Conclusion
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Gandhi gave great importance to the issue of women's freedom and strength in the struggle to build a humane and exploitation free society. His concern for the fair sex arose not merely out of compassion for their plight, or out of a patronizing attitude towards those who suffer. It was a part of his total and integral view of life. It came out of his perception of the deeper purpose, for the fulfillment of which man and woman together are constantly striving, namely self realization.

Gandhi tried to balance tradition with modernity. "It is good to swim in the waters of tradition, but to sink in them is suicide." These words of Gandhi, in a way, sum up his entire socio political philosophy. The technique of mass action of Gandhi did not advocate a radical change of the core institutions of Indian Society. He felt that India should preserve what is good and true in its ancient heritage. His views on the status of women were not only liberal but also at times radical. He was the only reformer who went beyond prevalent customs and sought a new social and moral role for all women outside sex relationship.

In Gandhi's views, if women were to be free they had to be fearless. "Gandhi rightly realized that it was more a matter of psychological fear and helplessness, culturally imposed upon
women by society, than physical weakness which kept them crippled."2 His constant message to them was that bravery and courage were not the monopoly of men:

Let no one dismiss the example of Sita as legendary. It was that higher type of valour, which he wanted Indian womanhood to cultivate... woman in our country was brought up to think that she was well only with her husband or on the funeral pyre. He would far rather see India's women trained to wield arms... than that they should feel helpless.3

But arms for Gandhi were a symbol of one's weakness. The real strength of a woman was her consciousness of her purity and chastity.

If most Indian women had lost the spirit of strength and courage, the power of independent thinking and initiative, this was the result of social tyranny. The liberation of women, therefore, was set as a fundamental task during the freedom struggle. To those who argued that the political struggle ought to have primacy over everything else, he answered, "To postpone social reform, till after the attainment of swaraj, is not to know the meaning of swaraj."4
Gandhi was convinced that hitherto “Man has regarded woman as his tool. She has learnt to be his tool and in the end found it easy and pleasurable to be such, because when one drags another in his fall the descent is easy...”\(^5\) Gandhi felt that women needed to take the task of their upliftment into their own hands. Ultimately women have to determine with authority what they need. Women must protest against being treated as sex objects. He declared, “If I was born a woman, I would rise in rebellion against any pretension on the part of man that woman is born to be his plaything.”\(^6\) The essence of self-rule, according to Gandhi, was the realization by each individual that unjust laws must be disobeyed.

Gandhi could not envisage the wife following an avocation independently of her husband, since the care of home and children requires tremendous energy. He felt that “In a well ordered society the additional burden of maintaining the family ought not to fall on her. The man should look to the maintenance of the family, the woman to household management.”\(^7\) However Gandhi recognized that circumstances might make it desirable for a married woman to work outside the home. Moreover, he felt that society should recognize the right of a woman to choose not to marry and to dedicate herself to social services in a different manner. Since he gave primacy of position to everyone’s right of self-fulfillment, he ruled out marriage as essential for women.
Marriage after all imposed certain obligations on a human being. Those who wanted to serve humanity may choose not to accept the restraints of marital and family obligations.

Gandhi insisted that men should have a curb on their sexual demands. Hardiman remarks, "By valorizing sexual abstinence and celibacy for men and women Gandhi provided a means for setting limits on this routine but gross form of exploitation." Moreover, Gandhi regarded liberation from one's passions and desires to be rather more important than external liberation. His upholding of celibacy as a higher ideal than marriage made it possible for many women to remain unmarried and yet be respected in society.

Gandhi advocated fundamental changes in Hindu inheritance laws to give men and women equal property rights. So far as the economic right of women was concerned, Gandhi held that women had equal share in the property earned by their husbands. Gandhi strongly opposed evil customs like child marriage and purdah. He held that by countenancing these evils we deny God as well as swaraj. The fight against social evils was an integral part of the programmes for national reconstruction and purification, which Gandhi urged men and women to take up. Regarding the remedies for many of the evils, Gandhi favoured creation of public opinion as
well as legislation. In his opinion, legislation alone could not be effective unless people are for such reforms.

