

Mahatma Gandhi and Concept of NREGA in Rural Women Empowerment

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi always argued for development of villages, particularly with empowerment and upliftment of status of rural women in India. He deeply emphasized for equality of women with education and economic independence. Nearly 70% of country's population lives in rural India. So, in the modern age of globalization, the development of rural and remote areas is essential for overall development of the country. Among various programmes, organized by Govt. of India since independence, NREGA has proved to be one of the most effective tool for poverty removal and employment generation in India. It has also proved to be one of the most effective women empowerment programme, achieving its ultimate goal for financial independence to rural women significantly. The present study is an attempt to evaluate the impact of NREGA on empowerment of rural women. It also deals with a brief discussion of unique features of NREGA as a poverty removal and wage employment programme in India.

Introduction:

Mahatma Gandhi always claimed that a woman is completely equal to man and encouraged for social and economic empowerment of rural women. He believed that the difference between men and women was only physical and advocated that in many matters such as tolerance, patience and sacrifice the Indian woman is superior to the male. He believed that Indian paternal society is the root cause of inequality between men and women. He said "Intellectually, mentally, and spiritually, a woman is equivalent to a male and she can participate in every activity." He felt that "only when the woman is liberated from the slavery of the kitchen, that her true spirit may be discovered." He was of the view that the household responsibilities should be shared among men and women; he encouraged women to outgrow the traditional responsibilities and also participate in national affairs. He wrote, "Men and women need to be educated equally in house work because the home belongs to both."

As we look back and compare the condition of women with present scenario of globalization, there is enormous progress in the social and economic condition of them in India, reflecting the fundamental agreement of equality between men and women. Women in India now participate in all activities like politics, media, education, science and technology etc. Mrs. Indira Gandhi, who served as Prime Minister of India for an aggregate period of fifteen years is the world's longest serving woman Prime Minister. In 1990s, grants from foreign donor agencies enabled the formation of new women oriented NGOs self help group and NGOs such as self employed women's Association (SEWA) have played a major role in women's rights in India. After declaration of year 2001 as the year of women's Empowerment (Swashakti), and National Policy for the empowerment of women in 2001 by the Govt. of India, the condition of women has gradually changed to better level. So many women can go to work in offices, banks, hospitals education institution factories, farmer etc without any fear and hesitation. In agriculture and allied sectors, large number of female labours are employed in rural India. According to a 1991 world bank report, women accounted for 93% of total employment in dairy production in India. Women constitute 51% of the total employed in forest based small scale enterprises.

Gandhi advocated that without development of rural India, our nation will be in dark eclipse. He deeply emphasized for the need of women's economic independence in India. He always agreed for proposal to bearing women out of their traditional mental fetters and into a better more dignified life.