

Gandhi on Empowerment of Women: Socio-Political Aspect

Dr. Danvir Singh, Associate Professor
Deptt. Political Science
S.D. (P.G.) College Muzaffarnagar (U.P.) India.

Abstract : *“Train a man and you train an individual, Train a woman and you build a nation” (M.K. Gandhi) Today, the empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st Century. Empowerment of women is necessary for sustainable development. But due to deep- rooted patriarchal mentality in the Indian society, women are still victimized, tortured, humiliated and exploited. The father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhiji experimented in this field a Century ago. He had shown the way for empowerment of women and development of the status of women. Gandhi was indeed one of the greatest advocates of women's liberty and throughout his life toiled relentlessly to improve the status of women. According to Gandhi women is companion of man, gifted with the equal right of freedom and liberty with him. He played a vital role to remove the social evils. The Indian National Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi inspired Indian women to enter the open field of politics. In this article discuss on Gandhiji views on women empowerment in the context of socio-political issues. After Gandhiji, which position of women in India also focus in this paper.*

Key Words: Gandhiji, Women Empowerment, Social Empowerment, Political Empowerment.

Introduction:

The topic on 'Women Empowerment' is a burning issue all over the world. It is a multi-layered, multi-faced and multi-dimensional concept. Empowerment may be described as a process with help people to assert their control over the factors which effect their lives. Women empowerment as a concept was introduced at the International Women Conference in 1985 at Nairobi, which defined it as redistribution of social power and control of resources in favor of woman.¹ According to the Country report of the government of India, 'empowerment means moving from a position of in forced powerlessness to one of power. It would promote women's inherent strength and positive self-image.'² Empowerment of woman means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that effect them.³

Gandhiji and Women Empowerment:

The history of women in India has been eventful. Most of social reformers tried to uplift and restore the women's glory through preaching, press and platform, one of them is Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji as a major social and political reformer, played on important role in attempting to eradicate the social evils

committed against the women of the country through ages. He had almost an instinctive understanding of women and their problems and had a deep abiding sympathy for them.⁴ Gandhiji wanted socio-economic and political empowerment of women so that they possess an increased awareness of their rights as well as have access to resources. I shall discuss Gandhi ji thought only social and political aspect in the empowerment of women.

Social Aspect of Women Empowerment :

Gandhiji thinks that if we want to get a developed India, then our first step is to develop to the women. He declared, "Our first attempt should be directed towards awakening in the minds of as many women as possible, a consciousness of their present condition."⁵ Gandhiji respected traditions of Indian society, but not at the cost of individual dignity. He realized that there were deep- rooted customs hampering the development of women and women's freedom from such shackles was necessary for the emancipation of the nation. To quote Gandhiji, "It is good to swim in the water of traditions, but to sink in them is suicide." We all know that Gandhiji was against social evils. The custom of child marriage became a target of his criticisms. According to Gandhi ji, "the custom of child marriage is both a moral as well

as a physical evil. For it undermines our morals and induces physical degeneration. By countenancing such customs, we recede from God, as well as swaraj."⁶

The system of dowry could not pass unnoticed from his critical eyes. Gandhiji defined dowry marriages as 'heartless'. To remove this system he advised every parent "to educate their daughters so that they refuse to marry a young man who wanted a price for marrying and would remain spinster that to be party to the degrading terms."⁷ Gandhiji favored creation of a strong public opinion and suggested ex-communication of such persons who took dowry. He declared, "any young man who makes dowry a condition of marriage, discredits his education and his Country dishonors womanhood."⁸

The very fact that is malice of strict legislations against this custom, modern society is still not free of dowry marriages or, its ill-effects Vindicate Gandhi's opinion that a piece of legislation is not enough to bring about the desired change in society. One must hope for a change in mindsets of people at large.

Gandhiji was also highly resentful of the system of purdah prevalent in the Indian Society. In his opinion, system of purdah only reiterated that woman were merely objects of lust. He advised control of passion because he wanted to train mind and thoughts and not just eyes. According to him women should come out from all types bindings. If they come out from all types of bindings then, along with women our society will also develop. And he believes that it is not possible to protect chastity only by keeping inside the wall. Gandhi ji said, "Chastity is not a hot house growth and can not be super imposed. It can not be protect by the surrounding wall of purdah."⁹ Gandhi ji knows that abolition of this 'purdah' would lead to education for women and it would help women in gaining strength.

The system of sati was struck by various reformers earlier and Gandhi ji carried the work further. His basic idea of widow- remarriage and his insistence on the parents for arranging marriage for widow was also directed towards breakdown of this cruel, heartless system. Women hardly had only say in the matter because the conservative society did not allow it. The cases of Sati have now become rare only

due the role played reformers like Gandhi ji who emphasized on treating widows with respect and giving them opportunities to expand their experience.

Gandhiji held very radicals thoughts about the emancipation and empowerment of women. Regeneration of women was an important aspect of his constructive program, where women were accorded special consideration. He had dynamic vision on the various issues and problems relating to woman, which has been often reflected in his numerous writings and speeches. He raised also his voice against female infanticide, sexual harassment of women, domestic violence against women, discrimination against girls child, denial of the education of women etc. i.e., almost all the touching problems and issues relating to women of contemporary world. According to Gandhi ji the three important factors that promote women empowerment are education, employment and change in social structure.

