



Mahatma Gandhi's Views on Women Empowerment.

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ABSTRACT

The Historical status of women through ages reveals, that, in ancient times Indian women enjoyed equal status with men. But the status of women began to decline in 500 B.C, with smrities (ESP MANUSRUTI) with the Islamic invasion of Mughals. Medieval India was considered the dark age for Indian women, Many foreign conquest, which resulted in the decline of women status, modern Indian women starts a sort of a paradise. But one side she is going success side, and other side, the violence effected by her own family members. women achieved a lot in modern times, but in reality, still they have to travel a long way.

A Century ago, Mahatma Gandhi experimented and shown the way for the empowerment development and status of woman in India. Today the empowerment of woman has become one of the most important concerns of 21st Century. According to Mahatma Gandhi's opinions, women do not find their place in social and economic fields and they could not yield their self respect for them-selves nor they could become self-dependant in any walks of life. Gandhi inspired by Indian women and took concrete initiatives regarding women education which will bring them out of these old customs and rules. The article examines the importance and relevance of Mahatma Gandhi's views on issues that directly or indirectly impact the status of women in India.

An attempt is made in the present paper to understand Gandhi's views on women in the context of social, economic and political issue. It includes Mahatma Gandhi on social regeneration, equality of sex, pardha system, dowry system, marriage, widow re-marriage, divorce, women's honor, education, birth control, sterilization, views on women liberty, views on women upliftment, present position of women in India, The present position of women in India after Gandhi, and conclusions were discussed in this paper.

Key Words: Gandhi's views, women empowerment, status of women in ages.

INTRODUCTION

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. It's impossible to think about the welfare of the World unless the condition of the women is improved. Undoubtedly the Father of Nation, Mahatma Gandhi experimented in this field a Century ago and shown the way for the empowerment, development, and the status of women. Gandhi, throughout his life struggled very hard to the upliftment of the socially down-trodden, made significant contributions for the development of the status of the women in India. Gandhi's inspiring ideologies boosted women's morals and helped them to rediscover their self- esteem. Not only there was a general awakening among the women, but under Gandhi's leadership they entered in to the main stream taking part in the National movement. The love and respect he had for the women is truly the best friend of the women in the World. An attempt is made in the present paper to understand Gandhi's views on women in the context of social, economic and political issue. It includes Mahatma Gandhi on social regeneration, equality of sex, pardha system, dowry system, marriage, widow re-marriage, divorce, women's honor education, birth control, sterilization, views on women liberty, views on women upliftment, present position of women in India, The present position of women in India after Gandhi, and conclusions were also discussed in this paper.

Gandhi's views on Social, Economic and Political issues:

Gandhi respected traditions of the society, but not at the cost of loss of individual dignity. His practical and dynamic advice was "*It is good to swim in the waters of tradition, but to sink in them is suicide*". He never hesitated to criticize the evils which had gripped the Indian society, and tried to mobilize public opinion against such evils. He realized that there were deep-rooted customs hampering the development of women, and women's freedom from such shackles was necessary for the emancipation of the nation.

Gandhi has tremendous faith in women's inherent capacity for non-violence. And his experience of participation by women in politics from his days in South Africa till the end of his life bears testimony to the fact that they never failed his expectations. With Gandhi's inspiration they took the struggle right in to their homes and raised it to a amoral level. Women organized public meetings, sold khadi and prescribed literature, started picketing shops of liquor and foreign goods, prepared contraband salt, and came forward to face all sorts of atrocities, including in-human treatment by police officers and imprisonment. They came forward to give all that they had, their wealth and strength, their jewelry and belongings, their skills and labor-all with sacrifices for this unusual and unprecedented struggle. Gandhi often presented ideals before women, drawn from Indian traditions, Mythology and history. He often talked about Sita, Droupadhy, Damayanthi and Mirabai as great women. There is nothing new for a social reformer drawing inspiration from the traditions. He visualized the Indian women as new Sitas, Droupadhis and Damayanthis, "pure, firm and self-controlled".

Gandhi's views on equalities of sex:

The perception of the self is a matter of conditioning. The way men and women perceive themselves is also a matter of conditioning that had and is taking place since the dawn of human race on Earth. Given the biological differences, can women be psychologically different from man? Can women be cerebrally inferior to man? I'm sure that the answer would be clear 'NO'. Yet, differential conditioning over many a millennia have contributed to the perception that both men and women are different, both psychologically and cerebrally. Religion, customs and laws from times immemorial had neglected women to the backyards of human civilization. When you fear the power of the other and when you have no means to equal the other, you connive and lay traps for the subjugation of the other. This is what the history of hither to existing man's civilization has done to women, save expectations like Mahatma Gandhi.

