



MAHATMA GANDHI AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

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The equality of men and women in the matter of political right is established by a large number of constitution, codes and laws. The constitution of the republic India prohibited discrimination against any citizen any grounds of religions, race, caste, sex and place of birth or any of them. The Indian constitution guarantees political equality through the institution of adult Franchise and Article 15 which prohibited discrimination inter-alia on ground of sex. It should be kept in mind that this recognition of political equality of women was a radical departure not only from the socio-cultural norms prevailing in traditional India but also in the context of the political evolution of even most advanced countries at that time

In spite of the unrivalled culture and high deals of society that ancient India placed before us. We have to bear witness to the tragic fact that we have fallen ever so far from that happy estate and perhaps in no sphere of life has that fall been so great as in that of women. From being man's co-equal and co-sharer and helpmeet she has become his subordinate a mere chattel to be used at will for satisfying his wants with no rights or will of her own. 19th century witnessed a radical change and various social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Ishwar Chander Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekanand, etc who strived endlessly to bring about a change in the condition of women.

No leader in history has commanded such a large following during his lifetime in his own country or the world as Gandhiji. And certainly no man has evoked such whole-hearted devotion from women. A passionate lover of humanity, an implacable foe of injustice in whatsoever from it, it is small wonder that Gandhiji early espoused the women's cause. And as in everything that he has preached he began to reform in his own home.

Gandhi has observed his wife and mother quietly resisting their exploitation at home. He admitted that he learnt the method of satyagraha and technique of non-violent passive resistance from women, especially from his mother and wife, he thereby put it into practice as a major strategy to rebel against exploitation by the British. A firm believer in the fundamental unity of all living being, hence Gandhi, not only a visionary but a man of practical wisdom strived to bring about the equality in every sphere of life. According to Gandhi, women is the companion of men, gifted with equal mental capacities the two live the same life, have the same feelings, the soul in both being the same. Each is a compliment of the other. In fact, one can't live without the other's active help.

Women according to Gandhiji, "is an incarnation of ahimsa which means love and infinite capacity of suffering. Who but women, the mother of man, shows this capacity? In the largest measure? she shows it as she carries the infant and feeds it during nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved. What can beat the suffering caused by the pang of labour? But she forgets in the joy of creation. Who suffers daily so that the babe may wax from day to day? Let her transfer that love to the whole humanity, let her forget she ever was or can be the object of man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of men as his mother, maker and silent leader. It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring world thirsting for that nectar. She can become the leader in satyagraha which does not require the learning that books give but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith". Gandhi strongly felt that the evils of child

marriage, dowry, purdah, the restrictions on windows and such other practices have to be wiped off. Thereby participating in struggles, the women were gradually able to liberate themselves from purdah and such social taboos. Gandhi felt, purdah is not the means of saving women from men's evil eye the only mean is men's own purity character. Therefore Gandhi, who could challenge the very ill of our traditional Hindu society and liberate the women from our customs and traditions,.

To begin with, Gandhi did not advocate an 'active' for women in the public sphere. However, when the issue of women's suffrage was raised, Gandhi supported it. He said it to women; the economic and moral salvation of India rests mainly with you. The future of India lies on your knees for you will nurture the future generation. You can bring the children of India to become simple, God fearing and brave men and women' Similarly Gandhi attached great importance to participation in public affair. This call to invite women to participate in the freedom movement was mainly responsible for removing many shackles. He said, "The women in India should have as much share in winning Swaraj as men. Probably, in this peaceful struggle, women can outdistance man by many a mile . Responding to his call women from different communities and all walked of life came forward to join the struggle as political campaigners, joining protests, marches and demonstrations as constructive workers , participating in and taking charges of the village reconstruction programs as workers in the cause of social and economic justice working for the removal of untouchable and other forms of social oppression. They joined hand to spread literacy and develop self-reliance among the people. Women who had spent their life behind purdha came out fight. Gandhi proved right in thinking about the importance of women in the struggle for civil Disobedience and salt satyagraha Movement saw scores of women in the forefront. Breaking of forest laws. Boycott of foreign clothes and liquor shops, resulted in women suffering police repression, incarceration in prison and other indignities.

Gandhi believed that induction of women in public life would result in its purification and in restricting unbridled ambitions and accumulation of property as women was incarnation of sacrifice and self-suffering. Gandhi had an immense faith in the inner VB strength of women. He held that women by nature are endowed with the quality of love, non violence, forgiveness and a remarkable capacity for sacrifice. Gandhi found women to be the worthier interpreters of non violence than men. A man, according to Gandhi , understand the Dharma of non violence through his intellect where as a women , the very embodiment of renunciation and compassion , has imbibed it even before her birth and In the words of Gandhiji , "The women of India Tore down the purdah and came forward to work for the nation. They saw that country demanded something more than their looking after their homes. They manufactured contraband salt; they picketed foreign cloth shops and liquor shops, and tried to wean both the seller and the customer from both. At late hours in the night, they pursued the drunkard to their dens with courage so as (1) to emancipate themselves from the domination of men and (2) participate in the national emancipation.

Gandhi advised women to reawaken the old Spirit of self sacrifice, love and inner strength in themselves we will have to produce women, pure, firm and self controlled as Sita, Draupadi and Damayanti. If we produce them, such a modern VB sister will receive the same homage from Hindu society as is being paid to their prototype of..... and equality, there was no place for competitor and confrontations between man he wanted women to be at least aware of their position and the actual hardships that they had been undergoing.

An analysis of Gandhi fundamental idea further reveal that in Gandhi social order based on justice and women and he did not want women ignore their duty as be housekeeper , mothers, molders of future generation and builder of the nation. But at the same time he did not put any limit on their role in practice. The very fact that he invited women to take part in public and political life of the country even in 1920s and 1930s postulate that he believed in complete gender equality and considered women fit for all type of activities outside of home. He call to parents not to kept their daughters utterly ignorant and illiterate, And bring them up only for purpose of marriage , to girl to get education and to remain unmarried and to be economically

independent provide ample evidence of his belief in equality of the sexes. In his Ashram he treated men and women as equals

For instance ,in the non-co-operation of 1920-21, for the time women participated in mass scale as Gandhi himself observed that no other class of people in country shown evidence of as much awakening as women. They participated in it as the first step of their emancipation and social amelioration. They took active part in boycotting the foreign goods and cloth and picketed the liquor shops and worked for the collection of fund. In past they had never attended national meeting in large numbers but during non-co-operation movement, they went everywhere in thousands.

Nature of Gandhi's leadership and program enable the tradition bound conservative women to make a breakthrough. The political carrier of majority of women started with direct or indirect contact with Gandhi. A close study of Gandhi's influence over women reveals that they were either present at meeting addressed by him or met him personally, communicating with him or read about him. Sarojini Naidu was impressed by Gandhi's simplicity during the very first meeting in London. According to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Gandhi's commitment to the women's movement attracted the latter; Mirabehn alias Madeline Slade was inspired by a book written on Gandhi by Romain Rolland. The women followers of Gandhi belongs to all sections of society ranging from poor and illiterate women to rich and educated like Rajkumari Amrit Kaur.....

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