

Gandhi's Views on Gender Equality

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Abstract: *Gender Equality refers to the equal human rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not imply that men and women will become equal, but that the duties, rights, responsibilities and opportunities of men and women will not be determined on the basis of whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not only an issue of women but it is also associated with men in the same way.*

Keywords: Gender, Equality, Gandhi

1. Introduction

Gandhi believed that men and women are equal as the same *atma* dwells in the women's body. [1] Gandhi unequivocally affirmed his uncompromising stand in the matter of gender equality. He believed that women are also individuals as men who should be given the liberty to make their own moral claims. But somehow or the other men has dominated women from ages past and the view imposed on them with regard to their inferiority, was part of the self interested teaching of men, which had left women in a state of helplessness and dependence. Gandhi was totally opposed to gender discrimination. Gandhi advocated a society which will be free of exploitation, establishing equality in all sphere of life which would not discriminate against human being on the basis of birth, colour, sex or nation. [2]

Today there is gross economic inequality. The basis of socialism is economic equality. There can be no *Ram Rajya* in the present state of iniquitous inequalities in which a few rolls is riches and the masses do not get even enough to eat. [3] He held that inequality ultimately led to exploitation, which for him was violence. Also, he held that all work socially useful is of equal worth, whether that of a scavenger, a doctor, a lawyer, a merchant or a minister. Hence work should get, if not equal, at least equitable remuneration. In his Ashram, all the inmates, engaged in physical or intellectual work, were treated as equals and everyone was provided with facilities, according to his or her needs. Gandhi made no distinction between men and women. [4]

Mahatma Gandhi views on Women Liberty:

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 notes 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. The main contribution of Gandhi to the cause of women lay in his absolute and unequivocal insistence on their personal dignity and autonomy in the family and in the society. Personal and social experience had convinced him that hitherto. [5] 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*. [6] According to Gandhi, a woman is the companion

of man, gifted with equal mental capacities. She has an equal right of freedom and liberty with him. But she is entitled to a supreme place in her own 'domain' or sphere of activity as man is in his. [7] Women's domain is her home and men's the outside world. It is women's right to rule the home. Man is master outside it. Man is the earner, women saves and spends. . . she is her children's educator and hence, mother of the nation. [8] Man has regarded women as his tool. She has learnt to be this tool and in the end found it easy and pleasurable to be such, because when one drags another in his fall the decent is easy. . . [9] while he agreed with those who felt that there is no power of resistance left in the women of India to fight against any evil whatever, yet he emphasised that women needed to take the task of their upliftment into their own hands. [10]

Gandhi had an immense faith in the inner strength of women. He held that women by nature are endowed with the qualities of love, non-violence, forgiveness and a remarkable capacity for sacrifice.

Against 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. [11] All that was done was the recitation of the simple Ashram prayer and some advice from Mahatma Gandhi to young couple on how they should live a contented and happy life of service. At the end of this simple ceremony, he would present to the couple a copy of *Bhagavad-Gita*.

Women Strength

Gandhi revolutionized not only Indian politics, but also the whole perception of life for women. Gandhi believed that all men and women are equal. He believed in the strength of every individual. His constant message to them was that bravery and courage were not the monopoly of men. [12] He gave the example of *Sita* who due to her moral strength was able to protect her from the hands of powerful *Rawan*. He believed that women of India had strength, ability, character and determination to stand on her own and work shoulder to shoulder with men in every walk of life. [13] Mahatma Gandhi in prayer meeting said that If one believes that women are weak, I would say that no women in the world are weak. All are strong. All those who have firm faith in their religion are strong, not weak. So I would suggest that we should first teach our boys and girls that they are not weak. [14]

Gandhi views on women Education

Gandhi was an ardent supporter of compulsory education for girls as well as boys. By education I mean an all round drawing out of the best in child and man body, mind and spirit, literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning. It is only of the means whereby man and women can be educated. Literacy in itself is no education. I would therefore begin the child's education by teaching it a useful handicraft and enabling it to produce from the movement it begins its training. I hold the highest development of the mind and the soul is possible under such a system of education. [15]

