

**Structure****12.1 Introduction****Aims and Objectives****12.2 Gandhi's Idea of Woman as Mother****12.3 Influence of Women Public Figures on Gandhi****12.4 Gandhi against Gender-based Discrimination****12.5 Gandhi and Empowerment of Women****12.6 Gandhi on Women's Contribution****12.7 Relevance of Gandhian Legacy for the Contemporary Women's Movement****12.8 Summary****12.9 Terminal Questions****Suggested Readings**

---

**12.1 INTRODUCTION**

---

‘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 strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior’.

‘If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with women’.

‘Woman, I hold, is the personification of self-sacrifice, but unfortunately today she does not realize what tremendous advantage she has over man’.

These are some of the most famous quotes from Gandhi's writings and speeches. Gandhi believed that India's salvation depends on the sacrifice and enlightenment of her women. Any tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, the Great Soul, would be an empty one, if we were to take no cue for our own guidance from his words and from his life; for him ideas and ideals had no value if they were not translated into action. He saw men and women as equals, complementing each other. If then, men and women work together selflessly and sincerely as equals with a faith like Gandhi's, they may indeed realize *Ram Rajya*, the perfect state. Traditionally, woman has been called *abala* (without strength). In Sanskrit and many other Indian languages *bala* means strength. *Abala* means one without strength. If by strength we do not mean brutish strength, but strength of character, steadfastness, and endurance, she should be called *sabala*, strong. His message almost six decades ago at the All India Women's Conference on

December 23, 1936 was: “When woman, whom we call *abala* becomes *sabala*, all those who are helpless will become powerful.”

### **Aims and Objectives**

After studying this unit, you will be able to understand

- Gandhi’s contribution towards Empowerment of women
- Gandhi’s Efforts at Enhancing women’s Dignity within private and public realms
- Gandhi’s role in political participation of women in the Freedom Movement
- Gandhi’s views on man-woman relationship
- Relevance of Gandhian Legacy for the Contemporary Women’s Movement

---

## **12.2 GANDHI’S IDEA OF WOMAN AS MOTHER AND “MOTHER INDIA”**

---

In the formative years, Gandhi was influenced by his mother Putlibai, who imparted in him strong sense of personal ethics and compassion. Gandhi said: "The outstanding impression my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking her meals without daily prayer. She would take the hardest of vows and keep them without flinching. Illness was no excuse for relaxing them." He got his mother's permission to go to England for studies by taking an oath: "I vowed not to touch wine, women and meat." These three vows shielded him throughout his stay in England.

Gandhi married at the age of thirteen to Kasturba and lost no time in assuming the authority of husband to **lord over** her life (emphasis added). At the time of conjugal conflict, Kasturba used the weapon of passive resistance of “fasting”; from this, Gandhi got inspiration to start Satyagraha in the freedom movement to resist the British Regime. Kasturba became his active partner and supporter in all his activities. She was a devoted wife, who was content to live in the shadow of her illustrious husband, and was fiercely independent.

Gandhi’s devotion to women began with his devotion to his mother and Kasturba, most particularly to women as mother. Motherhood became increasingly his model for liberation of India and his own life for he envisaged that unless we have a selfless devotion for our motherland many countries will be lying in wait to crush us down. He saw no hope for India's emancipation while her womanhood remained un-emancipated. In the course of his social reform work, the realisation came to him that if he wanted to reform and purify society of the various evils that had crept into it, he had to cultivate a mother's heart.

He learnt the fundamental aspects of his soul politics from his mother and his wife but women's influence on him was not limited to his family. The *bhadra mahila* (respectable or new women), created in nineteenth century by Indian social reformers, became the model for Indian women on the nationalist era. Women in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century created organisations such as All India Women's Council and Bhagini Samaj, founded predominantly among the upper-middle class in urban centres. Although many associate the ideals and organisations of the "new woman" with Gandhi, as Elise Boulding indicates "well before Gandhi was calling women to practice Satyagraha, the grandmothers, mothers, wives and daughters of the educated classes in India were forming organizations providing educations and action-training for other women, in order to re-build an Indian society freed from colonial structures."

