MAHATMA GANDHI’S CONCEPTION OF
DECENTRALISATION AND PEOPLE’S
EMPOWERMENT – AN ANALYSIS

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CHAPTER - FIVE

PEOPLE’S EMPOWERMENT
5.1 PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION

Gandhiji has stated more than once that man is one of supreme consideration. The individual, Gandhiji considered never as a means to an end but an end in himself and cannot therefore be treated subordinate to any institution howsoever powerful it may be. Gandhiji was of the view that it has his love of the human person which compelled him to enter into public life. The often quoted statements “Hate the sin and not the sinner.” \(^1\) “Man is superior to the system he propounds”\(^2\) testifies Gandhiji’s faith in human species. And his conviction that perfectibility of human nature is a possibility. Further, he has added that man is divine by nature. Gandhiji said, “We all are sparks of Truth. The sum total of these sparks is indescribable, as yet unknown Truth, which is God.” \(^3\) He often spoke of man as the part of God and as an incarnation of God. In Gandhiji’s words, “I believe in absolute oneness of God and therefore also of humanity. What though we have many bodies? We have but one soul.” \(^4\)

Gandhiji was not an abstract theoriser who sits down and write an elaborate treatise on extreme individualism or socialism. He has always taken a middle position according to which perfection of the individual is closely related with social
perfection, where society must provide opportunities for the full development of his personality. Life, Gandhiji viewed as a unity which cannot be compartmentalized but they act and react upon one another. The individual is not isolated being but an integral part of society. His ideal of spiritual unity, equality of mankind and the ideal of common good and belief in the perfectibility of human nature along with an ethical orientation so as to order individual life in unquestioning obedience to certain fundamental moral principles are the offshoots of his ethico-religious faith and convictions. He has strictly adhered to the observance of morality in personal, societal, national and international life and relations, the failure to do so lead to the ‘seven social sins’ namely -politics without principle, wealth without work, commerce without morality, knowledge without character, pleasure without conscience, science without humanity and worship without sacrifice.

Another notable idea is the conception of human freedom. Gandhiji’s own life was a struggle for freedom both individual and social. In the individual realm, he longed for spiritual freedom. Spiritual and political freedom is not antithetical to each other. Political freedom reflects spiritual
and moral freedom. Political freedom is the expression of the moral level of the individual. But the individual counts much more than the institution he has invented. “The individual alone is real, the society and state have little meaning apart from the individual.”  

But political freedom or independence is not isolated existence but inter-dependence. He said: “my mission is not merely brotherhood of Indian humanity. My mission is not merely freedom of India. But through realization of freedom of India, I hope realize and carry on the mission of the brotherhood of man.”  

Gandhiji’s ethico-religious outlook was the backbone of his entire message – with the individual at its centre. He has devised a man-centred and action-oriented programme for the upliftment and happiness of the masses. His ideas on Swaraj, non-violent state and decentralization at all levels – social, political and economic were significant milestones in the evolution of a non-violent democratic order in which people are the sovereign. Gandhiji’s very entry into politics was to revolutionize it. Instead of the coercive institution of the state authority, he pleaded for the establishment of the non-violent state. In politics, his motto was service to humanity. Gandhiji wrote,”My passion for the service of the suppressed classes
and as I cannot render this service without entering into politics. I find myself in them.”

Thus to Gandhiji, politics is not a stepping stone to attainment of power. It is rather an instrument or means to fight against evils of the suffering humanity. He was totally against centralization of state power. Instead it has to be shared among the people. That is people will have an effective voice in the administration of the village. Ordinarily the system is above the individual and hence acts against their freedom and equality. It has been Gandhiji’s main objective in independent India that developmental and administrative powers should be decentralized from the central authority to the state authority and from the state to the lower levels. The goal of decentralization below the state level has received new impetus after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments – to make the poor the focal point of planning and development. Any development without people’s participation is no development at all. The government of Kerala initiated the People Campaign in July 1996 which was in fact a re-affirmation of the Gandhian concept of Grama Swaraj so as to ensure greater participation of the people. Gandhiji observed, “I look upon an increase in the power of the state with the greatest fear, because
although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress.”