The position taken by Gandhi on the equality of the sexes was obviously in conflict with certain passages in the Hindu scriptures, which treat women as subjected to men. When challenged on this issue, Gandhi retorted that all that is written in the scriptures is not divine and the scriptural injunctions which are in conflict with true morality should not be followed. He belonged to the category of those reformers who, though had immense faith in the wisdom of Hindu Shastras yet, believed in the application of reason on each and every issue. Quoting the epithets used for women in the ancient Indian scriptures as Ardhangini, and Sahadharmini, he reiterated that women enjoyed a respectable position in ancient India, but gradually there was a decline in their status and position. Thus Gandhi, though a reformist, is also a revivalist and belongs to the category of reformers whose models are typically Indian and not Western.

For Gandhi, there was no basic difference between men and women with regard to the ultimate goal of life, namely self-realization. He maintained the view that women are equally capable of attaining it. He held that both men and women could become fearless. Men and women are characterized by fear as long as both are subject to passions. Therefore Gandhi suggested that
by controlling passions women could overcome many of their shortcomings.

Gandhi views the subordination of women as a mechanism to preserve property and power of the patriarchal family. He further notes that women have become accustomed to gain access to power through their husbands, and thus in the final analysis may support the very social system which is injurious to their basic rights. He saw clearly that one aspect of patriarchy, namely inheritance laws favouring the male line, contributes to the subordination of women.

From the Gandhian perspective, subjugation of women in its complex forms amounts to a negation of truth, and an "untruth is tantamount to violence." Woman has been defined as inferior, weak, evil and a temptress. Such a definition legitimizes the subjugation of women. From Gandhian viewpoint, such male ideological constructions of falsehood degrade both men and women. Gandhi was convinced that women's subordination of outer social role is due to convention, and does not reflect any lack of inner strength. He believed that centuries of discrimination against women had helped them to develop the art of self-control to a greater degree than men, and women's greater capacity to endure suffering was proof of their inner strength.
Gandhian ideology suggests that he visualized women's struggle to surmount the barriers limiting the full development of their human potential. He was of the opinion that female weakness is only superficial. If women would draw upon their inner reserves of strength, no obstacle could block their progress. At the same time, "Gandhi recognized that a programme of social reform to provide women with elementary human rights, such as physical mobility and access to learning, was necessary to stimulate in them the desire for progress."\(^10\)

Gandhi, more than any other male leader of modern India, based his theory and practice of non-violence on women's experience. His mother and wife had a powerful impact on his practice of satyagraha. Their spirituality and strength of character made a deep impression on Gandhi that grew as he matured. They showed him in day-to-day life that persons in externally subordinate roles could exercise enormous influence by the power of their souls. Gandhi wrote of Kasturba, "... her determined resistance to my will on the one hand and her quiet submission to my stupidity on the other hand, ultimately made me ashamed of myself... In the end she became my teacher in non-violence. And what I did in South Africa was but an extension of the rule of Satyagraha she practised in her own life."\(^11\) Moreover Gandhi often cited Mirabai as a symbol of successful passive resistance.
Gandhi's ideal of womanhood was Sita, but his message to Indian women was to rise above wifehood and become sisters. He said a wife could never become a sister in the full sense of the word. He wanted women to become 'sisters of mercy' by serving the poor and unfortunate. Women were asked to relate the movement for their own emancipation with that of all the oppressed people and to make common cause with them.

Gandhi had varying shades of interaction with women of different ages, classes, religions and countries. This is evident by the innumerable letters from them to him as well as his replies to them at all points of time in his career. These women had complete faith in him and his leadership. Gandhi was very influential in moulding the personal aspirations of many a woman who came into the national movement.

Sushila Nayyar was fifteen when she visited the ashram. She became an ardent convert to his principles and chose to remain unmarried. Gandhi entrusted her the work of eradicating cholera in the villages in 1930s. The epidemic was controlled under her care. She writes, “Thus I was launched into social and preventive medicine. Gandhiji helped me develop initiative and self-confidence.” Mirabehn, a British woman, attracted by Gandhi's life and personality came to India and became an ardent follower of
Gandhi. Influenced by Gandhi's ideas she remained single and adopted an austere life of simplicity and served the villages.