Pardha System:

Chastity cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of the pardha. It must grow within and it must be capable of withstanding every unsorted temptation (Young India, 3rd February 1927). Why is all these morbid anxiety about purity? Did women say in the matter of male purity? Female or male purity cannot be superimposed from without a matter of evolution from within individual self effort (Young India, 25th November 1926). The Indian men have been unduly obsessed with female chastity right from the ancient times. The Mahatma was different to the extent that he demanded male chastity also. The Hindu pardha or the Muslim pardha cannot protect chastity, self-control and purity of mind can do absolutely right.

Dowry System:

Dowry system is product of the caste system. The abolition of caste will lead to the abolition of dowry (Harijan, 23rd May 1936). Demanding dowry is a kin to discrediting womanhood. Young men who demand dowry should be excommunicated. Parents of girls should cease to be dazzled by English degrees and should not hesitate to travel outside their little castes and provinces to secure true, gallant young men for their daughters. The Mahatma was a very complex personality. He expected the woman to play a complimentary role in the society and wanted woman to scale the highest peaks of life in the female domain, not realizing fact that the complimentary status of women was a product of the caste system. He wanted women to wait till the ideal suitor comes. The Mahatma had a very sublime and sharp view of women and did everything to protect the pleasing side of the traditions.

Widow Re-Marriage System:

Widowhood imposed by religion or custom is an unbearable yoke and defiles the home by secret vice and degrades religion. In order to save Hinduism, enforced widowhood must be ridden. Child widows must be duly and well married and not remarried. They were never really married (Young India, 5th August, 1926). One cannot have a better view on Widow Remarriage than what the Mahatma has presented. He was clearly against Child Marriages and wanted child widows to be well married because they were not really married. He was the man who led the country by example. In 1918, when Hiralal's wife died of influenza, he was fifty and wanted to remarry. Gandhi did not allow his son to remarry. He later on relented but wanted Hiralal to marry only a widow. Hiralal was emotionally bankrupt after his wife's death and took to alcohol and women, only to be found dead in the Sewree hospital in midtown Bombay (Mahatma Gandhi, His Life and by Times, p261 by Louis Fischer and Mahatama versus Gandhi, p15 by Dinkar Joshi)

Divorce:

Marriage confers no right upon one partner to demand obedience of the other. However, divorce is not the only alternative. Marriage is a state of discipline. When one partner breaks discipline, the other can break the bond. The breach here is moral and not physical. It precludes divorce. Hinduism regards each as absolute equal of the other. Hinduism leaves the individual absolutely free for the sake of self-realization, for which and which alone he or she is born (Young India, 21st October, 1926). The Mahatma believed that marriage was not serfdom for men and women and that men and women had equal status. The loss of discipline is a moral breach and divorce is not a solution. Moral breach can be corrected by moral restraint and repentance. More importantly, he says that Hinduism offers the freedom of self-realization for both men and women. The Mahatma is clearly against any kind of male chauvinism.

Women's Honor:

It is physically impossible to violate a woman against her will. The outrage takes place only when she gives way to fear or does not realize her moral strength. If she cannot meet the assailant's physical might, her purity will give her the strength to die before he succeeds in violating her, for example, Sita (Harijan, 14th January, 1940). When a woman is assaulted, her primary duty is self protection. God has given her nails and teeth. She must use them with all her strength and if need be, die in the effort (Harijan, 01st March, 1942).

Education System:

Education enables women to uphold their natural rights. Men and women are complementary to each other. Man is supreme in the outward activities and therefore he should have a greater knowledge thereof. Home life is entirely the sphere of woman and therefore in domestic affairs, in the upbringing and education of children women ought to have more knowledge. Unless courses of instruction are based on a discriminating appreciation of these basic principles, the fullest life of man and woman cannot be developed (Harijan, 27th February, 1937). The Mahatma's views on women's education are based on family ideals because he assumes that man is supreme in the extra-mural activities and that woman is supreme in intra-mural activities. Hence, education imparted to both men and women should be according to their pre-ordained stations in life. The Mahatma's views on women's education are based on his belief in woman being a complement of man and are therefore out of sync in the modern context.

Birth Control :

Brahmacharya is an infallible sovereign remedy. Artificial methods are like putting a premium upon vice. They make man and woman reckless. Adoption of artificial methods must result in imbecility and nervous prostration. The remedy will be found to be worse than the disease. It is immoral to seek escape from the consequences of one's acts. Moral results can only be produced by moral restraints. All other restraints defeat the very purpose for which they are intended (Young India, 12th March, 1925). The use of contraceptives kills the desire to exercise self restraint. Man must understand that woman is his companion and not a means of satisfying his carnal desire.

The purpose of human creation was wholly different from that of the satisfaction of animal wants (Key to Health, pp.52-54). Sex is only meant for creation. Any other use is a sin against God and humanity (Harijan, 28th March, 1936). Woman must be taught the art of saying no even to her husband. She has rights as well as duties. Given the impossibility of the task, the Mahatma's solution of Brahmacharya, although virtuous in every sense of the term, can only be considered as one of the remedies of birth control.

