

Women's Involvement In Gandhi's Constructive Programmes

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Abstract: Gandhi wanted Independent India with its own vision that would be based on the combination of ancient Indian institutions along with scientific outlook. In his programme Gandhi wanted to de-construct the existing British imperialist legacies and wanted to construct a system based on the decentralisation of the economy and polity. He wanted that the society should get rid of the evils based on the feudal-values and society should be perfect democracy with minimum constraints. Chapter deals with women contribution to Gandhian constructive programme.

Most of us know Gandhi as the man who led our struggle for freedom from British rule. But while fighting for political independence, he desired to prepare the people for a new social order so that when independence came it would be complete. Gandhi wanted Independent India with its own vision that would be based on the combination of ancient Indian institutions along with scientific outlook. In his programme Gandhi wanted to de-construct the existing British imperialist legacies and wanted to construct a system based on the decentralization of the economy and polity. He wanted that the society should get rid of the evils based on the feudal-values and society should be perfect democracy with minimum constraints. Chapter deals with women contribution to Gandhian constructive programme.

He struggle for *Puran Swaraj* for all irrespective of their caste, class or religion. This meant building up or constructing the nation through nonviolent and truth full means. Constructive programmes formed an integral part of Gandhi's non-violent struggle for independence. He maintained that nonviolence was the way to achieve India's independence. It was meant to revolutionize the nation's outlook in all the spheres of life. In a radical reconstruction, it aimed at preparing the nation politically, economically, socially and morally for the impending struggle against British Imperialism. Gandhi firmly believed that India's real *Swaraj* would be attained through the constructive programmes.

According to Gandhi; the constructive programme may otherwise and more fittingly be called construction of *Puran Swaraj* or complete independence by truthful and non-violent means. Effort for construction of independence so called through violent and, therefore, necessarily untruthful means

we know only too painfully. Look at the daily destruction of property, life and truth in the present war. Complete independence through truth and non-violence means the independence of every unit, be it the humblest of the nation, without distinction of race, color or creed. This independence is never exclusive. It is, therefore, wholly compatible with interdependence within or without. Practice will always fall short of the theory, even as the drawn line falls short of the theoretical line of Euclid. Therefore, complete independence will be complete only to the extent of our approach in practice to truth and non-violence.

Gandhi said that for my purpose, which is to convince the reader of the necessity of following out the constructive programme in the non-violent effort, the acceptance of my argument about the ineffectiveness of violence for the attainment of independence is not required. The reader is welcome to the belief that independence of the humblest unit is possible under a scheme of violence, if this effort enables him also to admit that is a certainty through the complete execution of the programme by the nation.

Constructive programmes in its entirety were to enable the masses to emerge out of bondage into freedom and out of economic and social deprivation into self-reliance and out of state of alienation into deprivation into creative cooperative living. Hence various items of the constructive programme were given due importance in the political movement started under Gandhi's leadership. In fact, implementation of some of these items was the first prerequisite for the success of the political programmes. For instance, the programme of boycott of foreign goods that formed an important item of all the political movements led by him could hardly succeed without

emphasizing the need for *Swadeshi*, which was one of the central planks of constructive programmes.

Again Hindu-Muslim unity, another significant item of constructive programme, was considered imperative for the success of India's struggle for independence. Because communal question was, in the fact, the trump card which the bureaucracy used frequently to defeat Congress and all nationalists in the game of politics in India. Consequently in the annual session of the Indian National Congress held at Nagpur, in December 1920, a resolution was passed, which called upon public associations to advance *Khadi*, Hindu-Muslim unity.... to reform Hinduism in the matter of its treatment of the suppressed classes. It also included prohibition in its programme.

In a way congress made in very tactful move by linking constructive programmes with the political movement, for it put the Government on their nerves because any suppression of this campaign identified the Government with the promoters of an evil in the society that weakened the moral foundation of its rule. Further, it added new dimension to the political movement for it implied that the object of nationalist movement was not only freedom from external control but from internal weaknesses also. More precisely, its aim was to put the social structure on strong moral foundation. But he also realized that complete transformation would be a gradual process over a long period of time. The just society, Gandhi held, could not be built by any short violent cuts to success for it would not drop from heaven all of a sudden one fine morning. But it had to be built up brick by brick by corporate self-effort.

Describing the efficacy of the constructive programmes, which he labelled as national ammunition, Gandhi said, it will steady and calm us and make us industrious and fit for *Swaraj* and will cool our blood.