In the economic sphere Gandhiji stood for the moralization and the humanization of the methods of production and distribution. He was against the centralized production and advocated decentralized production. He was against the concentration of the means of the production in the hands of a few rich. Likewise the labour class too should have an effective role in the administration and management of the factory. Instead of the capitalist system of production and distribution, he preferred a non-violent decentralized economic order with emphasis on rural civilization in which there will be no exploitation of one man by another. The prosperity of a nation mainly depends upon its human being. Gandhiji preached economic programmes for the best utilization of manpower. According to him, “to live man must work”. The ideal of bread labour means that every man has to labour with his body for his food and clothing. His view that the nature and extent of production has to be determined by social necessity rather than profit motive has far reaching consequences. His concept of Khadi, Swadeshi, Bread labour,
small scale and cottage industries enhance the significance of his love of the human race for no one should suffer from want of food and clothing. The basic factor of Gandhiji’s economics is that man must eat. Throughout his public life Gandhiji strove hard to free his countrymen from degradation of poverty. S. Radhakrishnan describes Gandhiji as “the representative of the peasant”.10 Jawaharlal picturised Gandhi as “he does represent the peasant masses of India... he is the greatest peasant, with peasant masses of India... he is the greatest peasant, with the peasant’s outlook on affairs, and with a peasant’s blindness to some aspects of life. But India is peasant India, and so he knows his India well...”11

Gandhi’s development philosophy centres round man, society and their development. His philosophy was governed by the two fundamental and inter-related principles – truth and non-violence. In essence the development philosophy centre around the five co-related concepts namely, man as the end of development, man should feel at home with the process of development in which he is both the subject as well as the object, development of collective personality of man in which man finds its fullest expression, participation as the true of democracy and finally self-reliance as the expression of
man’s faith in his own abilities. Gandhiji believed that instead of man exploiting the society and both exploiting nature there should be a way of life which is in harmony with each other. In Gandhi’s scheme of development, man is at the centre. The objective is the moral and spiritual development of man.

Gandhiji dreamt of building a society with the active participation of people. By development, Gandhiji does not mean merely as the gross national product to improve the economic condition of the people. Gandhiji aimed at rebuilding an India in which the poorest shall have an effective voice and also an India in which all communities will live in perfect harmony. Development which concentrate on relieving absolute poverty or on meeting basic needs can be adopted as a matter of first priority. Development should be understood as a process designed to create conditions in which every person can exercise and utilize under rule of law all his human rights. Every person has the right to participate and benefit from the development in the sense of progressive improvement in the standards and quality of life. Development without people’s participation is not true development. True development is only the outcome of the proper utilization of the political will obtained by consumers.
In most cases people are far removed both from policy making and its implementation.

People’s participation is an essential ingredient and a necessary precondition for the successful implementation of any project or programme. Participation is a means of reducing power difference and its points to the affirmation of equalization and social justice. Decentralization does not increase participation if the government retains the power of decision. Gandhi’s devisal of Panchayati Raj and the Constructive Programme are steps towards the realization of participatory democracy. The Panchayat system was evolved with a view to ensure speedy justice to all and providing protection and education to all. Gandhiji was very much concerned about centralization of power and said that an increase in the power of the state although apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the roof of all progress. The real power of the village administration lies in the people’s support. The panchayat should therefore follow their ‘soul force’ and act under their control. But the people must be aware of the ‘soul force’ and on their own strength
and their capacity to regulate the power of the state when it goes astray.