---

### 12.3 INFLUENCE OF WOMEN PUBLIC FIGURES ON GANDHI

---

Gandhi was profoundly influenced by Annie Besant, a British militant feminist, Theosophist, Sarojini Naidu a trusted Gandhi's co-worker; Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, a fiery Satyagrahi; RajKumari Amrit Kaur and Pushpaben Mehta. Geraldine Forbes examines the model that Sarojini Naidu developed in her speech as President of the Indian National Congress, "a model with India as the "house", the Indian people as "members of the joint family and the Indian woman as the "Mother". Naidu, Gandhi, and many other advocates of women's and national liberation agreed wholeheartedly that women and India would advance together to the extent this new familial model for India was adopted by the women and men of India.

Gandhi believed that women could do much to transform India on all levels. He believed that equal rights for women and men were necessary but not sufficient to create a more just social order. Also having equal rights is no good if we are divided within ourselves and unable to attend true unity with others.

In a letter written to RajKumari Amrit Kaur from Wardha on 20-10-1936, Gandhi opined that, "If you women only realize your dignity and privilege, and make full sense 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 holders have become one in the crime on 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 further said: "I began work among women when I was not even thirty years old. There is not a woman in South Africa who does not know me. But my work was among the poorest. The intellectuals I could not draw ... you cannot blame me for not having organized the intellectuals among the women.

I have not the gift... but just as I never fear coldness on the part of the poor when I approach them, I never fear it when I approach poor women. There is invisible bond between them and me."

The mass of poor women were those whose dignified *upliftment* he craved. Poor women understood what he was saying because he spoke in the religious pantheon and referred to the facts of caste and gender. Some times highly progressive, other times conservative, he created an empathy with his audience through this cultural fine tuning. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, echoing this aspect of Gandhi's personality, stated that "We found him not a "Bapu" - wise father, but what is more precious, a mother, on whose all embracing and understanding love all fear and restraint vanish."

---

#### **12.4 GANDHI AGAINST GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION**

---

Gandhi was totally opposed to gender discrimination. He disliked the Indian society's preference for a boy and a general neglect of a girl child. In fact, in most cases she is not allowed to be born or her survival is not ensured. She is subjected to neglect, does not get respect and the status she deserves equal to that of a boy. Gandhi described discrimination against women as an anachronism: "I fail to see any reason for jubilation over the birth of a son and for mourning over the birth of a daughter. Both are God's gifts. They have an equal right to live and are equally necessary to keep the world going."

Gandhi called women as the noble sex, weak in striking, but strong in suffering. Gandhi described; "Woman as the embodiment of sacrifice and ahimsa." He further states: "A daughter's share must be equal to that of a son. The husband's earnings are a joint property of husband and wife as he makes money by her assistance."

Gandhi firmly believed that if a husband is unjust to his wife, she has the right to live separately. He averred, "Both have equal rights over children. Each would forfeit these rights after they have grown up, and even before that if he or she is unfit for them. In short, I admit no distinction between men and women except such as has been made by nature and can be seen with human eyes."

Gandhi preached and practised sharing of housework by both men and women of the family. He encouraged women to do intellectual work and men to help in cooking, cleaning and caring, conventionally 'women's chores'. Gandhi expounds further, 'more often than not a woman's time is taken up not by the performance of essential domestic duties, but in catering for the egoistic pleasure of her lord and master for her own vanities. To me this domestic slavery of woman is the symbol of our barbarism mainly. It is high time that out womankind was freed from this incubus. Domestic work ought not to take the whole of women's time'. His policy of empowerment was that man must participate in the housework and reduce the drudgery of women's home work.