He further added, my work of social reform was in no way less than or subordinate to political work, in fact, this work of self-purification is hundred times dearer to me than what is called purely political work. Because he believed that handling of *Satyagraha* without constructive programmes would be like a paralysed hand attempting to lift a spoon.

He listed eighteen items in his programme including popularisation of *Khadi*, Hindu-Muslim unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, upliftment of women, village industries, village sanitation, etc. Each item of the constructive programme was designed to have worth and value by and in itself, remarked J. B. Kripalani, as it strengthen the nation by eliminating from its life some of the drawbacks in its character, which were largely responsible for our slavery. Reaffirming his faith, Gandhi said: Its whole fulfilment is complete independence.

Though Gandhi emphasized that *Satyagraha* was an aid to constructive programme yet the best training for *Satyagraha* come through constructive programme, for he believed that as the violent soldier has to be trained and discipline, so must be the non-violent soldier. As in some countries the whole adult population is trained and disciplined for total war, so must the whole nation, which was expected to join the fight for freedom, be trained and disciplined for *Satyagraha* and for reconstruction of the country, which is possible only through the constructive programme, remarked Gandhi. In other

words, he believed that the qualities that freedom was expected to energise could be brought into play by constructive activities.

According to Gandhi constructive programmes were to be performed of its own accord, which was purely a moral action, strengthening morality and character of man. In addition to cooperation and mutual aid, self-reliance and self-help formed an intrinsic part of constructive programmes which concentrated expression of the spirit of non-violence while building it up from below, i.e. grassroots. Thus, Gandhi's constructive programme was a comprehensive revolution as it was based upon the revaluation of basic values.

In this sphere also Gandhi wanted women to play an important role. He asserted that more than a military campaign, constructive work calls for superior qualities like tolerance, renunciation, sacrifice, perseverance and penance and who could better exhibit these qualities than women. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, inspired by Gandhi's appeals women took up various activities of constructive programmes along with the political activities of nationalist movement and carried them successfully.

Though constructive programmes included eighteen items yet women by and large participated intensely in the promotion of *Khadi*, Hindu-Muslim unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition and emancipation of women. However, they also contributed in some other items of constructive programmes including promotion of village industries, village sanitation and education in health and hygiene and propagation of national language. Their participation in these programmes has been discussed below in detail.

KHADI

Gandhi attaches the greatest importance to *Khadi* of all the items included in his constructive programmes. He believed that spinning of Charkha and wearing of *Khadi* were the twin evocative and inspiring symbols, to arouse a sense of self-reliance and a nationalist zeal among Indian people. British Colonialism destructed India's cottage industries and village handicrafts. It caused untold misery to the masses and in this entire process women were the greatest sufferers as they were not only ousted from their traditional employment but were also not provided any alternative skill or work.

Gandhi said that *Khadi* is a controversial subject. Many people think that in advocating *Khadi* I am sailing against a headwind and am sure to sink the ship of *Swaraj* and that I am taking the country to the dark ages. I do not propose to argue the case for *Khadi* in this brief survey. I have argued it sufficiently elsewhere. Here I want to show what every Congressman, and for that matter every Indian, can do to advance the cause of *Khadi*. It connotes the beginning of economic freedom and equality of all in the country. The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Let everyone try, and he or she will find out for himself or herself the truth of what I am saying *Khadi* must be taken with all its implications. It means a wholesale *Swadeshi* mentality, a determination to find all the necessities of life in Indian and that too through the labour and intellect of the villagers. That means a reversal of the existing process.

Gandhi envisaged that *Swadeshi* had a distinctive relevance and significance for ameliorating women's condition, as it could provide work to the semi-starved, semi-employed women of India. He, therefore, urged women from all sections of society to take to spinning and weaving as he opined that for the middle class women the charkha could supplement the income of the family, for poverty stricken women it was undoubtedly a means of livelihood also, for widows it should be a loving companion, and finally, the elite educated and well-off women should spin as a duty in order to link up their lives with those of their poor country women.

Gandhi further linked the *Swadeshi* movement with women's dharma, which they need to follow themselves and also inculcate in their children. As he advised, if you wish a prosperous future for your children you should leave them as a legacy the idea that it is *adharma* to obtain our needs by imports. Gandhi even exhorted women that the economic and moral salvation of India rests mainly on you. The nation simply cannot be kept without *Swadeshi*. From the time that women gave up spinning began the economic and spiritual degradation of the people. It is no exaggeration to say that India's freedom hangs solely by a cotton thread.

He, therefore, perceptively implored India women to help vigorously and effectively in the building up of a free India by taking up *Swadeshi*, because, in *Swadeshi* there is an effective way to *Swaraj* and vindication of the national honour. The main burden of the task of propagating *Swadeshi* lay on the women of India and they must rise to the occasion, adverted Gandhi.