In his basic National Education Scheme elaborated in 1937, Gandhi proposed free and compulsory education for children of both sexes, from ages seven to fourteen. Gandhi felt that the educational curriculum should be adapted to the special needs of girls in order to prepare them to be mothers and homemakers. And most Indian women educators in the early twentieth century agreed with Gandhi that women's education must respond to the need of their different social role. As for women's education I am not sure whether it should be different from men's and when it should begin. But I am strongly of opinion that women should have the same facilities as men and even special facilities where necessary. [16]

Mahatma Gandhi View on Participation of Women in Politics:

M. K. Gandhi is known to be one of the few people who encouraged women's active participation in the freedom struggle-marking him as a rare promoter of women's liberation. In Gandhi words, My contribution to the great problem (of women's role in society) lies in my presenting for acceptance of truth and ahimsa in every walk of life, whether for individuals or nations. I have hugged the hope that in this, woman will be the unquestioned leader and, having thus found her place in human evolution, will shed her inferiority complex. Women's entry into national politics through non-violent methods brought miraculous results. On the one hand, women became aware of their inner strength, and on the other, the process brought human and moral elements into politics. [17]

Gandhi could see woman as connected with service and not with power. When a woman wrote to him in 1946 about the political scene and the paucity of women in it, he wrote: So long as considerations of caste and community continue to weigh with us and rule our choice, women will be well-advised to remain aloof and thereby build up their prestige. Women workers should enrol women as voters, impart or have imparted to them practical education, teach them to think independently, release them from the chains of caste that bind them so as to bring about a change in them which will compel men to realize women's strength and capacity for sacrifice and give her places of honour. If they will do this, they will purify the present unclear atmosphere. His advice to women was to teach people in villages simple lessons of hygiene and sanitation. Seeking power would be, for them, "reversion of barbarity". And still Gandhi believed that, Women must have votes and an equal status. But the problem does not end there. It only commences at the point

where women begin to affect the political deliberations of the nation. [18]

Mahatma Gandhi political ideologies are strongly based on humanitarian values, which were a reflection of his spiritual self. For him, politics could not be divorced from social factors. To Gandhi, social emancipation was as critical as political emancipation. [19]

The emergence of Indian women into active political life since independence is a result of their partnership in revolution that gained India her freedom in 1947. Mahatma Gandhi leadership followed by that of Jawaharlal Nehru, who championed the cause of women and sincerely felt that women must work side by side with men, were reason enough for the important new role they were to play. [20]

Panchayati Raj

Gandhi Knew that India lives in Village and her civilization has been an agricultural one. His concept of *Gram Swaraj* ultimately paved the way for Panchayat Raj System. Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village has to be self sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. . . . thus ultimately it is the individual who is the unit. [21]

The curse of industrialization

Gandhi was in favour of small Industries that lead to the villager's economic status as well as would be helpful in women safety purpose. He was against of craze for machine. Heavy industries would lead to the reason of poor people poorer. Gandhi worked for the emancipation of the superser people but according to Gandhi industrialization brought poverty. Replied to a question whether he was against all machinery, Gandhi Said: how can I be when I Know that even this body is a most delicate piece of machinery? The spinning wheel is a machine, a little toothpick is a machine, what I object is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call labour saving machinery. Men go on saving labour till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation. [22]

Gandhi believed in clean environment and industries would be resulted in environment pollution. On the question of the tram cars and electricity Gandhi answered that machinery is like a snake hole which may contain from one to a hundred snakes. Where there is machinery there are a large cities, and where there are large cities there are tram cars and railways, and there only does one see electric light. [23]

Gandhi on Women Economic Status

Gandhi was not only a leader who guided the country to independence through a non violent struggle, but was a person with a deep insight into the social as well as economic aspects of life. Gandhi knew that India lives in the villages, and her civilization has been an agricultural one. His concept of *gram Swaraj* ultimately paved the way for Panchayati Raj System. He favoured decentralized and balanced economy. It was with a remarkable insight that Gandhi without challenging their traditional role in society

could make women an important social base for the movement. [24]

Gandhi called upon women to take the responsibility not just for changing their own situation but that of the society at large. He urged, the economic and moral solution of India thus rests mainly with you [25]. As far as the emancipation of women was concerned; Gandhi felt that men and women had different spheres of work. In his opinion women could take to economic activities to supplant the income of her families like spinning which he believed to be a good opinion available to the women. He recommended that all women should devote at least one hour daily to spinning. He believed that by doing productive work she can be self sufficient.