Gandhiji stood for democratizing every aspect of life wherein the liberty of the individual, freedom of opinion and action are protected. In democracy, government by all the people implies arriving at unanimous decision following the opinion of the majority. The will of the majority does not represent the will of the people. Gandhiji held the view that in the matters of conscience the law of majority has no place. Gandhiji was a critic of the majority system in democracy and insisted that the opinion of the minority tool has to be taken into consideration. Gandhiji said, “the rule of majority when it comes coercive, is as intolerable as that of a bureaucratic minority. We must patiently try to bring round the minority to our view by gentle persuasion and argument.” The tyranny of the majority must come to an end for democracy in order to represent the government of the entire community should not resort to intolerance and violence. Gandhi categorically stated that, “True democracy is not inconsistent, with a few persons representing the spirit, the hope and the aspiration of those whom they claim to represent. I hold that democracy cannot be evolved by forcible methods. The spirit of democracy
cannot be imposed from without. It has to come from within.”

To Gandhiji, real democracy should have meaning not for a few but for all including the poorest. Gandhiji – the man of the masses was a leader of his people unsupported by any political authority or power whose success was based simply upon the moral power of his soul. Gandhiji observed, “we must first come in touch-with them by working – with them and in their midst, we must share their sorrows, understand their difficulties and anticipate their wants. With the pariahs we must be pariahs and see how we feel to clean the closets of the upper classes and have the remains of theirs to be thrown at us. We must see how we like being in the boxes, miscalled houses, of the labourers of Mumbai. We must identify with the villagers who toil under the hot sun beating on their bent back and see how we would like to drink water from the pool in which the villagers bathe, wash, their clothes and pots, and in which their cattle drink and roll. Then and not till then shall we truly represent the masses and they will, as surely as I am writing this, respond to every call.”
Gandhiji’s developmental scheme placed people’s at the centre so as to ensure full participation of the people to develop their capacities to resist authority when it is abused. Gandhiji stated that, “My ideal village contain intelligent human beings. They will be free and able to hold on their own against anyone in the world.”  

5.2 CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAMME

Mahatma Gandhi – the greatest democrat the world has ever seen was a moral beacon for generations to come. The path of democracy and spiritualism has at its core in the Constructive Work Programme which was one of the dual programmes of the Satyagraha envisaged by Gandhiji, the other being Civil Disobedience – positive and negative or agitational and constructive. The agitation part include Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience, Fast, Hartal, Picketing and other forms of mass non-violent resistance. Satyagraha consists in avoidance of violence in thought, word and deed. Violence is used not to convert the opponent but to injure or destroy him. Satyagraha is not merely resistance to evil but non-violent resistance to evil. It is non-violent direct action. It consists of an active and dynamic resistance to both social
and political evils. Constructive programme is also a form of Satyagraha, as revolutionary as the agitational method.

Gandhiji’s entire philosophy can be summed up in three words – Sarvodaya, Satyagraha, and Anasakti. Sarvodya embraces the eighteen point Constructive Programme both as a concept and definite plan of action to uplift the villages. In the conceptual level, it emphasizes the inter-dependence of the individual and society in their different facets. As a plan of action, it stands for the co-ordinated activity of many aspects of life in strict adherence to truth, non-violence and love. It promotes Sarvodaya – the welfare of all.

Constructive Programme is an integral part of non-violence. Constructive Programme was designed by Gandhiji as the basis of the training of non-violence to the brave. He emphasised cultivating non-violence in thought, word and deed, maximum of work with minimum of speech, spinning as the centre of the programme, programme of literacy, prohibition of drink and intoxicating drugs, medical relief, by simple rules of hygiene, sanitation and elementary preventive measures. He also advised to render selfless service and launched the mass-Constructive Programme. Gandhiji said, “this is the mass constructive programme I want you to do,
and that is the basis of the training of the non-violence for the brave. It is the whole and indivisible and those who do not believe in it whole heartedly must leave me and work according to their own lights.”

It is a means of establishing contact with the people. Constructive Programme yields its concrete results for the people. Gandhi regarded constructive work as an indispensable tool for training in the art and science of Satyagraha. The Satyagrahi comes close to the people.