Women responded to Gandhi's call with indefatigable zeal and enthusiastically worked for its implementation. Saraladevi Chaudhurani poured her heart and soul and gave a concrete shape to the sinning as like Gandhi, she also regarded charkha as the foundation of *Swaraj*. She was apparently the first woman to address public meetings wearing *Khadi* sarees and became a trend-setter as many women of Lahore followed her example and started wearing *Khadi* sarees. She extensively toured many parts of the north India and delivered speeches to popularize *Khadi* and spinning. The burden of her discourses was India's deep poverty, which Sarala Devi argued could be remedied only through *Swadeshi*. She considered that the foundation of British Raj was made on the ashes of the spinning wheel. She further told people that the hand that spun in India used to supply the nation with food and comfort and now the revival and protection of a dead art, the remodelling of India homes, the reclothing of India by India's own hands is the alpha and omega of *Swaraj*.

She organized spinning committees and started spinning classes at various places in Lahore. While spinning she used to sing, turn, turn the wheel, the spinning wheel do turn, ye girls of India with Gandhi's ardour burn. She also established 'Lakshmi Bhandar,' a centre for selling *Swadeshi* articles. Later on she established more such institution to sell *Swadeshi* goods.

For Maniben Nanavati also *Khadi* work was of crucial importance, as she also perceived a vital relation between spinning and freedom. Spinning, therefore, became an integral part of her life. She used to spin even while talking to people discussing important issues in meetings and assemblies. In 1934, she along with Jayaben Desai, Shirin and Sunaben Rao

started a *Khadi* mandir at Vile Parle, Bombay in which spinning was taught to women. *Charkha chala chala ke lenge swaraj lenge* was her favourite line while spinning. People used to call him Khadiben.

To start *Khadi* work in Orissa Subhadra Mahatab formed Gandhi Karma mandir. She delivered speeches at various places explaining people the significance of *Khadi* and also taught spinning and carding to women. Kasturba Gandhi too moved from village to village exhorting the people that every Indian should take an oath to use *Khadi* and buy it as much as possible.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, princess of Kapurthala, organised a spinners association in Punjab and extensively promoted the use of *Khadi*. She suggested that every town should have a committee of women, where they should spin at least an hour daily, because with every thread we draw, we are helping the mend the broken warp and woof of the fabric of our national life. In any event *Khadi* should receive our full patronage, if for no other reason than that it brings economic relief to women.

Gangabehn Mujumdar an illiterate woman who was an ardent spinner went to the hutments and taught the poor families how to earn supplementary income by spinning and weaving *Khadi*. She also organized women's meetings at various places asking them to take a vow that they would use *Khadi* henceforth. She believed that popularization of *Swadeshi* would help in bringing *Swaraj* nearer. Ramadevi Choudhary became member of spinning committee of Orissa and started propagating *Khadi* among her relatives, servants, neighbours etc. Lajjawanti addressed meeting in Lahore and urged people to stick to *Swadeshi*. She alongwith other women volunteers sold *Khadi* in front of the respectable families of Lahore. Urmila Shastri a congress worker of Uttar Pradesh addressed a meeting of prostitutes in which they took an oath to wear *Khadi* only.

Women belonging to different communities also carried the work for popularising *Khadi*. Among the Muslim women Abida Bano Begum, Ali matriarch popularly known as Bee Amma was prominent. She toured extensively in the Punjab to preach the message of *Swadeshi*. Mrs Haji Yousuff opened a girl's spinning school, Khwaja Begum too not only started wearing *Khadi* but also went to cities to inspire women to spin and wear *Khadi*. Mrs Hasan Imam, Mrs Mohamed Ali, famous poet and journalist Mrs Nishant Begum etc was yet another woman to come forward to popularised *Khadi*. Even women from royal Muslim families too learnt spinning of *Khadi*. Among Parsi women Mithubehn petit, Perin Captain, Goshiben Captain etc replace their silk saris with *Khadi* saris. Christian women also didn't lag behind in this propaganda work of *Khadi*. Mirabehn (Madeleine Slade) a true followers of Gandhi started on a *Khadi* tour throughout the country to make vigorous propaganda for the use of *Khadi*.

Thus *Khadi* work always remained dear to women's heart and they vigorously participating in popularising *Swadeshi* movement in a successful manner. In fact the entire *Khadi* movement was depended on them. Moreover women were also benefited by the *Swadeshi* movement because for them spinning and weaving *Khadi* proved not only as a means of their self reliance but also as a common bond uniting women from widely divergent section of society. National Movement

also spread up by the propagation of *Khadi* because it made possible the boycott of foreign cloth programmes of congress.