---

## 12.5 GANDHI AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

---

Gandhi was not only a great political leader but also a passionate enthusiast of humanity and an implacable enemy of all injustice and inequality; he was a friend of the lowly and the downtrodden. Women, the poor and the deprived sections commanded his most tender attention. He had almost an instinctive understanding of women and their problems and had a deep abiding sympathy for them.

The oppressive custom of dowry too came under fire from Gandhi. He preferred girls to remain unmarried all their lives than to be humiliated and dishonored by marrying men who demanded dowry. To him, dowry marriages are "heartless". Gandhi wished for mutual consent, mutual love, and mutual respect between husband and wife. He decried that marriage must cease to be a matter of arrangement made by parents for money. The system is intimately connected with caste; he opined that the girls or boys or their parents will have to break the bonds of caste if the evil is to be eradicated.

For the fight against foreign domination, women by the thousands rallied to Gandhi's call for civil disobedience. Women set aside their traditional roles, came out of seclusion, cast off their purdah, entered the public domain along with men, offered Satyagraha, remained undaunted by police beatings and extreme hardships in prison. Even illiterate tribal women from the forests joined the freedom movement. Though pre-occupied with heavy responsibilities his views in this regard were clear and he tried to educate the public to accept women as equal partners. He further asserted: "I am uncompromising in the matter of woman's rights. In my opinion she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat daughters and sons on an equal footing of perfect equality." Also he said that "To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is a man's injustice to woman. If by strength it is meant moral power then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not more self-sacrificing, has she not great powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with women."

Women could play a significant part in the freedom fight under his inspiring leadership, his fostering care and loving guidance. According to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, of all the factors contributing to the awakening of women in India none has been so potent as the field of nonviolence which Gandhi offered to women in his "war" against British domination of India. It brought them out in their hundreds from sheltered homes, to stand the furnace of a fiery trial without flinching. It proved to the hilt that woman was as much able as man to resist evil or aggression.

Gandhi was deeply pained at the impact of poverty on women that deprived them of even basic necessity like clothing. He took to spinning so that every poor woman could be clothed and he promoted production of khadi as an economic activity.

---

## 12.6 GANDHI ON WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION

---

Gandhi had profoundly said that the woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa: ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering. Who but woman, the mother of man, shows his capacity in the largest measure? Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget she ever was or can be the object of a man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. She can become the leader in Satyagraha which does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.

Citing an example of the bravery, which a woman showed, during child birth by not taking chloroform, which would have risked the child's life and undergoing a very painful operation, he further says: "Let not women, who can count many such heroines among them, ever despise their sex or deplore that they were not born men."

Feminist researchers differ widely in the assessment of Mahatma Gandhi's theory and practice of women's emancipation during the Indian Nationalist Movement.

Madhu Kishwar asserts that "Gandhi saw women not as objects of reforms ... but as self-conscious subjects who could, if they choose, become arbiters of their own destiny. In this way Gandhi represents a crucial break from the attitude of many of the leaders of the reform movements of the late nineteenth century... The main contributions of the Gandhi to the cause of women lay in his absolute and unequivocal insistence on their personal dignity and autonomy in the family and society."

It took several years for Gandhi to overcome the forms of sexism, classicism, and racism that he internalised as a young man. But from the perspective of social feminism, he made enormous progress. The new women (women engaged in feminist movement) respected Gandhi because he spoke their language, he did what they wanted men to do, and encouraged other men to follow suit. Given the stark contrast in Indian society between men and women's cultures, broadly speaking, where man is more bellicose, rigid, controlling culture while woman is more relational, egalitarian, fluid, open, peace-loving culture, it is not surprising Gandhi chose the latter. The extended family, even with its patriarchal modes of dominance, gave many women a wide scope of expression than either the British or the Indian public spheres. Gandhi's effort to model Indian public life on the joint family brought thousands of women into social and political institutions of the nation.

Gandhi had advocated three distinct levels of women's participation in the national movement.