Gandhian philosophy of non-violent resistance or satyagraha made him extraordinarily sensitive to the latent capabilities of subordinate groups. Gandhi believed that women had a moral power that was particularly suited to satyagraha. He said, "If by strength is meant brute strength, then indeed is woman less brute than man. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior." Gandhi scorned the extremist nationalists attempts to revive a male vigour in India as a counter to the masculinity of British colonialism. In his opinion, this could lead only to violence and hatred. The presence of women in the national movement would prevent this violence. Ashish Nandi observes that Gandhi rediscovered womanhood as a civilizing force in human society.

Gandhian legacy of non violence greatly contributed to the awakening of women in India. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur wrote:

Of all the factors contributing to the awakening of women in India none has been so potent as the field of non-violent action, 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.\textsuperscript{15}

Gandhi knew that no movement could succeed if one half of the population remained indifferent and passive. He was not only convinced that women's participation was desirable, but also that they should take the lead in the Satyagraha Movement in India. He expressed, "I would love to find that my future army contained a vast preponderance of women over men. If the fight came, I should then face it with greater confidence than if men predominated. I would dread the latter's violence. Women would be my guarantee against such an outbreak."\textsuperscript{16}

Gandhi sought the support of women for almost all of his political movements- Non-cooperation, Civil Disobedience and Quit India Movement. The role of educated women to implement Gandhian programmes was unique. They became inmates in the ashram and promoted spinning, khadi and other items of the Constructive Programme. They resorted to picketing of foreign cloth shops and liquor shops and succeeded in their mission. They gave up foreign clothes and celebrated their bonfires in public. The Salt Satyagraha of 1930 witnessed the greatest participation of women who organized and participated in processions, sold khadi from
door to door, and courted arrest in different movements. The response of women towards the national upsurge was tremendous. Many of them had sacrificed their personal and family lives for the national cause. At times, when they were standing as a picket or marching in processions, they were put into unbearable jail conditions. But they accepted all these hardships without a murmur. Margaret Cousins, an Irish feminist and a staunch worker for the liberation of Indian women, has this to say about Indian women:

Indian womanhood has proved itself uniquely fitted to demonstrate the only alternative to a world mentality of war based on the victory of force. That alternative is the technique of non-violent non-cooperation, the way of Satyagraha or soul force, where the individuals protesting against injustice and wrong-doing accept without bitterness the course of the law taken against them, and by their self-sacrifice release forces of spiritual influence which act on the higher natures of the opponents and breakdown the strength of evil. This is the campaign of the acknowledged Holy man of India, Mahatma Gandhi...
The sudden and massive entry of women into the Salt Satyagraha in 1930 opened up for women new opportunities, which could not be denied again. Subsequently, the Congress party passed a resolution in 1931 at its Karachi annual session committing itself to the political equality of women regardless of their status and qualifications. It is significant that at that time, women in most European countries had not yet won the right to vote, despite a much longer history of struggle. On this issue K. M Panikkar remarks, "there was no suffragette movement in India, no feminism, for the share of women in the battle of freedom gave them their position and equality without their having to fight for it separately."18

Gandhi's sense of justice led him to enlist women's support for the national movement. And this was instrumental in transforming the very character of the national movement, from being a purely political quest, into a social revolution for abolishing all types of social inequality. D. K Karve, the founder of the first Women's University in India, exclaimed, "what decades of my work and work similar to mine have failed to achieve, the wizard of Sabarmati has achieved by a single stroke of imaginative action."19

Gandhi was very much aware of women's power within the family. He asked, "If Kaikeyi could obtain all that she wanted from Dashrath by dint of duragraha, what could they not achieve with
the help of Satyagraha.\textsuperscript{20} He knew that women could play an important role in the removal of untouchability. Gandhi also knew from the experience of his personal household that as long as the womenfolk resisted, not much of progress could be made in removing untouchability. His An Autobiography makes it clear that he had to face a great deal of resistance from his wife on the question of untouchability.

