



WOMEN AND GENDER ISSUES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO M.K. GANDHI

Dr. Naushaba Anjum

Assistant Professor, Department of philosophy, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India

***Corresponding Author: Dr Naushaba Anjum**

Abstract

In the pre-independence period, the status of women within the India was in a deprived state. It is believed that women under legal and customary subjection of their husband and other male member of their family and their roles are confined to their families only. But the Women's situation was not same in ancient India. We find that in ancient India especially in pre- Vedic period and post- Vedic period women enjoyed the same freedom like men. They participated in all sphere of life equally. But gradually our society becomes more male dominance and the position of women was undermined. The major responsibilities of the women were dedicated towards the implementation of household responsibilities and they were not allowed to participate in the implementation of other tasks and activities, nor were they allowed to express their ideas and viewpoints. In addition, they were overwhelmed by the practices of polygamy, sati, child marriage, and female infanticide. Their names were associated with some evil happenings also, like they are regarded as the root cause of all problems. Some patriarchal writers go further and claim that the women are the root cause of all downfalls of men. Although some social reforms and government schemes had made effort to remove the hardship and provide opportunities to the women but few women were benefited from this. In such situation Gandhi gave a new definition of women, He says that women are not only superior to men but also, she is all (Kali, Laxmi, Durga). Gandhi tried to improve the conditions of women through his writings and also did some practical efforts for the same. In this paper with the theoretical support of Gandhian literature I will try to explore women's status in present time and will also try to find out the ways to rescue them from the clutches of patriarchy.

Keywords: *Women, Gender, Family ,Gandhi, Status*

Introduction

It is traditionally believed and accepted that the gender equality issues are very important for all times. In every patriarchal societies, it is normally very common that women should remain confined to their families. This was also the condition of women at the time of pre independence .

This paper is concerned with the status of women and gender issues in India. How far gender equality achieved in the past and present times. My focus is-how we might tackle the most pressing issues like women education, economy, social justice, purdha system, girls abuse, child marriages etc. It is also considered to social, political and economic shift/move on women lives in global and every day context.in this paper, I am trying to overcome the challenges of gender inequality and attempting to intervene with Gandhian vision and mission on such imbalances.

Published by:

Pather Dabi Educational Trust, (Regn No: IV-1402-00064/2023), Under Govt. of West Bengal, India.

Some basic issues are as follows:

1. Women's Education
2. Women's role in politics
3. Women as equal to men
4. Women as an activist
5. Women as a power.

Some very serious concerns related with gender issues are as follows:

- Illiteracy
- Female infanticide
- Dowry
- Purdha custom
- Widowhood
- Sati custom
- Prostitution etc.

Here's I am trying to focus some basic points given by Gandhi.

Women in the field of education:-As we all know that education is an overall development of all personality, it is main tool for gender equality and overall growth of human personality and society. Education provides a woman knowledge, skills, and makes her more productive and confident than anything else who is less educated. According to Gandhi "if you educate a man you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate entire family. Our dominant patriarchal system doesn't gives enough chances for women to have higher education even if they need and want and wish as we can say education reduce the gender gap and enhances earning potential.

Women role in politics: According to Gandhi women are companion of man and gifted with equal right and liberty . Our father of Nation is the first man to encourage the women to enter into the political system. Our constitution guarantees equal rights to women and men. As we all familiar that females registration and participation of women as contestants is less than that of men Democracy implies equal rights for all men and women. It is against the law of democracy, what is normally see is that women are excluded from different ways of life specifically in politics. Mahatma Gandhi said "men and women will attain equally only when the birth of a girl is celebrated with as much joy as in the case of boys (Gandhi,1987, 229).

Women in economic sphere-according to Gandhi the lose of spinning wheel brought about India's slavery and its voluntary revival will lead to freedom. In his view women were best suited to take up spinning. It should be good supplement for middle class women and very poor women for their means of livelihood. it brings about metamorphosis in the live of women.