The eighteen items which Gandhiji included in the programme were indispensable for the emancipation of the nation through non-violence. Gandhiji’s small booklet titled ‘Constructive Programme: It’s meaning and place”, which he wrote on the train from Sevagram to Bardoli wherein he had listed the following original thirteen items in the year 1941; namely

1. Communal Unity
2. Removal of Untouchability
3. Prohibition
4. Khadi
5. Village Industries
6. Village Sanitation
7. Nai Talim or Basic Education
8. Adult Education
9. Upliftment of Women
10. Education in Health and Hygiene
11. Provincial Languages
12. National Language
13. Promotion of Economic Equality

In 1945, Gandhiji added five more items;

1. Kissans
2. Labour
3. Adivasis
4. Lepers
5. Students

After Gandhiji’s death, his followers added the following items to strengthen the movement;

1. Cow Protection
2. Nature Cure
3. Bhoodan
4. Gramdan
5. Shantisena
Gandhiji introduced a number of programmes covering the social, political, educational, economic and cultural aspects of man’s life with a programme of total transformation of society. The Constructive Programme provides ample scope for the emergence of a new socio-political and economic order devoid of the exercise of the authority of the state which represents violence in a concentrated form. Through this programme Gandhiji dreamt of building up a non-authoritarian, non-exploitative, society. The state action has coercive power whereas constructive programme has voluntary basis. The more of the state action, the less of non-violence, democracy and satyagraha. There is no compulsion exercised in Satyagraha and Constructive Programme. The Constructive Programme gives us an elaborate blue print of social action comprising of Sarvadharma Samabhavana (equal respect for all religions), the craft based, skill oriented, value creating Nai Talim (new education), the trusteeship concept, decentralized planning, local self-government, village self sufficiency all of which were an all-embracing frame work of the non-violent revolution aimed at a new social order.

The future of India is inseparably connected with the future of villages. In order to translate Gandhiji’s programme
of action, in every village there should be a body of voluntary workers engaged in selfless constructive work to achieve social moral and economic freedom. It should be organized along democratic lines from below upwards. The Panchayat Raj institutions play a vital role in the constructive work and service. Gandhiji attached greatest importance to the economic item particularly the Spinning wheel and Khadi. He considered economic problem in terms of morality and human welfare. His economic outlook is founded on the ideals of non-possession, bread labour and Swadeshi. Constructive work also served as an preparation and training for participation in non-violent action. By doing constructive work the non-violent volunteer would become trained and disciplined.

Gandhiji launched a movement of Constructive Programme for economic betterment and for improving social life. He also formed All India Village Industries Association primarily meant for the revival of cottage industries and better rural life. The movement began with emphasis of Khadi and later became the Charka movement. The Charka movement tied workers to village life. Gandhiji give utmost important to Khadi in his programme of economic building. He felt that the growing problem of unemployment could be solved by
establishing small scale industries. Gandhiji wrote “this introduction of village industries as the media of instruction will have far-reaching educational, cultural and economic consequences. It will dispel the distaste and contempt for physical labour – an evil which has penetrated deep into the present system of education.”

Gandhiji stood for the revival of the Indian village communities through the revival of village industries, especially Khadi. Gandhiji’s advocacy of the universalisation of Khadi is the expression of the Swadhesi spirit. Khadi was the symbol of Swadhesi and Gandhiji pleaded for complete or cent percent Swadhesi. Khadi alone teach us the village population to be self-dependent. Through the universalisation of hand-spinning Gandhiji’s aim was to taught the village people the dignity of labour. It also brought unity between the masses. At the same time Khadi is an attempt to revive the economy restricting primarily to the needs of the village which lead Gandhiji to establish the Khadi movement. He said, “Khadi is the only economic proposition in terms of the millions of the villages until such time if ever, when a better system of supplying work and adequate wages for every able bodied person above the age of sixteen, male or female is found for
his field, cottage or even factory in every one of the villages in India; or till sufficient cities are built up to displace the villages so as to give the villagers the necessary comforts and amenities that a well regulated life demands and is entitled to.”

