

JAIN WOMEN, KHADI AND SPACE

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Abstract:

Gandhian influence has been empowering on the Indian women, including the Jain women. The paper explores the interconnection between religion, khadi and the space generated through Khadi especially for the Jain women. Khadi made the way for the empowerment of the Jain women in the modern India. The journey of the Jain women expanded beyond the Khadi. The space that Khadi provided them is the focus of the study.

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Introduction:

Gandhi's 'Experiments with truth' the title of his autobiography never ceased. ¹Khadi was one of the powerful expressions of freedom movement of the Gandhian era. Though it was an instrument of nationalist movement, it brought about multiple implications in the Indian history. Khadi enabled the women empowerment. The paper studies the case studies of the Jain women with the special reference to khadi and the space enabled and expanded by the Gandhian movement centering Khadi.

Gandhi's perception of social reforms:

Gandhi received unique and unparalleled attention in his life time. ²Broadly speaking Gandhi would fall in the category of those reformers whose models were typically Indian and not Western. He had a deep sense of appreciation for Indian ideals and wanted a change in the Indian society in conformity with them. ³ Khadi

stood for the fight against the British power and privilege structure. Gandhian thoughts and activities left a far-reaching influence on the nation and the people.

Gandhi and women:

Women have been generally looked as inferior. However, Gandhi's faith in the strength of woman as woman was firm and unshakable; and the Indian woman responded to his faith in untold measure. ⁴ Women used to attend his meetings and there have been a number of occasions where he addressed the women's associations and gatherings. He inspired them to emancipate themselves from social abuses. ⁵ Gandhi was a manager and executive, a supremely practical leader for change. ⁶ Women held him in high esteem. ⁷Gandhi indeed empowered women.

¹ Lloyd Rudolph & Susanne Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and other essays Gandhi in the World and at home*, New Delhi, 2006, p.viii.

² Bijay Kumar Das & Chintamani Bharati (Vol.ed.) *Mahatma Gandhi in Odia*, in *Gandhi and Indian language Vol 4* (Series editor) G N Devy & Shyam Pakhare, Mumbai, 2023, p.2.

³ Pratibha Jain, *Gandhian Ideals, Social Movements and Creativity*, Jaipur, 1985, pp.143-144.

⁴ Aloo Dastur & Usha Mehta, *Gandhi's contribution to the emancipation of women*, Bombay, 1991, p.V.

⁵ *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi Volume 39 (February 1929)*, New Delhi, 1972, p.447.

⁶ Alan Axelrod, *Gandhi CEO*, New York, 2010, P.11.

⁷ K.K.Chaudhary, *Source Material for a history of the freedom movement in India Mahatma Gandhi Vol III, Khilafat Movement Vol X*, Mumbai, 2007, p.19.

Gandhi and Khadi:

Gandhi was a man of deep convictions.⁸ The father of nation Gandhi initiated the concept of hand woven and hand spun cloth that is Khadi. It became an integral and important part of the Indian national movement. Gandhi considered manufacturing of hand spun khaddar as one of the pillars of swaraj.⁹ It became the instrument of breaking the multiple levels of hegemonic structures. Spinning of Khadi was a way to decentralize the economy. In fact, through Khadi Gandhi was able to solve multiple issues simultaneously.

Jain women and Khadi:

Khadi became the instrument to fight against the patriarchy for the Jain women. It refers to the breaking of the silence. In fact, the entire Khadi drive was initiated by the man that is Mahatma Gandhi but turned out to be supportive of women freedom. Jain women which is the focus of the paper, did not remain the passive subjects. Khadi and the fight for the nation's independence granted the Jain women the identity of their own. Khadi in a way provided them their own space. Spinning and use of Khadi was not just mass movement but it also centered around the economic as well as social empowerment of underprivileged sections of the society. Khadi was part of Sarvodaya vision of Mahatma Gandhi.

Smt.Maniben Nanavati (1905-2000):

The life and work of Smt.Maniben Chandulal Nanavati, Jain women can be considered for the case study for the empowerment of the Jain women through Khadi. The participation in the making of Khadi started as anti-colonial narrative. Maniben Nanavati was one

of the followers and participants of Gandhian movement. Gandhi considered her like her daughter.

¹⁰She is lovingly and popularly referred as Ba.

Maniben wore self-made white *Khadi* saris and even kept the limit of having 5 to 6 saris at ones.¹¹ Maniben serves as interesting case study. She belonged to prosperous industrial family background.¹² Making of Khadi cloth can be seen as the participation in the public activity in the mainstream space. Jain women by participating in this also contributed to the nation making.

Conclusion:

By locating Khadi movement in the larger context of the women movement and the Jain studies, the present study tries to find out the connections and relations between various variables. This paper addresses the journey of the Jain women empowerment through the Khadi movement. The intersectionality has been studied in the present study. Khadi was inclusive drive. Gandhi was not just political activist but even socioeconomic and cultural activism were not left out of Gandhian vision.

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⁸ Gopalkrishna Gandhi (ed.) *The Oxford India Gandhi essential writings*, New Delhi, 2019, p.xxx.

⁹ *Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol.26, 1970, p 325

¹⁰ Letter from Gandhi to Maniben Nanavati dated 10 January, 1947 quoted in Rita Patil, (Ed.), *Gandhi for All Times*; the letter has been part of collection of Mr. Harit Mehta, the Granson of Maniben.

¹¹ Manu Pandit, *Khadi Mata Maniben Nanavati Shatabdi Vandana 1905-2004*, [Gujarati], Ahmedabad, 2004, pp.50,108.

¹² Hemali Sanghavi, *Contribution of the Jains to the economic and socio-cultural development of Bombay city (1860-1960)*, Mumbai, 2019, p.273.

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