REMOVAL OF UNTOUCHABILITY

Gandhi works for all depressed persons of the society. One of his key elements of National constructive programme was treating untouchables as fellow of human being. He regarded untouchability as a blot on Hinduism and a social curse, which has no justification whatsoever neither religious nor moral or social. It is against the fundamental Principal of humanity and dictates of reason that a man should by mere reason of birth be forever regarded as an untouchable, even unapproachable and unseeable.

Gandhi spent his whole life fighting the evil of untouchability and gave the name *Harijan*, the people of the God, to the so called untouchables, to emphasise that they were also as much the men of God as the other people were. He emphatically said that he would prefer rather that Hinduism died than did untouchability live.

Gandhi said that at this time of the day it is unnecessary to dilate upon the necessity of the removal of this blot and curse upon Hinduism. So far as the *Harijans* are concerned, every Hindu should make common cause with them and befriend them in their awful isolation. Such isolation as perhaps the world has never seen in the monstrous immensity one witnesses in India. I know from experience how difficult the task is but it is steep and narrow. There are many slippery ascents and many deep chasms. They have all to negotiate with unfaltering step before we can reach the summit and breathe the fresh air of freedom.

Again owing to women's superior capacity for renunciation and penance Gandhi considered their involvement vital for the eradication of this evil. He regarded it a movement of self purification in which, women were any day more efficient than men. Therefore, he asked women to rise to the occasion and remain in the forefront. If the Hindu heart was to be cured of the taint of untouchability women must do the lion's share of the works.

He wanted them to root out this evil from their hearts and serve the *Harijan's* boys and girls as they serve their own children. He remarked that if you considered untouchable because they perform sanitary work, what mother has not performed such services for her children. Gandhi argued that just as mother would shower more affection on a dull, stupid and crippled child likewise God who is the Father of all living beings wanted us to extend justice to *Harijan* by treating them as equals. Gandhi appeal to eradicate untouchability made women conscious about this social problem of great magnitude and they ceaselessly worked for its removal.

Rameshwari Nehru dedicated herself to the service of the *Harijans*. After being appointed as the Vice President of the All India *Harijan Sewak Sangh* in 1934 she organized various meetings of *sangh* members to devise new plans for the upliftment of the untouchables. To enquire about *Harijan's* grievances she visited their quarters and make programmes for their development. She also toured extensively various places to examine the contribution of *Harijans* and delivered speeches condemning untouchability. In one of her speech she said, caste system is negation of domestic principle, it

militates against the idea of equality which every religion including Hinduism teachers. Ramadevi alongwith her husband Gopabandhu Chaudhury, established an ashram known as *Sewaghar* at Bari in Orissa with the aim to accommodate the children of the *Harijan* workers and impart them training in various items of constructive programmes. She along with other women cleaned *Harijan's* quarters, distributed medicine among them and asked them to follow simple rules of hygiene and health.

Kokila devi established a *Harijan* school and a ashram at Talapada in the Balasore district. She taught them reading, writing, spinning, weaving, making of mats etc. She also gave them the lesson of discipline, punctuality, honesty etc. In Bhadrak she persuaded the caste Hindus to open the village temple for *Harijans*.

Ferozuddin, a Muslim woman of Lahore also eloquently implored the people to do their best to remove the curse of untouchability, which she considered as a slur on the fair name and civilization of the Bharatvarsha, once the source of enlightenment to the world. Anusuyaben Sarabhai opened six night schools at Ahmadabad for depressed class children's. The teachers of these schools were also *Harijans* and they preferred to work without remuneration.

Similarly Haimavati Devi opened a day school for the *Harijans* in a small village in the district of Puri and Charusila Devi along with other women toured extensively the village of the Midnapour district in connection with Anti Untouchability movement and addressed several meetings explaining villagers the urgent need to remove the curse of untouchability from the Hindu society.

Nilakant of Ahmadabad, Charuprava of Bengal, Smt. S.R. Roy of Bengal, P.M Kamlavathy and m. Karthiayani Amma in Kerala, Nagamma Patil in Karnatka, Kasturba Gandhi, Fatima Tyabji, Mridula Sarabhaietc also poured their heart and soul for the amelioration of untouchables. Thus believing in the non violent philosophy of Gandhi women lent their valuable assistance to remove the malaise of untouchability from the Hindu society and helped to opening several schools for the untouchables in different parts of the society.