Gandhiji was convinced that the revival of hand spinning and hand weaving would largely contribute to the economic and the moral regeneration of the nation. Gandhi envisaged several advantages of the spinning wheel.

1. “It supplies the readiest occupation to those who have leisure and are in want of a few coppers.

2. It is known to the thousands

3. It is easily learnt

4. It requires practically no outlay of capital

5. The wheel can be easily and cheaply made. Most of us do not yet know that the spinning can be done even with a piece of tile and splinter.

6. The people have no repugnance to it.

7. It affords immediate relief in times of famine and scarcity.
8. It alone can stop the drain of wealth which goes outside India in the purchase of foreign cloth.

9. It automatically distributes the millions thus saved among the deserving poor.

10. Even the smallest success means so much immediate gain to the people.

11. It is the most potent instrument of securing co-operation among the people.”

Khadi industry serves as a supplement to agriculture. Spinning and cottage industries served the millions from starvation. The spinning wheel represents the hope of the masses. The economics of Khadi rests on the human element. Gandhiji said, “Khadi to me is the symbol of unity of Indian Humanity of its economic freedom and equality and therefore ‘the livery of Indian freedom’. More over Khadi mentality means decentralization of the production and distribution of the necessaries of life. Therefore, the formula so far evolved is, every village to produce all its necessaries and a certain percentage in addition for the requirements of the cities.”

The constructive programme form part of the Community Development Programme was started on 2nd October, 1952.
Community development is the method and rural extension agency through which the five year plan initiated a process of transformation of social and economic life of the villages. It aimed at the establishment of an agency to ensure the participation of villagers at the planning stage. The constructive work programme that Gandhiji initiated was taken up by his followers through two agencies namely ‘Sarva Seva Sangh’ and ‘Gandhi Smarak Nidhi’ entrusted with fellowship or brotherhood and coordination organization for all the constructive work respectively.

Gandhiji’s Constructive Work Programme is an answer to the ailing society. Gene Sharp, an outstanding scholar on Gandhiji wrote, “the Constructive Programme is an attempt to build the beginnings of the new social order while the old society still exists. The non-violent revolutionary which Gandhi claimed to be thus begins to build the new even when the struggling old one does not need to wait for the capture of the state machinery to begin. The Constructive Programme has been described as the scaffolding upon which the structure of the new society will be built.”

5.3 WOMEN EMPOWERMENT
Woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa. Ahimsa means infinite love, which again means infinite capacity for suffering.

Mahatma Gandhi

Gandhiji was the champion of women’s emancipation from the multifarious disabilities in the male dominated society. Her infinite capacity for love, sacrifice and suffering has very often been exploited. The Indian woman who were defied during the Vedic times have been brought down to the level of commodities. In a society or nation, so long as women were not treated with due respect cannot develop in the right direction. Gandhiji recognised clearly that woman has a vital role to play especially in the reconstruction of society. Woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has every right to participate in every minutest detail in the activities of man and she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with men. Every individual entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity like man. Women must cease to consider herself the object of man’s lust.

A practical idealist at the core, Gandhiji preached and practiced perfect equality between male and female. Gandhiji worked for gender justice signifying equality of two sexes.
Gandhiji was uncompromising in the matter of women’s right. He said, “I should treat daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality.” There is no occasion for women to consider herself as inferior to man. Instead of calling women ‘weaker sex’, Gandhiji called her ‘better half’ or ‘nobler sex’. They are not separate entities but halves of one. He was of the view that woman have the same liberty and opportunity as man in matters relating to self-development. Gandhiji said, “Man and woman are equal in status but not identical. They are peerless pair being complementary to one another; each help the other so that without the one the existence of the other cannot be conceived and therefore it follows as a necessary - corollary, from these facts that anything that will impair the status of either of them will involve the equal ruin of both.” Gandhiji held that man and woman are equal and their problems in essence must be one and the same. Both are complementary and interdependent and “they cannot live without the others active life.” Gandhiji stated in his speech on 20th February 1918 that, “Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities... she has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him. She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity as man is in his. This ought
to be the natural condition on things and not as a result only
of learning to read and write.”

