a few rolls is riches and the masses do not get even enough to eat. He held that inequality ultimately led to exploitation, which for him was violence.

Also, he held that all work socially useful is of equal worth, whether that of a scavenger, a doctor, a lawyer, a merchant or a minister. Hence work should get, if not equal, at least equitable remuneration. In his Ashram, all the inmates, engaged in physical or intellectual work, were treated as equals and everyone was provided with facilities, according to his or her needs. Gandhi made no distinction between men and women.

Mahatma Gandhi views on Women Liberty:

Gandhi worked not only for the political emancipation of the nation, but for liberation of all the suppressed and oppressed sections of society. One of the note worthy results of his life-work has been the awakening of women, 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 abala becomes sabala, all those who are helpless will become powerful". The welfare of the weaker sections of society was dear to his heart. He had no qualms about the priority of social over political ends. In his opinion, to postpone social reform till after the attainment of Swaraj. According to Gandhi, a woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him. But she is entitled to a supreme place in her own 'domain' or sphere of activity as man is in his. Women's domain is her home and men's the outside world. Gandhi said that both boys and girls should be educated, but it is only the primary education for the two sexes that can have much in common. As far as the highest education is concerned, important differences would exist. As nature has made men and women different it is necessary to maintain a difference between the education of the two. True, they are equal in life but their functions differ. It is women's right to rule the home. Man is master outside it. Man is the earner, women saves and spends... she is her children's educator and hence, mother of the nation.

Gandhi had an immense faith in the inner strength of women. He held that women by nature are endowed with the qualities of love, non-violence, forgiveness and a remarkable capacity for sacrifice. Gandhi once remarked.

Against heavy expenditure in connection with marriages.

He wanted to simplify marriage ceremonials. He was against feasting on such occasions. Many marriages were celebrated in the Ashram. All that was done was the recitation of the simple Ashram prayer and some advice from Mahatma Gandhi to young couple on how they should live a contented and happy life of service. At the end of this simple ceremony, he would present to the couple a copy of Bhagavad-Gita.

WOMEN STRENGTH

Gandhi revolutionized not only Indian politics, but also the whole perception of life for women. Gandhi believed that all men and women are equal. He believed in the strength of every individual. His constant message to them was that bravery and courage were not the monopoly of men. He gave the example of Sita who due to her moral strength was able to protect her from the hands of powerful Rawan. He believed that women of India had strength, ability, character and determination to stand on her own and work shoulder to shoulder with men in every walk of life. Mahatma Gandhi in

prayer meeting said that "If one believes that women are weak, I would say that no women in the world are weak. All are strong. All those who have firm faith in their religion are strong, not weak. So I would suggest that we should first teach our boys and girls that they are not weak. Gandhi considered neither man nor women to be treated as superior or inferior. Women have accepted the position assigned to them and therefore, they have developed an inferiority complex.

GANDHI VIEWS ON WOMEN EDUCATION

Gandhi was an ardent supporter of compulsory education for girls as well as boys. By education I mean an all round drawing out of the best in child and man body, mind and spirit, literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning. It is only of the means whereby man and women can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education. I would therefore begin the child's education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the movement it begins its training. I hold the highest development of the mind and the soul is possible under such a system of education.

In his basic National Education Scheme elaborated in 1937, Gandhi proposed free and compulsory education for children of both sexes, from ages seven to fourteen. Gandhi felt that the educational curriculum should be adapted to the special needs of girls in order to prepare them to be mothers and homemakers. And most Indian women educators in the early twentieth century agreed with Gandhi that women's education must respond to the need of their different social role. As for women's education I am not sure whether it should be different from men's and when it should begin. But I am strongly of opinion that women should have the same facilities as men and even special facilities where necessary.

Mahatma Gandhi View on Participation of Women in Politics:

M.K. Gandhi is known to be one of the few people who encouraged women's active participation in the freedom struggle-marking him as a rare promoter of women's liberation. In Gandhi words, "My contribution to the great problem (of women's role in society) lies in my presenting for acceptance of 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, will shed her inferiority complex. Women's entry into national politics through non-violent methods brought miraculous results. On the one hand, women became aware of their inner strength, and on the other, the process brought human and moral elements into politics.