- Equal treatment to daughter: He believed that as both men and women are necessary for the world, the parents should treat their sons and daughters as equal and rejoice at the birth of both.
- Wives as equal to husband: He wanted every husband to treat his wife as an 'ardhangini' and 'sahdharmini'. The wife is a friend with same freedom which the husband sees for himself. She should have the right to participate in the very minutest details in the activities of men.

Women as equal to men: He believed that men and women are equal as the same (soul) dwells in the women's body. Since soul is genderless men and women are perfectly equal in the eyes of God. He recommended equal payment for women. Gandhi said that women have equal mental status have:

- the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of men; and have same right to freedom and liberty as men.
- Women as individuals: He asked women to cease to consider themselves the object of men's lust. They should stop adoring themselves to please their husbands and others. He believed it will save

women from subordination of men and wives would be saved from beating by their husbands. He thought jewellery to be a source of subordination as well as intimidation. 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. He had full faith in their sincerity and was sure that they would not lag behind in producing perfect performance.

- Women in economic sphere: He believed that the loss of spinning wheel brought about India's slavery and its voluntary revival will lead to freedom. In his view women were best suited to take up spinning and the propagation of khadi and swadeshi.² To him for middle class it should supplement the income and for very poor women it could be the means of livelihood. He believed that it would mean a few coppers in hand where none existed before. Besides it will bring about metamorphosis in the lives of women as Shakti-Gandhi believed that women have been gifted by God but their marvellous power has been lying inactive. If they realise their power they can flash the world.
- Some harmful practices which are harmful for women and girls are as follows:
- Illiteracy-According to Gandhi 'lack of education and knowledge was the root cause of all evil'. Education is as necessary as for men, education is very important for enabling women to assert their natural and social rights. He realized that the low level of education among females have deprived them sociopolitical status and also power of reasoning/knowledge. He stood for proper and effective education for women as he believed that after receiving education they will become sensitive to the glaring inequalities of which they are subjected.

Child marriage: Gandhi ji was against the practice of child marriages. He believed that both the boy and the girl should be developed physically and mentally at the time of marriage and that they should have rights in the choice of their life partner. He recognized the practice of child marriage as a moral and physical evil. Child marriage to him was an immoral /inhuman act which made innocent girls objects of man's lust; ruined the health of many a child mother and converted tender age girls into widows. He also believed that the practice of child marriage came in the way of the progress of women. They were married off and expected to bear and rear children at an age in which they themselves should be in schools. He said women cannot make any progress so long as there are child marriages, as it results in denial of educational opportunities and deprivation of joys of girlhood. Moreover, it causes physical, mental and emotional cruelty as girls forced to adulthood prematurely and made submissive to their husbands. He promoted mobilization of strong public opinion and supported agitations by the local people against such incidence. He fully supported the child marriage restraint bill.

Dowry: Gandhi believed that the custom of dowry turned young girls into only a private property to be bought and sold. He called this custom destructive as it lowered the status of women; destroyed their sense of equality with men and defiled the institution of marriage. To control the toxic dowry system, he advised every parent to educate their daughters so that they refuse to marry a young man who wanted a price for marrying. He suggested that a strong public opinion needs to be formulated against dowry and such young men who soil their fingers with such ill-gotten gold should be excommunicated from society. He advocated change in education and also stressed the need of taking recourse to radical measure like organizing youth movements and offering satyagraha against those perpetuating the custom.

Purdah Custom: Gandhi ji considered purdah as inhuman and immoral, for it hindered the march towards swaraj and everyday activities of women. It denied women freedom as well as free gift of God like light and fresh air. It also crippled the free movement of women; interfered with their advancement and their capacity for doing useful work for the society. It weakened instead of strengthening morality for it did not help in preserving chastity either. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of purdah. It must grow from within and must be capable of withstanding every temptation. Men must be able to trust womenfolk as the later are compelled to trust them. He believed that the veil generates the feeling of insecurity in women and results in deterioration of their health. He appealed to public in general and women in particular to tear down purdah.¹ He was sure that abolition of purdah would lead to mass

education for both men and women and would help women in gaining strength and becoming an active participant in the struggle for self-rule.