Political Aspect of Women Empowerment:

The political participation of women in any society needs to be examined on the basis of the position and status they enjoy in that society or the level of their empowerment. In Modern India, women have held high offices in India including that the President, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Leader of opposition, Union Ministers. Chief Ministers and Governors etc. In fact its credit goes to Mahatma Gandhi. He was involved women in political movement first time of Satyagrah.

Gandhi ji becomes uncompromising in the matter of women's right. His message "When women, whom we all call abala becomes sabala, all those who are helpless will become powerful," reveals the importance he gave for the strength of women.¹⁰ The Indian National Movement under the leadership of Gandhi inspired Indian Women to enter the open field of politics. With the establishment of the Indian National Congress, membership was open to women. The Swadeshi Movement in 1905 saw the entry of women into independence movement. It also marked the formulation of several women's organization.

Gandhi ji recognized the importance of women's participation in the freedom struggle. He said, "In the non-violent struggle, Women

have an advantage over men, for women are in any way superior to men in their religious devotion. Silent and dignified service is the badge of her sex. Woman is sacrifice personified. When she does a thing in the right spirit, she moves mountains.¹¹ Gandhiji was already familiar with the capacity of women to launch and participate in a struggle against injustice. In South Africa in 1913, he was launched passive resistance against 'Unjust Marriage Tostloy Farm' actively participated. Gandhi was very impressed by the Courage of women like Fatima Mehta, Valliamma, Annie Besant and not to forget Kasturba. Gandhi not only made possible the involvement of women in politics but also made them realize that the national movement could not succeed without their participation. Therefore he said, "the part the women of India played in the struggle for freedom will be written in letters of gold."¹²

In the Non-co-operation Movement of 1921 and civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, new techniques like picketing and boycotting of foreign goods, liquor shops and non-co-operation in various governmental activities were used. Vijayalaxmi Pandit, Renuka Ray, Basanti Devi, Urmila Devi and Kasturba Gandhi palyed an important role in the boycott of foreign goods. Sarojini Naidu, Mridula Sarabai, Khurssedben Kamala Devi Chattopadhyaya and Avantika bai Gokhale were some of the prominent women associated with the salt Satyagraha.

The Independence movement brought the two streams of politically involved women folk together, the elite and the masses, both participated in the struggles for the independence.¹³ Gandhiji encouraged women to participate in all aspects, particularly in the constructive programme and non-violent satyagraha, for it required not physical strength but moral courage and spiritual determination. Thus, the nationalist movement was, for Mahatma Gandhi not merely a political struggle but a means of regenerating and rejuvenating the society.¹⁴

By the times of independence women from all sections of society had become active in politics. Direct political participation promoted women's confidence and self-reliance and broke the barriers of public and private dichotomies in

their lives.¹⁵ However, while the basic issue of women's right to participate in politics was thus settled, the content of their political role continued to be an open question.¹⁶

Present Position of Women Empowerment:

We are leading towards 21st Century with knowledge, science and technology. Women's participation and representation in different Decision- making levels has been increasing. Our Constitution has been bestowed equal rights men and women. It contains a number of Provision for the empowerment of women through the Panchayat Raj Institutions, over a million women have actively entered political life in India. As per the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, all local elected bodies reserve one- third of their seats for women. Although the percentage of women in various levels of political activity has risen considerably, women are still under-represented in governance and decision making positions. In 2005 the women Reservation bill passed and provides 33% of reservation for women in parliament and state Assembly.

Women comprise nearly half of the national population of a Country. As for as their social status is concerned. They are not treated as equal to men in all the places.

Women in India now participate in all activities such as Education, Politics, Science and Technology. But gender disabilities and discrimination are found in India even today. Differences about gender, the women are away from education, health and nutrition compare with trine. According to the law of girls should merry at the age of eighteen but in Bihar, 65% and Zarkhand 71% girls are identified as child marriage. It is very worst that effects on the empowerment of women.

The Government of India is running various welfare schemes and policies, both at Sate and Central levels for the empowerment of women. Some of the major programmes and measures include Swadhar (1995), Swayam Siddha (2001), Support to training and Employment Programme for women (2003), Sabla Scheme (2010), National Mission for Empowerment of women (2010) etc. All such policies and programmes focus on empowerment of women. However, 40% women in India become the victims of rape, dowry killing, injustices,

abusing, insulting hate, or other domestic violence, etc. According to a global poll conducted by Reuters, India is the "fourth- most dangerous Country in the world for women."

Lack of education and information is the root cause of all evils against empowerment of women. So, education is the most important equipment to make women awake of their rights, duties and status. There is urgent need to change the tendency to dominate women. The law enacted by government should be enforced and implemented strictly for empowering of women. Every person should come forward to ensure equal status for women in all spheres of life. That will makes them really empowered and courage.

Conclusion :

Thus, we can say that the most momentous change in the position of women in India was

due to the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi. The status of women in India compared to other countries is poor. But compared to the early days, these days women are coming out freely and participating in every field. It is a good sign of women empowerment. Its credit goes to Gandhi ji. But practically women empowerment is still an illusion of reality. Empowerment of women that development of a Society and Nation Possible. So, Gandhi ji and his ideas about women empowerment needs to be reviewed in the current scenario.

Women is an incarnation of 'Shakti-the Goddess of power. If she is bestowed With education, India's strength will double. Let the campaign of 'Kanya Kelavni' be spread In every home; let the lamp of educating Daughters be lit up in every heart.

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Narendra Modi

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