Gandhi could see woman as connected with service and not with power. When a woman wrote to him in 1946 about the political scene and the paucity of women in it, he wrote: "So long as considerations of caste and community continue to weigh with us and rule our choice, women will be well-advised to remain aloof and thereby build up their prestige. Women workers should enrol women as voters, impart or have imparted to them practical education, teach them to think independently, release them from the chains of caste that bind them so as to bring about a change in them which will compel men to realize women's strength and capacity for sacrifice and give her places of honor. If they will do this, they will purify

the present unclear atmosphere." His advice to women was to teach people in villages simple lessons of hygiene and sanitation. Seeking power would be, for them, "reversion of barbarity". And still Gandhi believed that, "Women must have votes and an equal 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."

Mahatma Gandhi political ideologies are strongly based on humanitarian values, which were a reflection of his spiritual self. For him, politics could not be divorced from social factors. To Gandhi, social emancipation was as critical as political emancipation.

"The emergence of Indian women into active political life since independence is a result of their partnership in revolution that gained India her freedom in 1947. Mahatma Gandhi leadership followed by that of Jawaharlal Nehru, who championed the cause of women and sincerely felt that women must work side by side with men, were reason enough for the important new role they were to play.

PANCHAYATI RAJ

Gandhi Knew that India lives in Village and her civilization has been an agricultural one. His concept of Gram Swaraj ultimately paved the way for Panchayat Raj System. Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village has to be self sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world..... thus ultimately it is the individual who is the unit.

THE CURSE OF INDUSTRIALIZATION

Gandhi was in favour of small Industries that lead to the villager's economic status as well as would be helpful in women safety purpose. He was against of craze for machine. Heavy industries would lead to the reason of poor people poorer. Gandhi worked for the emancipation of the supersets people but according to Gandhi industrialization brought poverty. Replied to a question whether he was against all machinery, Gandhi Said: how can I be when I Know that even this body is a most delicate piece of machinery? The spinning wheel is a machine, a little toothpick is a machine, what I object is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour saving machinery. Men go on saving labour till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation.

Gandhi believed in clean environment and industries would be resulted in environment pollution. On the question of the tram cars and electricity Gandhi answered that machinery is like a snake hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes. Where there is machinery there are large cities, and where there are large cities there are tram cars and railways, and there only does one see electric light.

GANDHI ON WOMEN ECONOMIC STATUS

Gandhi was not only a leader who guided the country to independence through a non violent struggle, but was a person with a deep insight into the social as well as economic aspects of life. Gandhi knew that India lives in the villages, and her

civilization has been an agricultural one. His concept of gram Swaraj ultimately paved the way for panchayat Raj System. He favoured decentralized and balanced economy. It was with a remarkable insight that Gandhi without challenging their traditional role in society could make women an important social base for the movement. Gandhi called upon women to take the responsibility not just for changing their own situation but that of the society at large. He urged, the economic and moral solution of India thus rests mainly with you. He recommended that all women should devote at least one hour daily to spinning. He believed that by doing productive work she can be self sufficient.

ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY

Gandhi was very much environment friendly. Throughout his life he worked for keep the earth clean. His emphasis on environmental hygiene is well known. He emphasized that the village as a whole and individual families must keep their premises absolutely clean. Gandhi practised himself these basic ideas related to harmonious living as close to nature.

ISSUES OF WOMEN SAFETY

Gandhi desired that women should be fearless and their honour can be protect only from women's inner moral strength. It is my firm conviction that a fearless woman, who knows that her purity is her best shield can never be dishonoured. However beastly the men, he will bow in same before the flame of her dazzling purity...i therefore recommend women to try to cultivate his courage. They will become wholly fearless if they can and cease to tremble as they do today at the thought of assaults.... Parents and husband should instruct women in the art of becoming fearless. It can best be learnt from a living faith in God. Though he is invisible he is one's unfailing protector. He who has this faith is the most fearless of all. Gandhi followed an uncompromising attitude towards women's rights. He declared, In my opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by men. I should treat the daughters and son's on a footing of perfect equality. Women may not look for protection to men. They must rely on their own strength and purity of character and on God as did Draupadi of old.

