

International Multidisciplinary
Research Journal

*Indian Streams
Research Journal*

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'A WOMAN' THROUGH THE PERSPECTIVE OF MAHATMA GANDHI

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ABSTRACT

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi, the social reformer and the Great leader known for his social and political stance to wash out the inherent social evils from the Indian society. His strong and convincing appeals help to eradicate the social injustice and the social wrongs committed against the women of the country through ages. His every viewpoint echoes his spiritual life showing the human values and powerfully appealing to the society. Through this paper it is the humble attempt of mine to re-open the voice of Gandhiji as the need in Today's scenario. I conceive the present paper, as there is need to restate the facts about Gandhian philosophy. It is effort of mine to interpret known facts in a way which are appearing significant from years and even today to me.



KEYWORDS- Society, Women, Status, Development.

INTRODUCTION :

To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. 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. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If nonviolence is the law of our being, the future is with woman. Who can make a more effective appeal to the heart than woman?

[To the Women of India (Young India, Oct. 4, 1930)].

When we read such mature and conscious verdicts, the name of the great Mahatma enters prior to our mind. Every thought of Gandhiji builds a stirring and innovating emotion in the living human being. This paper is an upshot of the similar feelings because the questions of women's emancipation are still the passionate subject to be thought over

Indian traditions, mythology and history are the sources from where Gandhi developed his ideas about women. He was under the spell of Sita, Draupadi, Damayanti and Mirabai as icons of women - "pure, firm and self-controlled" He has very inventive interpretation of the mythological characters that gives a sight of vibrant aspect in his belief and ideology. He affirms that Seeta represents the woman handing over his point of Swadeshi,

who only wore "cloth made in motherland" and thus reserved her soul and body to be pure and thus could defeat the strength and ego of Ravan. He interprets this- "dazzling purity" of a woman could disarm even the most beastly of men. Draupadi's appeal to Krishna when is to be understood as following one's own conscience. For him Mirabai, symbolizes courage, who followed her cherished conduit by discarding the so called contemporary social norms. He likes to see a woman as sister than to be an ideal wife or mother. He used to say "a sister is to all the world, while a wife hands herself over to one man. Women have the prospective to do vast service to the suppressed and weaker sections of the society, to be the Sisters of kindness". He enhanced the self-esteem of woman's housework, advising his men followers to take to spinning and to do routine works in everyday life. He sympathizes the women, but he does not want to pity them all the time.

Throughout a 'Renaissance' (1860 to 1960), we Indian went through the life cycle of a tremendous change. From Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Jawaharlal Nehru, our motherland has a grand galaxy of great men and women of ethical courage and intellectual purpose. These persons have born, lived, tried to change and died nobly. These people strive for the ethical social atmosphere. Putlibai, the mother of Gandhi influenced much on the views of Gandhiji who formed his ethics and compassion. Being the emotional personality he cares for the pains of others. He believed that women could do much to transform India on all levels. According to him equal rights for women and men are necessary. In a letter written to RajKumariAmritKaur from Wardha on 20-10-1936, Gandhi writes,

If you women only realize your dignity and privilege, and make full sense of it for mankind, you will make it much better than it is. But man has delighted in enslaving you and you have proved willing slaves till the slave and holders have become one in the crime on degrading humanity. My special function from childhood, you might say, has been to make women realize her dignity. I was once slave holder myself but Ba proved an unwilling slave and thus "opened my eyes to my mission.

He opposes the enslavement of women which is enforced from ages. He wants to open the vision of the women to make them feel the need of the existence with equal right and dignity.

At the present stage of India, when we see that the hoary and comprehensive effects both of what we captivated of Gandhi's teachings and of what we consciously or unconsciously rejected of his ideas are becoming noticeable and when the present generation in India is seeking to reconsider what it has inherited, Gandhiji's legacy should be of particular relevance and interest. There is need to uncover the roots of Gandhi's way of thinking, feeling his deeply religious nature, his moral views, his unsophisticated universal sense and his special intimation to awakening the Indian society and develop the nation through the great ideas.

To understand the role of Gandhiji played in improving the position of women in society, it is essential to look at women's status relevant at that time. When Gandhi emerged in to the political scenario, social evil like child marriage and dowry system was widespread Indian women have an average lifespan of only twenty seven years. Death of women in labor was the common phenomenon. Women education was not popular and hence the percentage of women with even basic education was as low as two percent. The patriarchal social system provides very low and negligible places for the women. The subordinate status with purdah system was in full vogue in Northern India. They are not even permitted to keep their feet out of their houses without the company of male companion. It was in such a dismal milieu that Gandhi took the responsibility of shouldering a social crusade that led to a major reorientation of the common notion of women in the Indian society.

