



EMPOWERMENT AND NATION-BUILDING: MADHAV SADASHIV GOLWALKAR'S PERSPECTIVES ON WOMEN IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70333/ijeeks-03-08-015>

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Article Info: - Received : 12 August 2024

Accepted : 28 August 2024

Published : 30 August 2024

Abstract

This paper explores Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar's perspectives on women's empowerment in post-independence India, emphasizing their role in nation-building. Despite the constitutional provisions that promote gender equality and women's rights, women remain excluded from significant spheres of social, economic, and political life. Golwalkar, a prominent thinker and leader of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), viewed women's empowerment as essential to societal progress. He emphasized women's roles within the family, society, and organized institutions, highlighting their potential to foster national pride and serve the greater good. Golwalkar believed in empowering women not through self-indulgence but by encouraging their contribution to society, aligning with traditional Indian values. However, his views on women were limited by patriarchal beliefs, often restricting their roles to the domestic sphere and promoting chastity and celibacy. While his ideology aimed to spiritually uplift society, it also faced criticism for being reactionary and irrelevant to modern liberal democracy. The paper critically examines these views, presenting a nuanced understanding of Golwalkar's legacy in shaping the discourse on women and empowerment in India.

Keywords: *Women's Empowerment, Nation-Building, Madhav Golwalkar, Patriarchy, Indian Constitution.*



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1. INTRODUCTION

After India's independence, the Indian Constitution embraced democracy, which rests on principles of equality, liberty, and freedom for all, including both men and women. Despite this, women are often excluded from various spheres, particularly in the social, economic, and political domains. The United Nations has identified women as the "world's largest excluded category." Mahatma Gandhi also recognized that the

backwardness of women was a significant barrier to progress. In 1921, he wrote in *Young India* that women, who he described as the nobler sex, embody sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith, and knowledge. Gandhi stated, "For all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking, or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity—the female sex, not the weaker sex" (CW. XXI: p. 105). He believed women had the right to participate in all spheres

of life and, like men, had equal rights to freedom and liberty. "She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activity as a man is in his," (Speech at Bhagini Samaj, Bombay, February 1918).

To promote the equal treatment of women in political life, the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were enacted at the grassroots level, providing women with training and practical experience in decision-making processes. These amendments reserved seats and leadership positions for women in all grassroots democratic institutions, especially Panchayats, significantly influencing the political processes in rural India. In this study, the researcher explores the concept of women's empowerment and the constitutional provisions that safeguard women's rights in India. The research also examines M.S. Golwalkar's views on these issues.

2. POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that enables individuals to gain control over their own lives. It develops people's capacity to act on the issues they deem important, improving their own lives, their communities, and society as a whole. Empowerment is inherently social and multi-faceted, encompassing sociological, psychological, economic, and other aspects. It can occur at individual, group, and community levels. As a social process, empowerment unfolds progressively, much like a journey. While other aspects of empowerment may vary depending on context, the connection between the individual and the community remains fundamental.

Women's political empowerment is founded on three essential and non-negotiable principles: (a) equality between men and women; (b) women's right to fully develop their potential; and (c) women's right to self-representation and self-determination. The core of empowerment is indeed 'power.'

3. MAJOR CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

Several key constitutional provisions guarantee women's rights:

- Article 9 (1c) guarantees the right to form associations or unions.
- Article 14 ensures equality before the law for all citizens, including women.

- Article 15 (1) prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex, religion, race, caste, or place of birth. Article 15 (3) allows the State to make special provisions for women and children.
- Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in public employment, with Article 16 (2) prohibiting discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, or other factors, and Article 16 (4) allowing the State to reserve appointments for backward classes.
- Article 19 outlines freedoms, including:
 - Freedom of speech and expression.
 - Right to assemble peacefully without arms.
 - Right to form associations or unions.
 - Freedom of movement throughout India.
 - Right to reside and settle in any part of India.
 - Right to practice any profession or occupation.