SELF PURIFICATION

Gandhi stressed on moral strength. He argued that identification with everything that lives is impossible without self purification, without self purification the observance of the law of ahimsa must remain an empty dream, God can never be realized by one who is not pure to heart. Self purification therefore must mean purification in all the walks of life. And purification being highly infectious, purification of oneself necessarily leads to the purification of one's surroundings. But the path of purification is hard and steep. To attain to perfect purity one has to become absolutely passion free in thought, speech and repulsion.

SPIRIT OF SWADESHI AND SPINNING

Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote.

VIEWS ON UNEMPLOYMENT

Gandhi believed in hard work and every work and gave equal importance to all work. Ultimately unemployment leads youth to indulge in crime and mostly our women suffer. But if we follow the idea of Gandhi than the question of unemployment will dissolve. According to Gandhi There is enough employment in India for all who will work with their hands and feet honestly. God has given everyone the capacity to work and earn more than his daily bread, and whoever is ready to use that capacity is sure to find work. No labour is too mean for one who wants to earn an honest penny. The only thing is the readiness to use the hands and feet that god has given us.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN NATIONAL MOVEMENTS LEAD BY MAHATMA GANDHI

Gandhi had tremendous faith in women's inherent capacity for non-violence. And his experience of participation by women in politics from his days in South Africa till the end of his life bears testimony to the fact that they never failed his expectations. With Mahatma Gandhi inspiration, they took the struggle right into their homes and raised it to a moral level. Women organized public meetings, sold khadi and prescribed literature, started picketing shops of liquor and foreign goods, prepared contraband salt, and came forward to face all sorts of atrocities, including inhuman treatment by police officers and imprisonment. They came forward to give all that they had - their wealth and strength, their jewellery and belongings, their skills and labour all with sacrifices for this unusual and unprecedented struggle.

In the first non-cooperation movement, women were called to participate within the limitations of their social conditions. Gandhi placed emphasis on spinning because it could be carried out within the home. Women were encouraged to tear down the veil, come out to attend street meetings and join processions. 1000 women marched in a procession in Bombay to oppose the visit of the Prince of Wales in November 1921. In the Bardoli Satyagraha in 1928, women were not seen at first. Yet, from April on, they outnumbered men in political gatherings and even held their own separate meetings. The year 1930 began with a pledge for Independence. In March, Gandhi announced that he would launch a civil disobedience movement by breaking the Salt Law. His plan was to walk from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi, a deserted village on the sea coast 200 miles away to make salt on the beach there. He did not include women in the first batch of 79 refusing their request to take four or five women with him. But as Gandhi walked towards Dandi, women were everywhere on the way to greet him and to hear him speak. At Abhrama on April 10, 1930, there were 2000 women in an audience of 5000. 560 women received him when he arrived at Dandi. But some women refused to be restrained in this

manner. Khurshedbehn Naoroji and Mridula Sarabhai jumped into the struggle despite strict orders not to do so. They were both arrested in Ahmedabad. Ahmedabad witnessed a grand procession of khadi-clad women on April 23. The procession stretched to half a mile, and was managed by saffron-saree-clad volunteers of Videshi Kapade Bahiskar Samiti. On 1st June 1930, 11 women took part in the Wadala raid organized by the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee in which Lilawati Munshi took an active part. They were all arrested and detained in the Salt Prevention office at Wadala.

Men were not opposed to Gandhi drawing their women out onto the streets to participate in the nationalist movement. Because Gandhi did not really challenge the established patriarchal order. He did not disturb the status quo of the conventional Indian family. He did not ask women to break their fetters. He held that woman was not inferior to man but that her role was different. Political participation was not to be at the cost of domestic duties. Service to her husband, family and country was a woman's primary duty. Gandhi advised women who wished to dedicate themselves totally to the cause of freedom to remain unmarried. Dr. Susheela Nayar and Ushabehn Thakkar are examples of this Gandhian rule. For couples who were similarly dedicated, he advised celibacy and no children. Acharya J.B. Kripalani and his wife Sucheta followed this ideal to the letter. Men, therefore, did not find Mahatma Gandhi appeal to women threatening their own dominant position within the family. The power-equation within the home remained undisturbed. Gandhi still spoke of Sita as the ideal wife. His aim was to use the traditional role of the Indian woman to extend these to the wider political sphere. The logic was simple if not simplistic: she was used to sacrificing for her husband, her children, her family; therefore, she was now being asked to sacrifice for her country's freedom.

