

Women Education and Gandhian Thought

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Introduction: In a democratic country Man and woman are given the equal right. So the educational opportunity should be equally served to them. The nature of duty of women is different. So in some cases women need special curriculum along with the general education of men. They are being supplementary to one another; each helps the other, and without the one the existence of the other cannot be conceived. In framing any scheme of women's education this cardinal truth must be constantly kept in mind. In domestic affairs, in the upbringing and education of children, women ought to have more knowledge than men.

Mahatma Gandhi believed that 'women are the noblest of God's creation' and even 'she is anyway superior to man in her religious devotion. He considered woman 'as an incarnation of *ahimsa*'. The question arises, how Gandhiji could evolve deep respect to women. In childhood he was greatly influenced by his mother and sister. After marriage his wife Kasturba influenced him. In Ashramic life, sincerity and commitment of Meeraben and Amrit Kaur impressed him deeply.

Southard (1981) mentioned that Gandhian feminism stands on two pillars: gender equality in all respect and gender specific role differentiation.¹ Gandhiji once said both men and women are supplementary and complement to each other. He quotes from the Hindu *Shastra* and establishes that every soul is originated from Brahman. So there is no difference between the two and the interpolations in *Smriti* are false. Prabhu (1967) remarked that Gandhi repeatedly made it clear and said Indian women were not inferior

The cause of illiteracy among the women is not mere laziness and inertia as in the case of men, the more potent cause is the status of inferiority unjustly branded on her. Man has converted her into a domestic drudge and an instrument of his pleasure, instead of regarding her as his

¹ Southard, B. (1981). *Feminism of Mahatma Gandhi*, Gandhi Marg, Vol. 3, No. 71, p.403

helpmate. This caused semi-paralysis of our society. Mahatma Gandhi wanted them to be educated but was against imparting English education to them Mahatma Gandhi stated that men had reduced women somewhat to the position 'of slave of old'²

Tendulkar (1953) mentioned that Indian Women had lost their glory and the spirit of courage due to social tyranny. The glory of Sita, Sabitri, Damyanti, Gargi, Maitreyi is lost. Liberation of women is the great task to the Congressmen. 'Let Congressmen begin with their own homes'.³ They should begin by imparting education to their own wives, mother and daughters.

Kmarappa (1952) said, 'The pre form of economy can be seen in the mother-nature of woman, which is worthy of emulation...No other form of life is able to express it better than woman, when she cares for the child, not necessarily her own, but all, and the tenderness with which she deals with matters in society. The world shall be richer when left in her hands,'⁴

Critical Review:

Geoffrey Ashe has shown in *Gandhi: a study in Revolution* that Gandhi realized the strength and power of women. Women became the leader of *satyagraha* and had shown their stout heart. This was proved during the agitation against Black Act in 1913. In South Africa woman -power got established when they willingly went to prison. Ashe has again shown that Gandhi knew from his personal household that as long as the womenfolk insisted, not much could be made in removing untouchability.⁵

Erik Erikson has shown that when women were molested during communal riots Gandhiji suggested them to either kill the culprit or kill themselves. This has been linked 'to his marital experiences and the feeling of guilt about his natural sensual needs.'⁶

²Gandhi, M.K. (1964).The Role of Women, Anand Hingorani (ed.),Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, p.1

³Tendulkar, D. G. (1953). '*Mahatma*', New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, Vol.6, p. 24.

⁴ Kmarappa , J.C. (1952). *Economy of Permanence*.Ahmedabad, Navajiban Publishing House. p. 217

⁵ Ashe, G. (1968). *Gandhi: A Study in Revolution*. London: Heinemann, p. 122

⁶ Erikson E. H. (1970). *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence*, London: Faber and Faber Limited, p. 97.

