

## Status of Women : From The Lens of Mahatma Gandhi

Dr. Geeta V. Waghmare

Department of English, Jaikranti Arts Senior College, Latur 413512 Maharashtra, India

Corresponding author E-mail: geetavwaghmare@gmail.com

Received: 14 October, 2023 | Accepted: 26 October, 2023 | Published: 28 October, 2023

### Abstract

There is no doubt that a nation's culture is reflected in how much value it places on the rights and dignity of its women. Women have been vital to the survival of the human race since the beginning of time, even beyond the role that reproduction plays in that regard. She creates, nurtures, shares, and typically does not destroy because it is part of her biological makeup.

Mahatma Gandhi felt that it is the women's sacrifice and education that will save India. If we did not draw inspiration for our own guidance from the words and example of Mahatma Gandhi, the Great Soul, then any tribute to him would be meaningless. To him, thoughts and aspirations were nothing unless they were put into practice. As equals who complemented one another, he viewed men and women equally. Additionally, he considered himself as a pragmatic idealist rather than a visionary. Then, with a faith like Gandhi's, men and women may work together selflessly and truthfully as equals and truly establish Ram Rajya, the ideal state. Women have historically been referred to be abala, or without strength. "Bala" signifies strength in Sanskrit and numerous other Indian languages. "Abala" denotes "one who lacks strength." She deserves the term "Sabala," or strength, if by strength we do not mean brutish strength but rather character, constancy, and endurance strength. On December 23, 1936, at the All India Women's Conference, he delivered the following speech, which was delivered about sixty years ago: "When woman, whom we call abala, becomes sabala, all those who are helpless will become powerful."

The present paper is an attempt to highlight Mahatma Gandhi's reformative ideas on Women and its relevance in the present scenario.

**Keywords:** Women's Status, The innate attributes of Women, Women in Freedom Struggle, Women and Advancement.

## **Gandhi's views on Women's Status**

As a social reformer, Gandhi aimed to change India's patriarchal culture, which attempted to limit women to the position of a lower sex that is under their male counterparts. He has significantly improved the position of women in India and motivated the ladies of his era, raising their spirits and assisting them in regaining their sense of self-worth. Gandhi was unable to accept the notion that women were less intelligent or wise than males and had a lower status in society.

He held that men and women are of equal status and are complementary to one another, and that it would be impossible to justify one's existence without the other. He also held the opinion that, just as men have an impact on public life, women have an impact on domestic life; as a result, women ought to enjoy the same degree of autonomy within their own sphere of influence as men have. As stated by Gandhi,

“Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him.”(1)

Gandhi also suggested that women should cease to think that they were the creatures to satisfy the lust of man. He called upon women to realise themselves as independent human beings and decorate themselves with high qualities so that whole humanity was benefited. Gandhi said, “Man is born of woman, he is flesh of her and bone of her bone. Come to your own and deliver your message again.”

Gandhi wished that women should realise that they were not slaves and playthings of men, their whims and fancies but should try to come up to the standard of men and should copy what was best in them. In *Young India*, Gandhi wrote,

“The future of India lies on your knees, for you will nurture the future generation. You can bring up the children of India to become simple God-fearing and brave men and women, or you can coddle them to be weaklings, unfit to brave the storms of life and used to foreign fineries which they would find it difficult in after life to discard.” (2)

## **The Innate Attributes of Satyagrah and Ahimsa in Women**

Mahatma Gandhi was concerned about the emancipation and empowerment of women from the early stages of his life. He also felt that a country could not move forward unless there was an awakening among the country's women. However, in the formative years, he was deeply influenced by his mother Putlibai, who imparted in him a strong sense of personal ethics and compassion that is conveyed through his favourite prayer song (bhajan) written by the 15th-century religious reformer, Narsinha Mehta: ‘Vaishnav jan to tene re kahiye je peed parai jane re’ (A godlike man is one, who feels another's pain, who shares another's sorrow).

He was deeply impressed by her religious traits and regarded her to be a person of great determination. He was deeply moved by her unwavering devotion to God and her domestic responsibilities. She would accept the harshest vows and uphold them without wavering, he recalls in his *Autobiography*. Gandhi was also unafraid to acknowledge his mistakes as a spouse. Kasturba, his wife, also became a significant figure in his life, both personally and professionally.

She showed great patience, courage, and determination. She was independent from an early age in her thoughts and behaviour, which shocked and sometimes irritated Gandhi as a young husband trying to assert his dominance over his wife. Gandhi also recognizes Kasturba's outstanding demonstration of Satyagraha resolve. She would resolutely and non-violently oppose her husband's unreasonable

expectations while completing her responsibilities without fail. Subsequently, she demonstrated her active participation in Satyagrahi, joining thousands of others in opposing the powerful British power in their struggle for national freedom.