Gandhi knew very well that the real India is in the villages. Unless the villages are reformed India cannot make progress. It is the villages, which need the special attention of the educated men and women. Therefore Gandhi continually emphasized that if swaraj was to be more meaningful than a mere transfer of power, Congress members must go and work for a radical reconstruction of the economy and polity in villages. He laid particular stress on the duty of educated urban women to work with their rural sisters while he himself travelled widely in rural areas, establishing independent and direct communication with the people.

Gandhi understood that self-aware, assertive, principled women working with women could transform the world. He believed that men oppressed women, but only women could free themselves and other women from that oppression. He believed that "If cultured women of India will make common cause with
villagers, and that too through their children, they will produce a silent and grand revolution in the village life of India."\(^{21}\)

"Gandhi envisaged the tremendous potentiality of women inculcating peace awareness, a role which has acquired immense importance in the modern world confronted with challenges of nuclear and chemical warfare, which can bring the doomsday in a split second,"\(^{22}\) observes Sandhya Chaudhri. Gandhi was conscious of the role of women when he told the women of Italy that they can do infinitely more than men against war. He told them, "Answer for yourselves what your great soldiers and generals would do if their wives, daughters and mothers refuse to countenance their participation in any shape or form in militarism."\(^{23}\) He regretted that unfortunately women did not realize this advantage they have over men in this regard. It was his firm conviction that woman was the right person to teach the art of peace to the warring world.

There is a unique blend of modernity and tradition in Gandhi's views, about the role of women in Indian Society. He was modern in so far as he considered woman as an individual human being in her own right and sought a new social and moral role for her outside sex relationships, propagated for gender equality and participation in public life and freedom movement. But his opposition to woman's forsaking the hearth to become the
breadwinner and his glorification of the role of motherhood with qualities of suffering and sacrifice reflect that he was guided by traditional Indian ethos.

Gandhi's ideas were a natural corollary of his living faith in God and truth and belief in Hinduism. The living faith in God made him believe in self-realization, morality and spiritual pursuits of life as opposed to the materialistic approach. His critique of Western civilization is also based on the same view of precedence of spiritualism over materialism. Accordingly, he warned Indian women against copying the West blindly. He asked them to apply indigenous methods suited to the Indian genius and Indian environment and conserve what is best in our culture and reject what was base and degrading. Sandhya Chaudhri states, "He did not like hankering after the Western materialistic pursuits which under the impact of consumerism were pushing increasing number of women to seek lucrative jobs at the cost of their household responsibilities and feminine qualities." 24

Gandhi worked tirelessly to alter the power relations between women and men, to make men more responsible for the day-to-day work in the house, to bring an increasing number of women into leadership positions in the Indian National Congress and the Constructive Programme to live and to focus on the commonality of women's and men's spiritual essence. By his ideas and example
Gandhi contributed to androgyny for men and women. He stated, "My ideal is this: A man should remain man and yet should become woman; similarly a woman should remain woman and yet become man. This means that man should cultivate the gentleness and the discrimination of woman, and woman should cast off her timidity and become brave and courageous."25

Gandhi stood for the emancipation and welfare of all, irrespective of caste, class, creed and gender. For him, collective self-reliance is the way towards a harmonious society. A society which accepts truth and non-violence as its central philosophy would recognize and promote emancipation of women in every walk of life. In his Constructive Programme, he promoted widow remarriage, abolition of purdah and sati and other evil social customs related to women. He emphasized the inner regeneration of the country by reconstructing the society.