Legally speaking, Gandhi made it clear that he was 'uncompromising in the matter of women's rights.' Yet, he also believed that since legal reform would not solve the problem, it should not be accorded greater attention or effort than it deserved. According to him, since relationships between the sexes were not unlike those between other groups unequal in power, the liberation of women was inextricably tied to the liberation of India, the removal of un-touchability and the amelioration of the economic condition of the masses. Gandhi deplored the fact that women who belonged to women's organizations were out of touch with their rural sisters. He preferred them to spend more time to find out about the lives of women in villages.

Gandhi, throughout his life, struggled very hard for the upliftment of the socially downtrodden, making significant contributions for the development of the status of women in India. Women under his ages took a milestone to step towards re-establishing their identity in the society. Mahatma Gandhi inspiring ideologies boosted their morals and helped them to rediscover their self-esteem. Not only there was a general awakening among the women, but under Mahatma Gandhi leadership they entered into the National mainstream, taking parts in the National Movements. In Mahatma Gandhi words, "To call women the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to women." The views expressed by the Mahatma and the actions undertaken by him may not go entirely with the

current times because the times have irreversibly changed but the honesty of the Mahatma, the love and respect he had for the women, can never be doubted. He is truly the best friend of the women of the world.

PRESENT POSITION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Day by day crimes against women are rising and laws formulated to safeguard women's interest seem insufficient to handle the situation. The practice of child marriage, prohibition of female education and widow re- marriages, polygamy marriage, slavery, purdha system and the dowry system all these prescribed by society left the women weak and fragile and dependent on men from the time of their birth to death. Gandhi discarded all these situations. His ideas are even relevant today.

In concluding remarks it is analyzed that after the passing of the Quit India resolution in August 1942, a new generation of women- which was prepared to undertake dangerous and challenging tasks- began to emerge. Thus the traditional image of women as weak and helpless creatures underwent a radical transformation. Their levels of confidence increased manifold and they had a new role to play in the national mainstream.

"The emergence of Indian women into active political life since independence is a result of their partnership in revolution that gained India her freedom in 1947. In modern India women have adorned high offices in India including that of the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha etc. in fact its credit goes to Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi developed a number of techniques whose basic thrust was to strengthen socially, economically and politically the weaker section. His techniques were directed towards strengthening the mental and physical fibre of every individual in the Indian society. Gandhi also developed the concept of non violence as a means to achieve the socio- economic and political objectives of the weak. His ideas about the dangers of western civilization have assumed significant in the context of several issues concerning the survival of the humanity and evolution of a just and viable world order. Gandhian concept of sarvodaya will be very useful for solving the social problems of today and coming centuries. Its mass perspective and commitment for a decentralized social setup will help in transforming society for the welfare and wellbeing of every individual and of the community as a whole. He never had a specific program for women, but women had an integral role to play in all his programmes. I feel that this is one of the reasons why women participated in his programs so overwhelmingly. This study examines the ways in which Gandhi intentionally and unintentionally strengthened Indian women's during the freedom movement.

CONCLUSION

Gandhi, throughout his life, struggled very hard for the upliftment of the socially downtrodden, making significant contributions for the development of the status of women in India. Women under his ages took a milestone to step towards re-establishing their identity in the society. Mahatma Gandhi inspiring ideologies boosted their morals and helped them to rediscover their self-esteem. Not only there was a general

awakening among the women, but under Mahatma Gandhi leadership they entered into the National mainstream, taking parts in the National Movements. In Mahatma Gandhi words, "To call women the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to women." The views expressed by the Mahatma and the actions undertaken by him may not go entirely with the current times because the times have irreversibly changed but the honesty of the Mahatma, the love and respect he had for the women, can never be doubted. He is truly the best friend of the women of the world.

Day by day crimes against women are rising and laws formulated to safeguard women's interest seem insufficient to handle the situation. The practice of child marriage, prohibition of female education and widow re- marriages, polygamy marriage, slavery, purdha system and the dowry system all these prescribed by society left the women weak and fragile and dependent on men from the time of their birth to death. Mahatma Gandhi discarded all these situations. His ideas are even relevant today.

In concluding remarks it is analysed that after the passing of the Quit India resolution in August 1942, a new generation of women- which was prepared to undertake dangerous and challenging tasks- began to emerge. Thus the traditional image of women as weak and helpless creatures underwent a radical transformation. Their levels of confidence increased manifold and they had a new role to play in the national mainstream.