2. Review of the Literature

Kriplani (1970) [26] in his book on “Gandhi: his life and Thoughts,” projects him as a liberator of women from the scourge of social evils. To him, Gandhi made no distinction between men and women and was against all sorts of social and religious evils like child marriage, sati and so on. He argues that Gandhi invited the women of India to participate in the Satyagraha movement as they are not only equal to men but they have also possessed the virtues which made them superior to men in a non – violent fight which require infinite patience and silent suffering. Kriplani said that Gandhi was critical of those religious practices which instead of protecting the women’s freedom made ways to suppress them. In this context he quotes Gandhi’s Idea we cry out for cow protection in the name of religion, but refuse to protect the human cow in the shape of the girl widow. Kriplani argued that Gandhi accepted voluntary widowhood rather than enforced one, as voluntary widowhood adopted by women adds grace and dignity to her life.

Unnithan (1979) [27] in his book on “Gandhi and Social Change” argues that Gandhian Ideas relating to lower caste women, where he defended caste as an essential for the best possible adjustment of social stability not only for men but also for women and their mutual progress. He argues that Gandhi without arguing against the existing caste system and its impact mostly on women made a distinction between the ideal caste system as practices in India.

Tahtinen (1979) [28] in his book on “The Core of Gandhi’s Philosophy” wrote that Gandhi will continue to be studied from various points of view and by a variety of people. His protean personality, his integrated life-thought-action, his experiences as expressed in his prolific writings, are so comprehensive that practically no subject and / or aspect of genuine human interest has been left untouched by him. And whatever he touched, he made it more knowledgeable. All this Gandhi did during his lifelong earnest quest for truth, the law of Evolving Humanity,-Being, in the midst of Becoming-in the day-to-day world of our experience.

Kishwar (1985) [29] in her article on ‘Gandhi on Women’, analyses the role of Gandhi in drawing a large number of women into the mainstream of the freedom movement. Mahatma Gandhi ideas about women and their role in public life was a departure from those of the 19th century

reformers. He saw women as a potential force in the struggle to build a new social order He consciously attempted to articulate connections between private and public life in order to bring women into the struggle. However, he failed to come to terms with the fact that oppression is not a moral condition but a social and historical experience relating to production relations. On the other hand even while insisting that a woman's real sphere of activity was the home, he was instrumental in creating conditions which could help women break the shackles of domesticity

3. Research Methodology

The present study is one kind of qualitative research and content analysis method will be used for it. This study will be purely based on Mahatma Gandhi authentic written material so content analysis method was applied. The field of this study is women upliftment because Gandhi basic philosophy of women upliftment is discusses here. The data for the present study will be collected through both primary and secondary sources. All the available literature related to the problem was included in the content analysis method.

Primary Data

The primary data will be collected from all the books which were written by Mahatma Gandhi and the books in which his written thoughts took place primarily (Collective Works of Mahatma Gandhi and My experiments with truth) another books, articles & journals.

Secondary Data

The secondary data will be collected from reference books, journals, articles, magazines, news papers, government records, publications periodicals, annual reports etc. The collected data would be properly analysed and interpreted.

4. Conclusion

Finally, we can say that Gandhi made many efforts for women’s equality. Women not only played an important role in the movements run by Gandhiji but also played an important role in other movements for the freedom struggle. Women stand shoulder to shoulder with men in liberating the country. And when the country was liberated, women were given the right to equality by the constitution. Women got the right to equality but until society stops discriminating between men and women, we will not be able to reach our real goal.

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