First, women who had familial responsibilities such as care of children and the aged, were to fulfill only their primary duties which were not to be given up for the sake of the national movement.

Second, a group included women from whom he expected a sacrifice of the pleasure of house-keeping and child-caring. If already married these women were expected to remain celibate for the sake of the nation.

Third, full time workers were expected to stay single and dedicate themselves entirely to the struggle for independence.

---

## **12.7 RELEVANCE OF GANDHIAN LEGACY ON THE CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

---

Contemporary feminists' analysis on empowerment of women includes not only of sexism but also of racism, classism and imperialism as determining factors in shaping women's status in the private and public realm. This development seems consonant with Satyagraha which for Gandhi was an inclusive quest to find creative solutions for all forms of oppression. In India and elsewhere, there are healthy movements of Gandhi's followers, and there are more moribund Gandhians who speak in Gandhi's name but also subvert the power of his theory and practice by failing to be open to new movements. Feminists and other women are engaged in many forms of action that Gandhi may not have anticipated. We have much to learn from Gandhi's theory and practice, but not to the exclusion of modern ideas and movements.

Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Swaraj, in all its facets and perspectives, has permeated the discourse on India's contemporary history. As the most towering figure in India's freedom struggle, Gandhi's role remains unchallenged and the imprint of his moral philosophy as a workable political ideology has been particularly indelible. Gandhi's views on social, political and economic matters are transparently evolutionary, a continuing examination of reality, the human condition and truth. Gandhi's attitudes towards women were as much shaped by his innate sense of comparison and justice as they were by the patriarchal albeit benevolent conservatism that was the sheet anchor of his cultural and social discourse. The contradiction between his liberal feminist pronouncements, his egalitarian, loving and respectful concern for women, his belief in their role in politics and in society are sometimes difficult to reconcile. Yet Gandhi, more than anyone else, struggled with these paradoxes in the existing social milieu. Comparing his vision of women with the current status of women and the ongoing struggle for women's empowerment will provide a measure of what has been achieved.

Gandhi was able to devote himself to such a mission and formulated views on all aspects of a woman's life, political, social, domestic and even the very personal or intimate. He was able to do this by liberating himself from the sexual desires that identify the difference between man and woman and thereby positioned himself well above the feminist, becoming instead a reformer of humanity. While this gave him the right to demand far-reaching changes in the attitudes of society towards women and the attitudes of women about themselves, he rooted his views on distinctly Indian soil. It was also for the "non" Intellectual among Indian women. Poor women understood what he was saying because he spoke in the idiom of Hindu religion and culture, religious pantheon and caste and gender.

This is particularly clear in his response to a question asked of him as to "What would determine a woman's varna? Perhaps you will answer that before marriage a woman would take her Varna from her father; after marriage from her husband. Should one understand that you support Manu's notorious dictum that there can be no independence for woman at any stage of her life ...?" In his reply Gandhi analysed the prevailing social situation and went on to state an ideal objective and finally reiterated the reality embedded within the question. He says: ".....owing to the confusion of varnas today, the varna principle has ceased to operate. The present state of Hindu society may be described as that of anarchy; the four varnas exist today in name only. If we must talk in terms of varna there is only one varna today for all, whether men or women; we are all shudras. In the resuscitated varna Dharma, as I conceive it, a girl after her marriage, would naturally adopt her husband's varna and relinquish that of her parents. Nor need . . . any such change... imply a slur since...the age of resuscitation would imply absolute social equality of all four varnas" (Harijan, October, 1934). Not only does Gandhi automatically accept the secondary status of the woman vis-a-vis the social identity of her husband or father but he goes on to say, "I do not envisage the wife, as a rule, following an avocation independently of her husband."