Sterilization :

I consider it inhuman to impose sterilization law on the people. I am against the use of contraceptives in case of women. I do not mind voluntary sterilization in case of man since he is the aggressor (Amrita Bazaar Patrika, 12th January, 1935). While the Mahatma conceded Sterilization for men because he thought that man was the aggressor, he was clearly against the use of contraceptives by women. His thoughts about self control and purity seems to have clouded his mind and prevented him from making practical big time solutions to big time problems like the problem of population explosion. The Mahatma was convinced about the need of self control in matters of sex. The overriding belief in self control was also because of his personal success in pursuing Brahmacharya. While self control is a very good solution, a virtuous solution by every means, it cannot be expected from the entire population. The Mahatma always led the society by example. In South Africa, a young Indian married woman successfully assaulted Manilal's continence (Brahmacharya).

When the dereliction was discovered, Gandhi made a public scandal, fasted, persuaded the woman to shave her hair and said he would never allow Manilal to marry. He only relented under Ba's pressure, in March 1927 when Manilal was thirty five.

Liberty System:

Gandhi worked not only for the political emancipation of the nation, but for liberation of all the suppressed and oppressed sections of society. One of the note worthy results of his life-work has been the awakening of women, which made them shed their deep-rooted sense of inferiority and rise to dignity and self- esteem. For Gandhi, "When woman, whom we all call abala becomes sabala, all those who are helpless will become powerful". The welfare of the weaker sections of society was dear to his heart. He had no qualms about the priority of social over political ends. In his opinion, to postpone social reform till after the attainment of Swaraj.

Gandhiji's view's on Women upliftment:

- In Vedic times men and women are equal in all walks of life, including the religious and the instinctual. Therefore, in proclaiming the perfect equality of men & women.
- Gandhiji was against-
 1. The pernicious system of child marriage. He considered such marriage as initio null and void and as such, no marriage at all.
 2. All social and religious barriers to widow remarriage. In the case of adult widows, especially those with children; he would have liked them to remain true to their marriage vows and to their first love, rather than to remarry. If a widow could not or did not wish to live alone, she have every right to remarry and society must not look down such marriage.
 3. The purdah system. It crippled not only the free movement of women but interfered with their advancement and their capacity for doing work useful to the society.
 4. The dowry system. For the middle and poor classes it was a nightmare. It was also on this account that while there was joy on the male child, there was expressed of silent mourning on the birth of a female child.
 5. Heavy expenditure in connection with marriages. He wanted to simplify marriage ceremonials. He was against feasting on such occasions. Many marriages were celebrated in the Ashram. All that was done was the recitation of the simple Ashram prayer and some advice from Gandhiji to young couple on how they should live a contended and happy life of service. At the end of this simple ceremony, he would present to the couple a copy of Bhagavad-Gita.
 6. Gandhi revolutionized not only Indian politics, but also the whole perception of life for women

Present position of women in India:

- A 1997 report claimed that at least 5,000 women die each year because of dowry deaths, and at least a dozen die each day in 'kitchen fires' thought to be intentional.
- According to UNICEF's "State of the World's Children-2009" report, 47% of India's women aged 20–24 were married before the legal age of 18, with 56% in rural areas. The report also showed that 40% of the world's child marriages occur in India.
- The National Crime Records Bureau reported in 1998 that the growth rate of crimes against women would be higher than the population growth rate by 2010. Earlier, many cases were not registered with the police due to the social stigma attached to rape and molestation cases.
- Through the Panchayat Raj institutions, over a million women have actively entered political life in India. As per the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, all local elected bodies reserve one-third of their seats for women. Although the percentage of women in various levels of political activity has risen considerably, women are still under-represented in governance and decision making positions.

Conclusion:

Lastly we can conclude that the position of woman in India compared to other countries is poor. In some villages they are considering woman as a kitchen bee. This type of attitude has to be changed. But compared to the early days, these days' women are coming out freely and participating in every field. It's a good sign of women upliftment & empowerment. So, today also need to know Gandhiji thought of women upliftment. On a scale of one to ten, the Mahatma comes out with flying colors for his views on the various aspects concerning women in our society.

Considering the fact that he wrote his ideas about 70 to 80 years ago, we can set aside some of his views such as the women being a complement of men in matters of occupation and education and female chastity in the context of women's honor. The Mahatma, by far, can be considered the best friend of women in India and the world. The Mahatma's purity of thought and honest intentions are beyond question. No other man in the entire history of India or in the world had such godly ideas about women. For both men and women, to have a better perspective of each other and life, Gandhian literature will continue to be a prescription for many years to come.

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