Pathetic widowhood: Gandhi was deeply concerned about the condition of child widows who were denied the rights to re-marry and also suffered other social and legal issues. He advised the parents to see that the child widows are duly and well married-. Regarding adult widows, he felt that the decision to re marry should rest with the widow, but he was against the wrong done to the widows. He protested against the prevalent belief that a widow crossing one's path is a bad omen. He considered it to be his good fortune to see a widow in the early hours of the day. He regarded enforced widowhood as an unbearable yoke that defiles the home by secret vice and degrades religion. He advised every family to treat widow with utmost respect and to give her facilities to expand her knowledge. The ultimate remedy suggested by Gandhi was to consider the widow and the widower on par so far as re marriage was concerned.

Sati custom: Gandhi found the roots of the sati pratha in the blind egoism of men. He argued that if wife must prove her loyalty and undivided devotion to her husband, then the husband must also prove his allegiance and devotion to his wife. To prove her sati hood, she must not mount the funeral pyre of her dead husband but prove it through utilization of every opportunity to add to her stock of knowledge and increase her capacity for cultivating renunciation and self-discipline. To him sati was a futile exercise it takes away one more life. He believed that sati hood is the postulate of purity. As purity cannot be attained or realized by dying but can be attained only through constant striving, constant immolation of spirit from day to day.

Polygamy and subjugation of wives: To Gandhi wife was not the slave of the husband but his friend better half, colleague. The wife is a co-sharer of husband with equal rights and duties. Their obligation towards each other and towards the world must therefore be same and vice versa. He believed that a wife is not bound to be an accomplice in her husband's crimes and when she holds anything to be wrong, she must dare to do the right. If a husband is unjust to his wife, she has the right to live separately. Married life, he believed, is intended to promote mutual good here and hereafter. It is meant to serve humanity. When one partner breaks the law of discipline, the right accrues to the other of breaking the bond. The wife or the husband may separate to serve the end for which they had united.

Molestation: He wanted girls to learn the art of protecting themselves against indecent behaviour of uncivil youth. If a woman is assaulted, she should not stop to think in terms of ahimsa (non-violence) as her primary duty is self-protection. She is at liberty to employ every method or means that comes to her mind in order to defend herself with all her strength and if need be die in the effort.

Prostitution: He regarded prostitution as a social disease or moral leprosy promoted by men who lack morality. He felt it to be a matter of bitter shame, sorrow and humiliation that a number of women have to sell their chastity for men's lust. He criticized prostitution as well as entertainment but realized that men were responsible for driving women into flesh trade. He advised women to give up this profession and take up living by spinning khadi. He believed that such women can be reestablished by getting social acceptance by involvement in a noble cause and by extending opportunities of education and employment.

Concluding Remark

We should remember that Gandhi ji was not a feminist or anti-feminist but a great soul. His impact on women and gender issues extends across in different aspects His advocacy for education, politics, social economic empowerment laid the ground work for humanity and for social reformations. Hence recognition the critical approach, it is important to acknowledge the positive steps made and the ongoing challenges that demand continued effort for gender equality. Gandhi's repercussion remains a source of inspiration for women and for individual. His movement was directed towards making a better society.

References

- Bakshi, S. R. (1986). *Gandhi and his social thought*. South Asia Books. New Delhi.
- Gandhi, M. (1922). *Young India* (Vol. 4). Navajivan Publishing House.
- Gandhi, M. (1987). *The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi (Vol. 87)*. Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India
- Gandhi, M. K. (1909). *Hind Swaraj*. The International Printing Press, Phoenix, Natal.
- Gandhi, M. K. (1918). Speech at Bombay Bhagini Samaj.
- Gandhi, M. K. (1958). *Women*. Navjivan Publishing House.
- Gupta, S. (1999). *Women in Modern India: Problems & Issues*. National Publishing House.