Gandhiji held woman in high esteem. Woman is the
embodiment of all that is virtuous and moral. Gandhiji has
evolved new methods for the social upliftment based on
higher values of morality, equality and social justice. Gandhiji
pleaded for the equality of both the sexes, but not their
identity. But women are far superior to men in some other
respects especially in exhibiting nobler virtues like love,
suffering, self-sacrifice, and unadulterated ahimsa. Gandhiji
said, “I do believe that it is woman’s mission to exhibit ahimsa
at its highest and best... For woman is more fitted than man to
make explorations and take bolder action in ahimsa... For the
courage of self-sacrifice woman is anyday superior to man, as
I believe man is to woman for the courage of the brute.”

But fundamentally man and woman are one for the soul both is
the same. Woman is the incarnation of ahimsa which means
love and infinite capacity for suffering. “Who but woman, the
mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure?
She shows it as she carriers the infant and feeds it... and
derives joy in the suffering involved... But she forgets them in
the joy of creation... Let her transfer that love to the whole of

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humanity, let her forget that she ever was or can be the object of man’s lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world…”

Majority of woman undertake the special mission of the duty of motherhood, mainly requires qualities which man need not possess. Woman is passive, Man is active and she is essentially mistress of the house. He is the bread winner, she is the keeper and distributor of the bread. She is the caretaker in every sense of the term. The art of bringing up the infants of the race is her special and sole prerogative. Without her care, the race must become extinct.

But women were always degraded and looked down upon by society. Gandhiji was far in advance to understand the dilemma of women, writing in Young India, Gandhiji said in 1921, “of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible none is so degrading so shocking of so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity to me, the female sex, not the weaker sex.” But Gandhiji was of the considered view that woman is also a person in her own right in a plan of life, he maintained that, “women has as much right to shape her
own destiny as man has.” However he believed that though both are fundamentally one, difference in their vocation and roles are to be expected and very often to be accepted.

Gandhiji’s position on women’s issues was fundamentally based on two concepts: equality between the sexes and differentiation of their social roles. Both have equal capacities and are equal. But the fact remains that women all over the world are facing problems. Many social reformers and prophets of women’s emancipation have voiced against women atrocities and discrimination but have not yet attained the desired goal – for discrimination against women and violation of human values still persist. Women need freedom from child-marriage, purdah, sexual exploitation, economic exploitation, dowry death, rape, etc. to mention a few. There are no easy answers or solutions to realized gender equality or gender justice. Gandhiji suggested to approach the problem through non-violent means by launching Satyagraha.

In Gandhian framework women have to realise their own potential and inner strength. The Satyagraha technique would be the best remedy to remove all types of gender discrimination. Gandhi wrote, “If she learn Satyagraha, she can be perfectly independent and self-supporting. She will not
have to feel dependent upon one. This does not mean that she shall not take any help from others. She will certainly. But if such help be not forthcoming, she will not feel destitute.”

Satyagraha has brought about the political awakening with immediate results following there from. Women were largely emancipated from their bonds and came out in large numbers to participate in the freedom movement. Women’s entry into public life in turn had its impact in social life as well and also in restraining the ambition of men. The theory and practice of non-violence, which played significant role in the techniques of Satyagraha involves the avoidance of the suppression of women. Women has as much right as man in matters relating to her destiny in a plan of life based on non-violence. Gandhiji stated that, “the largest part of the human effort for promoting the regeneration of woman should be directed towards removing the blemishes represented in the Shastras as necessary requisite ingrained in the characteristics of women.”