HINDU MUSLIM UNITY

Gandhi considered Hindu Muslim unity imperative for getting Independence of the country so he made it one of the central planks of his constructive programme. He considered it significant for building a secular society, in the classical sense of equal respect for all religion. Gandhi said everybody is agreed with the necessity of Unity, but unity does not mean political unity which may be imposed. It means an unbreakable heart unity.

Gandhi asked women to take a leading part in promoting communal solidarity. He believed that women could help in strengthening the bond of affection between these two communities- Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi encouraged women to non cooperate with their menfolk by refusing to cook and even serving themselves in protest so long as their men do not wash their hands of these dirty communal squabbles, and also to teach communal solidarity to their children from childhood so that they must not think the two to be each other's enemy.

He further implored women to join the process of national integration even if it implied the transformation of each household into a veritable battlefield of individual Satyagraha. He said that if you are convinced that Hindu Muslim unity is a sine quo non I ask you to use against our own countrymen the same weapon of *Satyagraha* that you used so effectively against the British Government.

Many women inspired by Gandhi's Appeal and came forwards for promotion of Hindu- Muslim Unity. First amongst all Sarojini Naidu staunch believers in this unity, did contract work for bringing harmony between these two communities. She addressed several meetings and spoke from various platforms to inspire women and men for promoting Hindu- Muslim solidarity. She said till we Hindu and Muslim know each other closely and study each other's religion and women go to each other homes... we shall not make a real union of India.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur toured almost every corner of the Punjab addressing meetings to generate public opinion for promoting communal solidarity. She argued that by teaching children the spirit of oneness women can play a suitable role to solving this problem. Vijyalakshmi Pandit also moved from village to village to address meetings to unite these two communities because we can get *Swaraj* only if we stand united. Sarladevi Chaudhurani and Rup Kaur also visited several places in the Punjab, Muthulakshmi Reddi in Madras appeal people to be united.

Muslim women also made earnest efforts to promote harmony between Hindu and Muslims. For bee Amma communal solidarity had become an article of faith as she realized that the freedom of India was impossible without Hindu Muslim unity. Nawab Begum, General Secretary of Hindu Muslim Women's Unity committee of Bengal too emphasised on the communal solidarity and urged women to play a special role in combating communalism. As she said women are by nature lovers of peace and harmony. The homes that they maintain, which are the units forming the larger social organism of the state, cannot thrive in an atmosphere of hatred, animosity and strife. Women should therefore work for bridging the gap between these two communities.

Begum Shah Nawaz and Begum Iftikhar-ud-din moved a resolution in women to play their role in uniting the two communities as they had been the messengers of peace in all ages. Amutasslaam, Begum Rashida Latif and Shariffa Hamid Ali also championed the cause of Hindu- Muslim unity. Acknowledging the work done by women for advocating Hindu- Muslim Unity, Gandhi commented that women had realised their duty to promote communal solidarity while understanding and remaining faithful to their own religion, thus helped in the process of national integration.

PROHIBITION

Prohibition was also considered as an important aspect of Gandhi's Constructive Programme. He was convinced beyond doubt that without weaning away the poorest section of our society from the evil of drinks and drugs it would be impossible to ameliorate their economic condition in any tangible manner. It was because of this compelling reason that he once declared if I was appointed a dictator even for an hour

for all India the first thing I would do is to close without compensation all liquor shops. He further remarked that liquor was not a matter to trifle with. No soft and easy going policy would cope with the tremendous evil. Nothing short of total population could save the people from the curse.

Gandhi said if we are to reach our goal through non-violence effort, we may not leave to the future government the fate of lakhs of men and women who are labouring under the curse of intoxicants and narcotics. Medical men can make a most effective contribution towards the removal of this evil. They have to discover ways of weaning the drunkard and the opium-addict from the curse. Women and students have a special opportunity in advancing this reform. By many acts of loving service they can acquire on addicts which will compel them to listen to the appeal to give up the evil habit. Congress committee can open recreation booths where the tired labourer will rest his limbs, get healthy and cheap refreshments, and find suitable games; all this work is fascinating and uplifting. The non-violence approach to *Swaraj* is a novel approach. In it old values give place to new. In the violent way such reform may find no place. Believers in that way, in their impatience and, shall I say, ignorance, put off such things to the day of deliverance. They forget that lasting and healthy deliverance comes from within, i.e. from self-purification. Constructive workers make legal prohibition easy and successful even if they do not pave the way for it.