Gandhiji felt that there was a need to change the mindset of the male community concerning women. The way men and women perceive themselves was also a matter of habituation that had and is taking place since the dawn of human race on earth. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation sought to bring the revolutionary change in the status of women in the first half of the 20th century. Being a practical idealist he believed that if we want to create a Ram Rajya, the perfect state, men and women should work together as equal members of the society. He believed that the discrimination against women is an anachronism. He rejected the differences between the status of man and woman. He emphasized that the son and daughter in the family should treat equally. He is totally opposed the gender discrimination. He was very much against the fond of the Indian society for Boy child. The girl child faced failure to get respect. They were not sure about the survival though being the second half of the society. He states:

I fail to see any reason for jubilation over the birth of a son and for mourning over that of a daughter. Both are God's gifts. They have an equal right to live, and are equally necessary to keep the world going.

Traditionally woman is called abala, a person without strength. But Gandhiji believed that a woman has special type of strength and had a capacity to establish her place in the society. He understood that woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacity. He did not ready to believe that women are subordinate and inferior to men. He said: "if by strength is mean moral power, then woman is immeasurably men's superior" (Tikekar S. R. p-243).

"Womanhood is not restricted to the kitchen", he opined and felt that "Only when the woman is liberated from the slavery of the kitchen, that her true spirit may be discovered". HE does not mean that women should give up their house hold duties, woman should not cook. Women, according to him, are full of strength and have ability to walk shoulder to shoulder of men at every walk of life. He called women as the noble sex. He was not ready to except the distinction between men and women. He encouraged women to do cerebral work and men to help in cooking, cleaning and caring, predictably 'women's chores'. He alleged that women are the strong persons and so he advised them to take part in the freedom struggle. His appeal to the women brought the tremendous change in them and they joined the social and political movement. His plea not only affected the women of his time but is suitable for the universal application of every century for their existential stance. Every determination of his shows that he is the zealous lover of humanity and implacable enemy of all injustice and inequalities. He had almost an instinctive understanding of women and their problems. He is against the dowry system. He expected mutual consent, mutual love and mutual respect between husband and wife. He cultivated that the widowhood is the epidemic in the life of a female. It is an evil system constructed by the patriarchal point of view. He realized that the ratification of any kind of legislation would not help but enlightened public perception would be a boon. This according to him is the unreligious thing.

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). He enforced the remarriages of the widows. He was against the child marriages. He felt that the life of a woman should be based on humanity and not on the established norms. He wanted that that the women should get active participation in all spheres of life including politics, economical fields. He opposed to call woman a weaker sex. He believed that fundamentally, man and woman are one; their problems must be in one essence. The soul in both is the same. Each is a complement of the other. He emphasized being equal means being equal in every respect. The one cannot live without the other's active help. He insisted the respective place to every individual. Gandhiji, by far, can be measured the best friend of women in India and the world. The Mahatma's purity of thought and candid intention are beyond question. No other man except Gandhiji had such pure and touching ideas about the female community. And so even after many years his philosophies has been read and will be read with the same curiosity and provide the best perspectives to every generation. Mahatma is the divine historical figure of the modern age which will remain the guide for the coming generation. Every thought of his will prove the pierce of great architect for the society and who design the great picture of humanity, equality, non-violence and many more. I am sure that he will remain in the minds of the people and be renowned as the best historian from our country.

Gandhi visualized Women's access into national politics through non-violent methods winning incredible results. He believed the women to be aloof from all sort of corruption including mental moral physical and financial aspects of life and thus the politics he imagined to be the type of politics of which very base was service truth and morality. He had marvelous faith in the innate capacity of women in support of non-violence. With this inspiration and call from Gandhi the contemporary women were swayed in the freedom struggle for Swaraj sweeping all taboos and age old customs such as untouchability, and caste system. This contribution of women feminized the nationalism of the time. And all this was happening when Gandhi did not ever challenged the women to come out of the age old traditions.

Gandhi had clear cut ideas about the economic aspect and perspective of women's life. He expects the equivalent role of women in all spheres of life. He does not look upon them as merely looking after the children and household but also sharing the financial responsibilities of the family by taking up some work, to add-on the

income of the family. For him the spinning, was perchance the best occupation they could take on. Gandhi's vision of Ramraj, was free from all exploitation. He would say "Spinning and weaving for women are 'the first lesson in the school of industry' and the spinning wheel can be the 'widow's loving companion', livelihood for the poor family and a means to add-on the income of the family, and for the well-to-do women, it would be a means to relate their lives to those country's poor women." He looked at women the best managers of the families, hence in view of him they can be best managers in the financial matters of the families.

Certainly, all the ideas in the world are subject to place, person and time, so also are the ideas of Gandhi about women. He had and has such a tremendous influence over so many men and women of the world of many generations and yet many others will continue to be the followers of his ideas in the ages to come.

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