Further he also held that it is the bounden duty of the awakened women to spot out the age-long evils and eradicate them. Women’s non-violent rebellion against man’s supremacy and injustice was proved to be doubly effective. Gandhiji said, “To call women the weaker sex is a libel, it is
man’s injustice to women. If by strength is meant, brute strength, then indeed; is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power; then women is immeasurably man’s superior, has she not greater intuition, is she not more self sacrificing, has she not greater 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… who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman.”

To enable women to fight against discrimination, it is necessary to empower them by ensuring their participation in decision making bodies at all levels. The use of the notion of empowerment is relatively new. Empowerment is generally viewed as a way of an individual acquiring power from another individual or agency to look after his own interest. As a consequence of empowerment, individuals are expected to voice their views and demands in their favour and also involve themselves in the process of fulfilling their needs. It is often believed that power in the process of empowerment is provided from outside or lie outside an individual. The community also plays a pivotal role in the process of empowerment along with individuals. There is always the
involvement of another personal community that can become empowered. However, it is to be noted that the people have to recognize and act upon the power or potential power that they already have. The emphasis is on the fact that both the individual and the community have potential power which need to be reflected in and through the process of empowerment. The notion of empowerment is a multi-level process. It includes individual involvement, organizational development and community change. Individual involvement in fact refers to participation of a person in decision making. Community change refers to the impact of involvement in the community. Organizational development refers to the structures which mediate between the individual and community and pave the way for collective action which lie at the root of community change. In brief empowerment at its best includes all three levels namely individual involvement, organizational development and community change.

Women’s problems can be solved by women themselves. The primary aim of gender justice is the creation of a just, democratic, non-violent and egalitarian society and for that women empowerment is a necessary pre-requisite. Empowerment means that women need to be taken seriously.
Alongside, it is equally important the enlightenment of men to change their attitude towards women. And understand their problems.

From time immemorial, due to the injunctions laid down by the Sage Manu, the study of Vedas was restricted for women. Since then the Indian women have been deprived of education. In the long run, this had narrowed down their outlook and consequently completely suppressed this interest and quest for knowledge. It was in the year 1936. Gandhiji raised a question about educated boys and girls but who were unable or unwilling to resist the evils such as custom of compulsory marriage with dowry. Gandhiji questioned the value of education that was imparted to them. He maintained that there was something basically lacking in the system of education imparted that might have made the educated to be insensitive to the evil customs and practices in Indian society. Gandhiji stood for proper education for women and believed that in proportion to the education they receive they would become sensitive to the glaring inequalities which they are subjected to. Gandhiji pointed out that there was no justification to deny women of their equal rights in matters relating to literacy. Gandhiji said, “Education is essential for
enabling women to assert their natural rights to exercise them wisely, and to work for their expansion again true knowledge is unattainable by the millions who lack such education." Due to lack of proper education and information, the situation of deprivation of women has increased. It leads to the deprivation of social and political power and also the power of knowledge. It was observed that “An education system to work as catalyst for the socio-political awakening of women needs serious restructuring and re-orientation of its values and ideals. Education pattern of properly sensitive to women, can to a considerable extent help in redefining the role of women in the society and polity. It needs to become ‘neutral’ to socio-religious norms, and establish a new set of values and norms for the progress of society. Then only can it become ‘agent’ for improving the status of women, making them active participants in the process of social and political development.”

Gandhiji emphasized the fact that the empowerment of women is in no way the threat to society but a way to improve families and societies. Gandhi as categorically stated that he had, “a passion to serve womankind... I hold radical views about the emancipation of woman from their fetters,
which they mistake for adornment. If God will it, I hope one
day to place some of my conclusions before the public when
my researches are completed. My experience has confirmed
me in that real advancement of women can come only by and
through their own efforts.” 35 This was Gandhiji’s unfinished
agenda-the biggest challenge before humanity.

Notes

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26 Harijan, 05.11.1938, p. 317.
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29 M.K. Gandhi, Constructive Programme. p.17
32 Young India, 10.04.1930, p. 121.