In the final analysis, Gandhi believed that only satyagraha would solve the problems of society. No theoretical schemes for the restructuring of society can solve women's problems. Women themselves must formulate their goals, struggle for them and redefine them through the practice of satyagraha. The search for truth through non-violent resistance is particularly suited for women. The practice of satyagraha will enable them to transform the family and society for the betterment of all.
For Gandhi satyagraha is the vindication of truth. It is a moral weapon, which is superior to all other weapons of warfare. He had declared that the method of persuasion, whether in internal or external affairs, is the only humane and civilized way open to men. He wanted to rule out physical force and substitute in its place the use of moral pressure, namely satyagraha. Gandhi's satyagraha was intended not only to transform relations among humans but also between humans and environment. He was one of the first political activists of the twentieth century to recognize that modern civilization is destroying the eco-system, which we need for survival. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya and other women worked with Gandhi to develop a simple, sustainable technology that could be implemented at the village level. Vandana Shiva, an environmental activist and writer who works with other women and peasants in India, is carrying on and expanding Gandhi's work.26

It was hoped that independence would ensure freedom and equality for women and ameliorate their condition. The constitution of India pledged to achieve the notion of a just society based on the principle of dignity of the individual and political and legal equality in the form of Fundamental Rights. But even after more than fifty years of independence no significant improvement is discernible as far as the lot of women is concerned. "Gandhi's ideas in this context are relevant not only for India but also for the
whole third-world countries, since these countries cannot afford to let a large part of human resource remain unutilized."27

If women are to contribute their maximum to the development of the nation and to the reconstruction of society, it becomes imperative that the disabilities suffered by them is removed. A Gandhian framework can be a great help in reconstructing the social order towards sarvodaya. Women have to realize their inner potential and inner strength as emphasized by Gandhi, since in modern society most of the problems arise from degradation of spiritual progress. Women have to tread a long path of agitation to attain complete enjoyment of social, political, economic, and cultural freedom. Development of the satyagraha technique would be of great help to them in this regard.

Sarvodaya, the central philosophy of Gandhi, stands for the survival and development of all. It was the vision of a moral society based on the cardinal principle of truth and non-violence, a society which aims at a thorough transformation of individuals through vows which he practised in his ashrams. The economic institution of sarvodaya stressed simplicity of life, khadi and village industries, decentralization of economic units, self-reliance and co-operation in economic affairs. Gandhi also introduced constructive programme to ameliorate social and economic injustice, which were rampant. In his order of sarvodaya, political institutions
would be decentralized where leaders become servicemen rather than party bosses. The state would remain as a symbol of non-violence with least interference in an individual's matters.

The national movement had provided the best platform for the awakening of women's consciousness in India. The ideology and programmes which were used for this purpose were profoundly indigenous. After independence, this trend declined immensely. As Clymes Augustine and A.K. Sharma note, "The tradition of national movement has given way to modernization and urbanization which sucked away Gandhian tradition. Women's issues were increasingly sidelined as the national elite were reconstructing society in a modern, scientific and industrial setting."28

Though industrialization and modernization had not solved many of the problems, they provided a wider canvas for rational and scientific endeavor in ideology. The 1970s in India had witnessed a reawakening of women's consciousness. The contact with European feminist ideologies helped them to locate themselves.29 During the national movement the rejuvenation of women was not essentially feminist in character. These movements were liberal, national and confined to the existing social framework. But the second phase represents a typical feminist upsurge. As the movement took roots in Indian soil, efforts have
been made to seek traditional answers to women's problems. In this context Gandhian ideology becomes very relevant.

In recent years there has been an alarming increase of dowry deaths, sexual violence, and harassment of women, which reveals a large-scale societal breakdown. Women's position is worsening practically in every sphere, with the exception of some gains in education and employment for middle class women. Women are still found in least paid jobs, long working hours, bearing full responsibility for the home and family. This is the stark reality for millions of women in India, which reflects the wide range of disparity of the whole population, and Gandhian framework can be applied in this situation.

There was a substantial agreement between Gandhi and feminists during the freedom struggle. Since Gandhi and his women followers did not call themselves feminists, the feminism with which Gandhi can be identified is social feminism, "a particular version of feminism whose most important characteristic is focus on values, and experiences identified with women." Gandhi and the women's movement leaders during his time agreed that women should have equal rights, and they worked resolutely for these rights, but they believed that rights in themselves would not transform women's conditions. By performing their duties, women would elevate themselves and others. Since Gandhi and
these women were convinced that women were generally superior to men, they wondered why they would want to be more like men. Fellow nationalists and women activists never subjected Gandhi to any strong criticism for his feminist ideology. His close women followers in his ashrams and elsewhere revered him as 'father' accepting his authority without a murmur. Sarojini Naidu, a woman of intellect and power who had fought with success for the women's franchise and who served as president of the Congress in 1925, described Gandhi as "my father, my leader, my master."\textsuperscript{32}