Additionally, Article 21 protects life and personal liberty, which includes the right to live with dignity. Article 23 (1) prohibits exploitation, including human trafficking and forced labor. Article 39 (a) ensures economic equality, directing State policy to provide citizens with adequate livelihoods, while Article 39 (d) guarantees equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

4. GOLWALKAR'S VIEWS

Golwalkar believed that empowerment was not about self-indulgence but about contributing to society's and the nation's greater good. For him, women's empowerment was about their capacity to serve society with confidence and self-respect. He emphasized three roles for women:

- As Matrushakti (mother power) within the family.
- Extending this role to society on an individual level.
- Contributing to society through organized efforts for societal progress (Parijat, 1986).

5. WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE FAMILY

Golwalkar placed immense importance on the family, particularly the role of mothers in shaping future generations. He saw the home as the center for molding individuals dedicated to serving society. Mothers, according to Golwalkar, had the duty to instill values such as devotion to

duty, personal endeavor, love for the motherland, and readiness to serve society. He often recalled how his own mother's devotional chanting in his childhood had left a deep, holy imprint on him, which he believed prepared children for a life of service (Golwalkar, 1966).

6. MOLDING CHILDREN FOR THE NATION

Golwalkar believed that mothers should raise their children to be heroes, instilling pride in their country and its culture. He encouraged mothers to prepare their children to stand up for the nation and, if necessary, sacrifice for it. He cited examples from the Mahabharata, where Queen Vidula inspired her son Sanjay to display valor, and Kunti encouraged her sons to be lion-hearted warriors (Golwalkar, 1966).

7. WOMEN'S ROLE IN SOCIETY

Golwalkar extended a woman's role beyond the home, expecting women to serve society through their properly molded children. He encouraged women to work for the betterment of society, care for the needy, and contribute to community development. He urged women not to feel inferior or helpless but to see themselves as living emblems of Parashakti (supreme power). Women, he argued, should engage in educational and social activities that promote national pride, devotion to Dharma, and community well-being (Golwalkar, 1966).

8. MATRUSHAKTI IN ORGANIZING SOCIETY

Golwalkar revered women as manifestations of Shakti (power), believing they had the capability to solve their own problems. He likened women to Swami Vivekananda in their ability to organize for nation-building. Golwalkar was confident that Indian women would find their own ways of solving problems, consistent with Indian values, which emphasize the organic connection between family and society (Parijat, 1986).

9. GOLWALKAR'S VIEWS ON PROSTITUTION

Golwalkar took a pragmatic approach to social evils like prostitution, focusing on addressing root causes rather than simply condemning the behavior. He believed that improving the conditions of women in such professions could be achieved through education and devotion to Dharma and God (Kohli, 1993).

10. CONCLUSION

Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar was one of the significant thinkers of modern India. His influence extended to prominent figures such as Eknath Ranade, Deendayal Upadhyay, and even political leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani. Golwalkar introduced traditional Indian values into the modern context, blending spirituality with political and social action.

While his views were often criticized by liberal historians, who considered them reactionary, Golwalkar's focus on spirituality and moral values provided an alternative vision for nation-building. His ideas of empowerment, both for women and society, were rooted in selfless service and national pride.

However, some shortcomings in his thought on women remain. For instance, despite his acknowledgment of women's role in nation-building, his writings reflect a patriarchal mindset that limits women primarily to domestic roles. His inability to define women's roles beyond this sphere reflects the broader limitations of his ideology, which places heavy emphasis on celibacy, chastity, and traditional values prescribed centuries ago by figures like Manu. Golwalkar's thoughts, though rooted in ancient traditions, continue to offer a relevant perspective on nation-building and the moral development of individuals, advocating for a society not focused on materialism but on spiritual and moral upliftment.

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Cite this article as: Rajarshi Chakraborty (2024). Empowerment and Nation-Building: Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar's Perspectives on Women in Post-Independence India, *International Journal of Emerging Knowledge Studies*. 3(8), pp.517-520. <https://doi.org/10.70333/ijeks-03-08-015>