It is indeed interesting to note that, in a letter to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur in answer to a question about the religion of children in mixed marriages, Gandhi reveals his patriarchal bias: "I am quite of opinion the children of mixed marriages should be taught in the male parent's religion. This seems to me to be self obvious for common happiness and interest. That the instruction should be liberal goes without saying. I am considering merely the question of choice of religion. The children cannot profess two religions. They must respect the female parent's religion. If the female parent has not that much discretion and regard for her husband's religion, the marriage becomes superficial." One sees Gandhi grappling with what is just and moral at one end with the necessity to assert the paternity rights of the father at the other. In reality, even if there was no respect, and the marriage was not a true meeting of minds, the father's religion still prevails, seems to be the unsaid part of the answer.

While adopting a high moral and often conservative position, he could- the next moment- seemingly abandon it for a more fruitful and dynamic postulation that brings him to the forefront of extreme liberalism. Typically, Gandhi was able to step out of his traditional attitudes through the medium of education. When asked to write a primer for school children by Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Gandhi did it in the form of a mother teaching her child in which she explains to her son that housework was good for both mind and body and helped in character-building. This was part of his efforts to build a wholly new society, without which he believed it was not possible to make an appreciable difference to improve the lot of mankind with the cultural discourse of society as it was, and he never shied from providing direct and practical methodologies to achieve his goals. From feminist ideas in a text book to spinning the charkha for swaraj, he always came up with a constructive proposal to bring women out of their traditional mental fetters and into a more dignified life.

In describing the woman's role as householder and housekeeper, he goes even further in stressing the need for man and woman to "do the duty for which nature has destined us"; by finding it "degrading, both for man and woman, (if) the woman should be prevailed upon or induced to forsake the hearth and shoulder the rifle for the protection of that hearth. It is a reversion to barbarity and the beginning of the end. In trying to ride the horse that man rides, she brings herself and him down. The sin will be on man's head for tempting or compelling his companion to desert her special calling. There is as much bravery in keeping one's home in good order and condition, as there is defending it against attack from without." The contemporary argument for wages to be calculated for women's work at home and the need for economic independence for them to be truly able to act in their own interest overtakes by far Gandhi's traditional perceptions. Today's liberated woman would find his position almost totally unacceptable. They would argue that while women's special calling may be child nurturing, peace-loving and preservationist, they are capable of performing all tasks hitherto left to men.

But Gandhi revealed a deep understanding of the pulse of society, and reflected its rhythm. He offered spinning and the salt agitation as nonviolent ways for women to join the political movement for swaraj. By 1940, he had provided modifications to his earlier more generalised approach to women's contribution to public life. Despite a change in attitude he seems to have the middle class woman rather than the poor one in mind, and adheres to the position that a woman should be able to order her household duties in such a manner as to complete them and yet have enough time for public work were she to abjure vanities. The onus is still on the woman. However Gandhi was always willing to modify his own stated positions. He simply resolved his contradictions by responding instinctively and practically to a situation as he saw it.

Liberation of woman, as Gandhi saw it, was linked to a deep-seated malaise. Dr. S. Muthulakshmi Reddy wrote a long letter to Mahatma Gandhi as far back as 1929, in which she raised some fundamental issues concerning social reform. She also questioned him as to why the Congress, which was fighting for the freedom of every nation and the individual, should not first liberate their women from the evil customs and conventions that restricted their healthy all-round growth. Indian women, with a few exceptions, have lost the spirit of strength and courage, the power of independent thinking and initiative which actuated the women of ancient India, such as Maitreyi, Gargi, Savitri and even today activate a large number of our own women belonging to the liberal creeds like the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, Theosophy, which is only Hinduism freed of all its meaningless customs, rites and rituals? Although Gandhi agreed with her in a rather perfunctory way, he was not prepared to tackle the issues of social and religious customs so directly at that point of time and centred his response thus, "Men are undoubtedly to blame for their neglect, nay their ill use of women, and they have to do adequate penance, but those women who have shed superstition and have become conscious of the wrong have to do the constructive work of reform. The question of liberation of women, liberation of India, removal of untouchability, amelioration of the economic condition of the masses and the like, resolve themselves by penetration into the villages, reconstruction or rather reformation of the village life."