However, there have been subsequent critiques from a broadly feminist perspective. They hold that the participation of women in the freedom struggle failed to shake the structure of patriarchy in a profound way. Sujata Patel questions Gandhi's claim that woman is biologically suited to work at home. In her opinion, Gandhi does not provide any grounds for a serious attack on patriarchy.\textsuperscript{33}

Ketu Katrak maintains, "Like other Indian social reformers, Gandhi reinforced British liberal and imperial policies since he did not challenge women's subordinate position in patriarchal family structures."\textsuperscript{34} On the other hand Clymes Augustine and A. K. Sharma conclude, "For a theoretical frame work of feminist ideology, the sarvodaya (the good of all) philosophy of Gandhi would be the best frame of reference."\textsuperscript{35}
The main reason why Gandhi is criticized by many modern feminists is because of the apparent inconsistencies in his writings about women resulting from a continuous evolution of ideas. Infact Gandhi never claimed to be consistent in his writings. He admitted, "My language is aphoristic, it lacks precision. It is therefore open to several interpretations." Feminist opponents of Gandhi can find passages that prove he contributed to the subjection of women, and feminist supporters can find passages that prove he contributed to women's liberation. In this context it is appropriate to quote Madhu Kishwar, "Gandhi is one of the few leaders whose practice was far more radical than the words he used for describing it." His public pronouncements on the condition of women were at times conservative, but his letters to women activists and his egalitarian practices in the ashrams were often radical. Similarly while he accepted the special position of women in the house and continued to affirm it, his acts and their implication belied it and showed that by 1945-46 he was convinced of women's equal role outside the home.

Another reason for the criticism of Gandhi is that the feminists themselves are divided in their assessment of Gandhi. There is a major divide between various feminists and Gandhians. Contemporary feminism connotes wide-ranging and often conflicting perspectives. The greatest division in feminist research
on Gandhi seems to be between social feminism and equity feminism. Social feminism is not acceptable to many equity feminists, which is the radical version of feminism. Equity feminism is mainly useful in analyzing Western movements. In the Indian context an ideology, based solely on gender feminism tends to be rejected. Therefore there must be a “comprehensive and inclusive ideology and movement that incorporates and yet transcends gender specificity. We must create a feminist movement, which struggles against those things which can clearly be shown as oppressing women, whether based on race, sex, or class, or resulting from imperialism.”

Women have endured male domination for a long time and have tolerated the patriarchal structure for too many centuries. Therefore it takes time to change mental frames which have been embedded in the collective consciousness for centuries. As Rekha Pandey points out that women's oppression is not only widespread but also the deepest in that it is the hardest to eradicate; abolition of women's subjection cannot be effected like the abolition of a class society. It takes time to bring about changes in the mental frames of both the oppressor and the oppressed. Gandhi was keenly aware of the dimension of interiority in the transformation of society, when he said, “All true change comes from within. Any change brought about by pressure, is worthless.”
Today women have neither lost all their disabilities nor have won an equal place in the national mainstream, but they have come a long way from the dark corridors of oppression. Gandhi made woman into a subject, making her realize that she had freedom, qualities and attributes which are crucial to contemporary society. In a radical reconstruction, he gave her confidence in herself and her essence. Gandhi may not be equated with those feminists who insist that woman is capable of performing anything and should be free to perform any function that man does. For him, the functions of man and woman are fundamentally different. What Gandhi did for the Indian woman was he stirred her into regaining her individual dignity in a male dominated world; shed her sense of inferiority and the perception that she is the weaker sex. He enabled her to insist on her male counterpart to recognize her as his equal and treat her with due respect. Gandhi, more than others, inspired the Indian woman of all classes, to realize and claim a complementary status with man. This in essence, was his vision of the emancipated woman.
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