REFERENCES

- [1] Dr Ram Krishna Mandal, 'Empowerment of Women Through Education and Some Selected Opinions', cited in Women in the 21st Century, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 2012.
- [2] Bhikhu Parekh, Gandhi: A Very Short Introduction, Oxford, 1997, p 2.
- [3] Young India, April 3, 1924.
- [4] Rajan Mahan, Women in Indian National Congress: 1921-31, Rawat Publication, Jaipur, 1999, P. 82.
- [5] Harijan, 1936
- [6] Shyama Sinha, Kasturba Gandhi and the Mahatma, 'Kasturba and women Empowerment', ed. Savita Singh, Gandhi
- [7] Smriti and Darshan Samiti, New Delhi, 1994, p 84.
- [8] Eleanor Morton, Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi, The Stellar Press Union Street, Barnet Herts, London, 1954, p.33.
- [9] Dhurjati Mukherjee, Towering Spirit, Gandhian Reverence Assessed, New Delhi, Chetana Publications, 1978, p 67.
- [10] M. K. Gandhi, Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, VOL. 53: 2 JULY, 1931 – 12 October, 1931, P. 469.
- [11] K.B.Pradhan, Women in Indian National Movement, Arise Publishers, New Delhi, 2012.
- [12] M. K. Gandhi, 'The Marriage Ideal', Harijan, 5 June 1937.
- [13] M K Gandhi, op. cit. Vol.39, 1928, P. 415.
- [14] Young India, 2, August 1926.
- [15] Young India, 3 February, 1927.

- [16] Dr Umesh Pratap Singh and Dr Vivek Kumar Nigam, 'Gandhi and Empowerment of Women' cited in Women Empowerment Dimension and Direction, Adhyayan Publisher, New Delhi, 2012, p 410.
- [17] Harijan, 1-6-1947, p172
- [18] Usha, Thakkar, 'Breaking the Shackles: Mahatma Gandhi Views on Women' <http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/women1.html>.
- [19] M. K. Gandhi, Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, VOL. 14 P. 31-36.
- [20] Madhu Kishwar, 'Gandhi on Women' Economic and political Weekly, Vol XX No 40, 5 October, 1985, p 169.
- [21] Dr Umesh Pratap Singh and Dr Vivek Kumar Nigam op. cited, p 411.
- [22] M. K Gandhi, op.cit, Vol, 39, P 262
- [23] R.J. Terchek, Gandhi: Struggling for Autonomy, New Delhi, Vistar Publication, 1998, p 65.
- [24] Harijan, 31,7,37
- [25] M. K .Gandhi, India of My Dreams, compiled by R.K Prabhu, Navajivan Mudranalaya, Ahmedabad, 1947, p 169
- [26] Dr Shubhangi, Rathi, 'Gandhi and Women Empowerment', <http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/women1.html>.
- [27] Maya, Majumdar, Protecting our Women, Volume III, Dominant Publisher and Distributors, 2001, p1.
- [28] R.K.Prabhu and U.R. Rao, The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi, Navjivan Publishing House, www.mkgandhi.org, p356
- [29] M.K.Gandhi, Hind Swaraj and Indian Home Rule, Navjevan Publishing House, Ahmadabad, p 6
- [30] Ibid, p 90.
- [31] Madhu Kishwar op. Cited, p,1700
- [32] Young India, August 11,1921.
- [33] Harijan, 1,3,1942.
- [34] M.K.Gandhi, Women and Social Injustice, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1942, p12.
- [35] R.K.Prabhu and U.R. Rao, Op cited, p281
- [36] M.K .Gandhi, India of My Dreams op cited, p 220.
- [37] Harijan, 19-12-1936, p 356
- [38] Shoma A. Chatterji, 'Gandhi And Women,' <http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/women1.html>, 2001.
- [39] M. K Gandhi, 'The Position of Women', Young India, Oct.17, 1929, P. 340.
- [40] Barbara Southard, 'The Feminism of Mahatma Gandhi', Gandhi Marg, 1980, Pp. 404-422.
- [41] Maya Majumdar, Protecting our Women, Volume III, Dominant Publisher and Distributors, 2001, P.1.