Mahatma Gandhi believed that *Satyagraha* was the most powerful weapon in a nonviolent struggle, which involves defiance, the willful, peaceful, and breaking of unjust laws. Since women were the most nonviolent and ardent lovers of peace, it could be sharpened and extended as a weapon in women's struggles for justice and equality. To him the ultimate ahimsa and Satyagraha was when women, in vast numbers, rose up to put an end to the destructive aspects of male dominance in society. Had the momentum of freedom struggle not been slowed down, such mobilisation could have attracted many more women into public life. Political activity geared towards the transformation of society into the holistic, integrated entity as Gandhi had visualised has not yet crystallised. Satyagraha is now just a word, a mere symbol, that serves no purpose for the academic or the elite, or even the middle class feminist whose dialectic emerges from a theoretical background far removed from Gandhi's poor women who act because they have no use for words to explain themselves.

The anti-liquor movement of Andhra Pradesh built up gradually in the minds of poor and illiterate women who, for long years, suffered the ill-effects of alcohol consumption by their men folk. For families steeped in poverty, for women who were subject to domestic violence related to alcohol, for wives who had nothing material to lose by rebelling because they had nothing to lose, they fulfilled Gandhi's wish of deciding no longer to be slaves of the situation. "No one can be exploited without his or her willing participation" said Gandhi. Gandhi said that women "strengthen my belief in swadeshi and satyagraha....if I could inspire in men devotion as pure as I find in the women, within a year, India

would be raised to a height impossible to imagine. As for swaraj it was the easiest thing in the world." The superior qualities of women and the intrinsic difference between man and woman was something Gandhi kept highlighting. He believed that women could bring about swaraj better as they were the very embodiment of nonviolence, greater soldiers and beneficiaries of his swaraj campaigns. The three famed spearheads of these campaigns were the manufacture of salt, boycott of foreign cloth and shunning of liquor which he said "were specially meant for the villages and the women would benefit especially."

Somewhere along the way, however, the issues close to Gandhi's heart have been largely left by the wayside by women who became part of the power structure as well as by the emancipated women's groups. Organisations involved in trade union work, social reform and development issues have in part or in whole addressed the issue of prohibition; but women, as a group in parliament or through institutional structures, have not raised this demand loudly and effectively. Prohibition is not accepted when it is presented as a moral issue alone and therefore the argument has to include developmental priorities, revenue collection, and budgetary allocations to social welfare, health and other sectors which rural women are unable to do.

The salt satyagraha and boycott of foreign cloth emphasises the indigenous, but the feminist movement has not associated itself with the swadeshi movement except for the Gandhian elements within the various groupings. The wearing of khadi and handloom among the younger activists is more as the badge of a progressive liberal rather than as a commitment to the foods of indigenous manufacture. These are no longer taken up as issues of struggle although many women are part of the wider movement against the neo-colonial pressures of the new world trade regime which destroy both sovereignty and national resources.

Many institutions and organisations representing women's rights have a high visibility in the cosmopolitan arena and have effectively expressed their concerns. Further, their members have decisively moved far ahead of Gandhi's vision of fearless women. Alert, active and bold, they engage in constant discussion and introspection for genuine equality.

While middle class women were visibly active side by side with Mahatma Gandhi, wearing khadi, going to jail, organising resistance on the British in some creative and selfless way, the socially conscious middle class woman of today has largely shunned direct political activity, preferring to seek more secure ground in funded social work through voluntary organisations. A growing number of emancipated, educated, young women are being diverted by market-oriented consumerism in the name of modernity and liberation. They become packaged products for the marriage, beauty or fashion markets, a professionalised catering to "the vanities" that Gandhi spoke of. This depoliticises them to

such an extent that the cream of young women students are unavailable to articulate the needs of their underprivileged sisters. This results in a wider cultural and social divide emerging between the rural and urban woman. It also demonstrates that emancipation does not mean empowerment in the Gandhian sense if women move away from involvement with the more deep-seated problems facing India.