To combat the malaise he thought of a twofold programme viz educating the people with regard to evil effects of drinking and removing the temptation from their way through the closure of liquor shops. And in this regard women have the special responsibility in this programme. Gandhi said that drinks and drugs sap the moral being of those who were given to the habit and the distress was felt in the home, and therefore by women. Only those women who have drunkard husbands know what havoc the drink devil worked in homes that once were orderly and peace loving. He declared let the women of India take up this task they would contribute more than men to national Freedom. They would have an access to power and self confidence to which they have hitherto been strangers.

Not surprisingly, A large number of women inspired by Gandhi's fervent appeals came forward and courageously organised picketing in front of the liquor shops. Hansa Mehta an ardent Congress worker took an active part in this connection and led various procession of women and organised picketing in front of the liquor shops appealing shopkeepers to stop selling this.

Mrs Lukmani, Manibehn Nanavati, Mridula Sarabhai, Khurshedben Naoroji, Mithubehn, Kamla Nehru, Nirmala Maity, Phulkumari Dasi etc earnestly worked for the prohibition of liquor. In addition to it there were several more women who were active in prohibition programme. Notable among them were Lajjawati, Smt. Laxmibai, Sumitra Devi Ramadevi etc. As a result of the women's active participation in this programme sale of liquor was reduced to a considerable extent.

WOMEN

Gandhi gave due importance to the upliftment of women and included in the constructive programme. Although *Satyagraha* had automatically brought Indian women out from their seclusion as nothing else could have in such an incredibly short space of time, but still they needed a lifting hand emphasised Gandhi.

He held men responsible for the suppression of women as they had considered themselves to be lords and master of women instead of considering them as their friends and co workers and opined that in a plan of life based on non-violence, women has as much right to shape her own destiny as men has to shape his.

He further perceived that the progress and salvation of mankind and man's attaining higher spiritual level of harmonious and joyful existence depended wholly upon the full cooperation and equal progress of both. According to Gandhi : I have included service of women in the constructive programme, for though *Satyagraha* has automatically brought India's women out from their darkness, as nothing else could have in such an incredibly short space of time, Congressman have not felt the call to see that women became equal partners in the fight for *Swaraj*. They have not realized that woman must be the true helpmate of man in the mission of service. Woman has been suppressed under custom and law for which man was responsible and in the shaping of which she had no hand. In a plan of life based on non-violence, woman has as much right to shape her own destiny as man has to shape his. But as every right in a non-violent society proceeds from the previous performance of a duty, it follows that rules of social conduct must be framed by mutual co-operation and consultation. They can never be imposed from outside. Men have not realized this truth in its fullness in their behaviour towards women. They have considered themselves to be lord and masters of women instead of considering them as their friends and co-workers. It is the privilege of Congressman to give the women of India a lifting hand. Women are in the position somewhat of the slave of old who did not know that he could or ever had to be free. And when freedom came, for the moment he felt helpless. Women have been taught to regard themselves as for the moment he felt helpless. Women have been taught to regard themselves as slaves of men. It is up to Congressmen to see that they enable them to realize their full status and play their part as equals of men. This revolution is easy, if the mind is made up. Let Congressmen begin with their own homes. Wives should not be dolls and objects of indulgence, but should be treated as honoured comrades in common service. To this end those who have not received a liberal education should receive such instruction as is possible from their husbands. The same observation applies, with the necessary changes, to mothers and daughters. It is hardly necessary to point out that I have given a one-sided picture of the helpless state of India's women. I am quite conscious of the fact that in the villages generally' they hold their own with their men folk and in some respects even rule enough throughout and demands radical alteration.

But he lamented that congress men had not realised that women must be the true helpmates of men in the mission of service. They had not felt the call to see that women become

equal partners in the fight for *Swaraj*. He therefore asked women to take up the cause of their own upliftment also along with other programmes. Many women opened schools, welfare organisations, sanghs, ashrams, etc. and through them worked for the upliftment of their own gender. They also tried to generate public opinion by delivering speeches.