"Woman is the true incarnation of Ahimsa," according to Gandhi. He believes that practicing ahimsa should condition one's perception of life's realities. As a result, morality and sacrifice are combined for both men and women. He saw that women's high moral standards and willingness to make sacrifices, led by ahimsa and Satyagraha, would lead to their rise to prominence in society.

According to Gandhi, woman is the emblem of Ahimsa/non-violence- "weak in striking strong in suffering"; she had come to occupy a pivotal position in his plan of Satyagraha. He wanted to convert her self-sacrifice and suffering into Shakti-power

### **The Role and Contribution of Women in Freedom Struggle**

Gandhi's views on the woman's role in independence were complex and rooted in the notion that she embodied the spiritual and moral courage of Sita and Draupadi-the mythological heroines of Hinduism. Representing Gandhi's perception of the ideal Indian woman, female followers were encouraged to embody the "pure, firm and self-controlled" virtues symbolized by these heroines, He urged women to be as "self-reliant" as Draupadi and upholders of "superior moral courage" as seen in the chaste Sita. Thus, the Mahatma used the aid of religious and traditional symbols of Indian womanhood to convey a complex "socio-political message".

Gandhi's use of these religious figures was ostensibly a tool to manipulate the system, whereby he could legitimize the entry of women into the political sphere and motivate them to join the movement by equating them with the great mythological heroines

Gandhi is known to be one of the few people who encouraged women's active participation in the freedom struggle – making him a rare promoter of woman's liberation. In his letters and speeches to women, Gandhi repeatedly emphasized that women were not weak. Addressing a meeting in Bombay in 1920, where women expressed their views on the atrocities committed in Punjab, Gandhi said: "I, therefore, want the women of India not to believe themselves weak. It is ignorance to call women weak, women who have been the mother of mighty heroes like Hanuman."

Gandhi asked women to be fearless. As Jawaharlal Nehru wrote: "The dominant impulse in India under British rule was that of fear-pervasive oppressing, strangling fear; It was against this all-pervading fear that Gandhi's quiet and determined voice was raised: Be not afraid" (Discovery of India). Not only did he inspire women to be brave, he taught men too to respect women. Gandhi did everything to correct gender imbalances and bring women to the forefront in India's social, economic, cultural and political mainstream. wrote in 'Young India' in 1930, "To call women the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to women".

In his historical march to Dandi on 12 March 1930, women came out in thousands. Women's participation in large numbers in Gandhi's mass movements was a kind of social revolution which made a breakthrough in their lives.

### **Women and Advancement**

"Sarvodaya", which means comprehensive progress, is the term Gandhiji used to describe his constant appeal for fundamental transformation. He stated often in his works that he thought there were

just physical differences between men and women and that Indian women were superior to men in many areas, particularly tolerance, patience, and sacrifice. Reading his essays from "Harijan" and "Young India" will reveal this to us. Women played a crucial part in all of his programs. According to Gandhiji, parents are the best teachers and there is no school that is superior to the house. Men and women are equal, he remarked, but they are not the same. "Intellectually, mentally, and spiritually, woman is equivalent to a male and she can participate in every activity."

### Conclusion

In a nutshell, Gandhi gave women a significant place and status throughout the liberation struggle that no other leader had. He put a great deal of faith in their resolve, selflessness, and sacrifice. He talked about men and women being treated equally all the time. In addition to receiving an education on par with that of men, he wanted women to be able to access healthcare, contribute to the preservation of traditional culture, and values. Gandhi supported the rebirth of fresh social norms. But this regenerative process could not be carried out alone. He wants the next generation to shape public perception of this kind of development. Additionally, he anticipated that society would accept the shift and give women a significant role.

### References

1. Gandhi on Women: Collection of Mahatma Gandhi's Writings and Speeches on Women, Source: <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/602685>, Accessed: 23/09/2019
2. Gandhi, M. K., Young India, p.406
3. The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi; Women's Status and Role in Society, Source: <https://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/c hap60.htm>, Accessed: 23/09/2019
4. Women's Empowerment, Source: [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s\\_empowerment](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_empowerment),
5. <https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/gandhi-and-women-1503172718.html>
6. <https://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/63889/1/Block-3.pdf>
7. <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-articles/gandhi-on-gender-violence-and-gender-equality.php>
8. <https://www.ijstr.org/final-print/apr2020/Relevance-Of-Mahatma-Gandhis-Ideas-On-Women-Empowerment>.