Duncan Ronald mentioned that fearlessness and tolerance are the essential values of women. Fearlessness means freedom from all external fear. These values are to be nurtured by the humanity. Proper education to the women is the cause of removal social barrier and enables women to come forward.⁷ Mahatma Gandhi believed that economic freedom could play a vital role for the empowerment of women. Eleanor Morton has shown in *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi* that Gangabehn became the first organizer of the Khadi movement in India. All the followers Kamaladevi, Mirabehn, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, and Anasuyabehn were efficient and treated to be equal to work with him for his ideal.⁸

Martin Green has shown in *Tolstoy and Gandhi* that Gandhi's relation with women was usual but a somewhat unusual relationship was the one with Saraladevi Choudhrani who protested the personal attachment of Gandhiji with her.⁹

Eleanor Morton has said in *The Women in Gandhi's Life* that Gandhiji wanted women to preserve their integrity and self-respect. The women should voluntarily renounce all sexual or 'lustful' contact with their husband. Their love becomes free from the impurity of lust and so grows stronger. His blessings was the young couple 'may have no children'¹⁰

"If I was born as woman, I would raise in rebellion against any pretension on the part of man that woman is born to be his plaything. I have mentally become a woman in order to steal into her heart. I could not steal into my wife's heart until I decided to treat her differently than I used to do, and so I restored to her all her rights by dispossessing myself of all my so-called rights as her husband. And you see her today as simple as myself"

⁷ Ronald, D. *Selected writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, London: Faber and Faber Limited, pp. 48-49

⁸ Morton, E. (1954). *Women Behind Mahatma Gandhi*. London: Max Reinhardt, p. 108

⁹ Green, M. (1983). *Tolstoy and Gandhi*, New York: Basic Books, pp. 163-16

¹⁰ Morton, E. (1953). *The Women in Gandhi's Life*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., p. 148

Gandhi always favored women education. The educationally ill-disposed should be educated by their husbands. The customary and legal status of women is bad and demands radical change. (Selections from Mahatmas' Constructive program, pp. 17-18).

Gandhian Concept of Women Equality: According to Mahatma Gandhiji Women are gifted with equal mental capacities and therefore she has equal rights. However, due to the force of custom, ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying superiority over women. (Selections from Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi, ps. 424-425).

Gandhian Concept of Women Self Reliance : Gandhi had invented a portable spinning wheel which he professed to ne be used by women for their living. (Selections from Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi) This was a strategy to inculcate discipline and dedication to weeding out the unwilling and ambitious and to include women in the movement at a time when many thought that such activities were not respectable activities for women. (Selections from the Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi)

Gandhian Concept of Women in Social Service: Gandhi worked not only for political emancipation of nation but also for the liberation of all the suppressed & oppressed sections of society . He could awaken women to shed their deep rooted sense of inferiority & rise to dignity & self esteem. (Selections from The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi)
Gandhian Concept of Child Marriage According to Mahatma Gandhiji child marriage was a moral & physical evil. He thought that it undermines the morality & induced physical disintegration. It was vicious brutal & barbarous

Gandhian Concept of Marriage: According to Mahatma Gandhiji marriage was a sacrament imposing discipline on both the partners. He insisted on monogamy in His opinion woman was a companion of man gifted with equal mental capabilities . Gandhi very clearly said that women should cease to consider herself as the object of man's lust (Selections from Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi) **Gandhian Concept of Sexuality** According to Mahatma Gandhiji sexuality should be kept inside the marriage limits. He said all sexualities outside the marriage should be banned..referring to his own

life he observed that he began to enjoy his married life only after abandoned sex. For him, "the conquest of lust is the highest endeavour of a man's or a woman's existence" (Selections from Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi).

Gandhian Concept of Dowry: According to Mahatma Gandhiji dowry taking is a sin. He preferred girls to remain unmarried than to be humiliated by marrying men who preferred dowry. He called dowry as a heartless demand .He wished for mutual consent mutual love & mutual respect between husband & wife (Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi)

Conclusion: Father of the nation truly brought Indian women in the front row of all activities of life. He encouraged them to become more 'Sabala' rather than 'Abala' So far women empowerment is concerned, Mahatma Gandhi opened every scope to women so that they come forward in the service of nation building. He gave emphasis on the education of women belonging to marginalized, Dalits and SC & STs or other backward classes. He compared Indian women being so powerful to Sita, Sabitri and Damayanti. He believed in the sanctity and respect of Indian women.

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5. Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand (1994). The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi. Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India.