Kamladevi Chattopadhyay asked people to do away with Imperialism wherever it existed and told them to start with putting down Imperialism in their own homes by improving the physically. Subhadra Kumari Chauhan also championed the cause of welfare and rights of women. She composed many stories and poems like *Bhikhre Moti*, *Jhansi Ki Rani* etc. for the said cause. Annapurna Devi also moved from place to place organised meetings and established Nari Seva Sadan at Berhampur in Orissa for women's upliftment. She also organized a number of Pathshalas in various villages of the province for providing education to them. Hemprabha Mazumdar opened a Mahila Karmi Sansad in Bengal to carry on constructive work for women's upliftment. She also opened a boarding house in which spinning, knitting and weaving were taught to women. Lakshmi Bayamma Unnava founded Sarada Niketanam a residential school for women at Guntur in Andhra Pradesh. Mithubehn Petit started a school and hostel for adivasi girls in Gujrat with the aim to make them self sufficient economically and develop their self esteem. She taught them spinning, weaving, farming, crafts, cleanliness, hygiene etc. The girl student themselves physically looked after these hostels. Awantikabai okhale organized Hind Mahila Smaj at Bombay to spread social and national consciousness among women. Various activities such as stitching, spinning etc were undertaken by the Samaj. Anusuyabeen Kale founded the Bhagini Mandal. Agyawati Devi worked for the upliftment of women and opened a widow's home in Delhi. Lady Harnam Sing of Punjab laid more emphasis on women's education. She appeals women to continue their education even after marriage. She founded the ladies club in Shimla to discuss the social problems. In Bengal Nari Shiksha Samriti was established by Lady Abala Bose. Muthulakshmi Reddi tried to abolish devdasi system under which young girls were being condemned to a life of immorality in the name of religion. She brought devdasi bill before Madras Legislative Assembly and made ceaseless efforts to get it passed. Sarojini Naidu worked for women's rights like inheritance, education etc. Under her president ship All India Women's Conference passed a resolution on equal inheritance rights for women. Mridula Sarabhai, A member of youth League Gujarat had shown a deep concern for women's causes. She protested against gender inequality, injustice, oppression and discrimination which women faced within the family and in society. Mridula along with other women of Ahmadabad established a women's organization to canalized the women. Gandhi named this organisation jyoti Sangh. Its main aim was to empower women by training them in useful vocations and crafts and make them economically independent, fearless and self confident. Thus women with a sense of dedication and determination worked for making their own gender self reliant fearless autonomous and also helped in the passage of *Devdasi* Bill, women's Inheritance Rights Bill, etc. Moreover many women started coming out for the cause of country's freedom.

VILLAGE INDUSTRIES

Village industries was Gandhi's another constructive programme. He considered village industries vital for the development of village he believed that by developing village industries National wealth would be added and hundreds of unemployed youth in the country could get employment. In 1934 All India Village Industries Association was founded. its two main objectives was to revive the dead and dying industries of the village and to provide work to unemployed villagers.

According to Gandhi, Village industries stand on a different footing from *Khadi*. There is not much scope for voluntary labour in them. Each industry will take the labour of only a certain number of hands. These industries come in as a handmaid to *Khadi*. They cannot exist without *Khadi*, and *Khadi* will be robbed of its dignity without them. Village economy cannot be complete without the essential village industries such as hand-grinding, hand-pounding, soap-making, paper-making, match-making, paper-making, tanning, oil-pressing, etc. Congressmen can interest themselves in these and, if they are villagers or will settle down in villages, they will give these industries a new life and a new dress. All should make it a point of honour to use only village articles whenever and wherever available. Given the demand there is no doubt that most of our wants can be supplied from our villages. When we have become village-minded, we will not want imitations of the west or machine-made products, but we will develop a true national taste in keeping with the vision of a new India in which pauperism, starvation and idleness will be unknown.

In this constructive programme women of different places of India played significant role. Rameshwari Nehru made deep efforts to revive village industries. She encouraged the Indian people to bring back the lost status of India by concentrating and working hard for reviving village industries. Basanti Devi while presiding over the Bengal Provincial Congress session in 1921-22 gave priority to revive the cottage industry, which she considered, would restore to women some of their lost economic strength. She exhorted that modernization was to be encouraged only insofar as it suited the country's need. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur also worked for village same cause. Mirabehn made concentrated efforts to vindicate the programmes of village reconstruction and the revival of cottage industries. Fatima Tyabji along with her husband took farming and other activities of village reconstruction. Sucheta Kriplani and Matangini Hazra also worked for the development of cottage industries. Because of the revival of village industries not only many workless women got employment but it also helped in adding the National wealth.