Compared to the momentous work of stalwarts like Sarojini Naidu, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Dr Muthulakshi Reddy, Lakshmi N. Menon and Annie Besant and organisations like the All India Women's Conference, the Arya Samaj and many others during Mahatma Gandhi's time, the collective or individual work of women in the political arena in the post-independence era has been unremarkable. Some of the organisations are fine examples of Gandhi's ideas put into practice but lack political power to influence change in the society around it. The appalling number of women at the helm in the decision-making levels of the administration shows that there is a long way to go before gender parity is achieved.

While in some spheres women have accepted Gandhi's words about shedding their role as slaves and facing patriarchal challenges, women have largely slipped away from the paths of political action that Gandhi had opened out for them during the freedom movement. For instance, women from the middle classes have achieved remarkable prominence in fields such as aviation, science and space technology, administration, education, literature and the arts. Unfortunately, the women of the rural classes are subjected to the same oppression as before, not only by the men within their caste but also by other communities. In spite of the policies and legislations favouring women, and adoption of universal franchise before many other nations, India remains far behind in achieving social and gender justice. With the increasing criminalisation of politics and the use of vast sums of unaccounted money and ugly muscle power by different groups and with both caste and gender groups perpetuating traditional and modern divisions, the mission of Gandhi and the dreams of women are yet to be fulfilled.

---

## **12.8 SUMMARY**

---

Gandhi taught us that empowerment of women without sharing our material, financial, intellectual resources with the poor women is not possible. No other leader has done as much as Gandhi to bring out masses of illiterate women from the four walls of their houses. A few talented women were spotted by him who worked shoulder to shoulder with him, like Midas touch, anybody whom he inspired became vibrant and active soldier of movement and not a lifeless idol of gold. No one can double the efforts made by Gandhi to empower women. He had attracted many millions of literate and illiterate women without the power of state, without the modern information technology and offering in return only sweat, toil, and pain, which is an exceptional feat! His insistence on Women's education is the

first step in right direction. We still have miles to go to achieve our cherished goal to empower women.

---

## 12.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

---

1. Describe Gandhi's contribution towards empowerment of women.
2. Critically analyse Gandhi's views on man-woman relations.
3. How did Gandhi make thousands of Indian women to join India's freedom movement?
4. What is relevance of Gandhian legacy for contemporary women's movement?
5. Write short notes on:
  - a. Gandhi as mentor of women freedom fighters
  - b. Women's Awakening in Gandhi's era.

---

## SUGGESTED READINGS

---

Bhatt, Ela and Renana Jhabvala., "The Idea of Work" , vol. 39, no.48, November 27 - December 03, 2004

Gandhi, M.K., Hind Swaraj-Indian Home Rule, Navajivan Publications, Ahmedabad, 1908

The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1994.

Homer, Jack.,(ed), The Gandhi Reader: A Sourcebook of His Life and Writings, Grove Press, New York, 1956.

Gandhi, M.K., An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments With Truth, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1940, 2nd edition, p.xii, p.404.

Kapadia, Sita., "A Tribute to Mahatma Gandhi: His Views on Women and Social Change", Journal of South Asian Women Studies, Vol. 1, No. 1, November, 1995, Asiatica Association, Milano (Italy)

Jha, Sadan., "Charkha, 'Dear Forgotten Friend' of Widows" Economic and Political Weekly, vol.39 no.28, July 10 - July 16, 2004

Kishwar, Madhu., "Gandhi on Women", Economic and Political Weekly, vol. XX, no. 40, October 5, 1985.

### Websites:

<http://www.fiu.edu/~fcf/Gandhi.quotes.html#WOMEN>

<http://www.gandhilibrary.org>

<http://www.mkgandhi.org/swarajya/coverpage.htm>