VILLAGE SANITATION AND EDUCATION

Gandhi rural reconstruction cannot be achieved without village sanitation and education in health and hygiene. Gandhi lamented that a sense of National or social sanitation was nonexistent among Indians. Villages of India present a horrible picture of neglect. They are full of dirt and dust without proper sewerage and lack in sanitation and hygiene. Having given a place to village sanitation, the question may be

asked why give a separate place to education in health and hygiene? It might have been bracketed with sanitation, but I did not wish to interfere with the items. Mention of mere sanitation is not enough to include health and hygiene. The art of keeping one's health and the knowledge of hygiene is by itself a separate subject of study and corresponding practice. In a well-ordered society the citizens know and observe the laws of health and hygiene. It is established beyond doubt that ignorance and neglect of the laws of health and hygiene are responsible for the majority of diseases to which mankind is heir. The very high death rate among us is no doubt due largely to lack of education about health and hygiene. Men in corporation are perhaps the first law for humanity. A healthy mind in a healthy body is a self-evident truth. There is an inevitable connection between mind and body. If we were in possession of healthy minds, we would shed all violence and, naturally obeying the laws of health, we would have healthy bodies without an effort. I hope, therefore, that no Congressmen will disregard this item of the constructive programme. The fundamental laws of health and hygiene are simple and easily learnt. The difficulty is about their observance. Here are some: Think the purest thoughts and banish all idle and impure thoughts. Breathe the freshest air day and night. Establish a balance between bodily and mental work. Stand erect, sit erect, and be neat and clean in every one of your acts, and let these be an expression of your inner condition. Eat to live for service of fellow-men. Do not live for indulging yourselves. Hence your food must be just enough to keep your mind and body in good order. Man becomes what he eats. Your water, food and air must be clean, and you will not be satisfied with mere personal cleanliness, but you will infect your surroundings with the same three-fold cleanliness that you will desire for yourselves.

In this area Mrs. Soundaram made ceaseless efforts. She organized a group of women volunteers and asked them to visit village to tell the people about the importance of personal hygiene and sanitation and to keep themselves, their children, their homes and village clean.

Kasturba Gandhi, Avantikabai Ghokhale, Anandibai, Manibehn Parikh and Durga Desai organized classes in village Champaran to give the villagers lessons in cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation. Fatima Tyabji with her husband and Mirabehn also played an important role to give villagers the practical lessons in hygiene, dietary, enrichment of soil, cleanliness etc.

NATIONAL LANGUAGE

National Language was yet another Gandhi's constructive programme. According to Gandhi a Nation like India could not be free from foreign clutches unless its members cultivated their tongues as an expression of National culture. He considered *rashtriya bhasha* Hindi to be one of the means of achieving independence. He believed that language is the sole medium of communication and if people cannot communicate with each other in a language understood by all they cannot feel closer to one another. It would be difficult to unite the people for the purpose of fighting for *Swaraj* without having a national language. And then for all-India intercourse we need, from among the Indian stock, a language which the largest

number of people already know and understand and which the others can easily pick up. This language is indisputably Hindi. It is spoken and understood by both Hindu and Muslims of the North. It is called Urdu when it is written in the Urdu character.

The Congress, in its famous resolution passed at the Cawnpore session in 1925, called this all-India speech Hindustani. And since that time, in theory at least, Hindustani has been Rashtra Bhasha. I say in theory because even Congressmen have not practised it as they should have. In 1920 a deliberate attempt was begun to recognize the importance of Indian languages for the political education of the masses, as also of an all-India common speech which politically-minded India could easily speak and which Congressmen from the different provinces could understand at all India gatherings of the Congress. Such National languages should enable one to understand and speak both forms of speech and write in both the script. I am sorry to have to say that many Congressmen have failed to carry out that resolution. And so we have, in my opinion, the shameful spectacle of Congressmen insisting on speaking in English and compelling others to do likewise for their sake. The spell that English has cast on us is not yet broken. Being under it, we are impeding the progress of India towards her goal. Our love of the masses must be skin-deep, if we will not take the trouble of spending over learning Hindustani as many months as the years we spend over learning English.

For this propagation Hindi *Prachar Sabha* was formed in Bombay. Perin Captain firmly believing in the necessity of one language for the country made ceaseless efforts to implement this idea with great commitment. She worked for Hindi *Prachar Sabha* in her capacity as honorary secretary to propagate the National Language.

In the end it may be said that constructive programme is the mother of all development works including social work and they complement each other. Women's participated remarkably in Gandhi's constructive programme such as *Khadi*, Hindu Muslim unity, removal of untouchability, prohibition, village industries etc. Women's not only organised meetings but also went door to door for popularisation of these programmes. They also started various organisations to carry out these programmes and made tremendous efforts to get passed many bills pertaining to these programmes. They poured their hearts and soul to make these programmes successful. In return women's participation in the constructive programme helps them to outgrow their inferiority complex and to realise the inherent worth they are endowed with and thereby redeem herself in society. Through constructive programmes women got involved in the task of regenerating Indian Society and establishing an egalitarian social order which Gandhi had visualized. Constructive programme gave women an opportunity to work equally with men folk and to prove their worth and strength as good organiser and leaders and also a good reformers.

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