

Mr. Vinod Manoharrao Kukade
Assistant Professor in English
Head of the Dept. of English,
Fule-Ambedkar College of Social Work, Gadchiroli,
Maharashtra, (India)
Email: vinodkukade05@gmail.com
Mobile No. 9960160554

A Study of Mahatma Gandhi as Feminist

Abstract:

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi the greatest man, the father of Nation, the Mahatma was true motherly lover of women. His views about women are invaluable for us to bring about all way development of women. This paper presents the invaluable and pure views of Mahatma Gandhi which he cherished in his heart for women and brought into action. Mahatma Gandhi was the man who brought his thoughts into action. He was the man of thought and action. He was embodiment of truth and non-violence, spirituality and morality. It has been significant to know that he is inspired for his spirituality and non-violence by his mother and his wife respectively. His feminism is clearly seen in his autobiography. His suggestion to the women to be adamant, fearless, to learn to say “no” is significant. He considers her to be ethical, moral, and superior to men. According to him she is incarnation of ahimsa, she is passive and active.

Keywords:

Non-violence, Truth, Pure, Active, Morality, Feminism

Mahatma Gandhi was a feminist who advocated the views of woman's rights and equality of sexes. He appeals for having political, economic, social, professional and personal equality between men and women. Different kind of efforts are made by feminists to eradicate bad customs like Sati, the institutions of women began to emerge, and the thoughts of equal rights and equal opportunities to be provided to the woman emerged and later on her status and dignity to be maintained in the family by the men. Though many efforts are made by Indian

feminists' movements for woman's professional, social, economic progress, but still modern woman has to face inequality in various matters. Mahatma Gandhi has respected woman in his entire life and made efforts for her equal rights, dignity, her educational, professional and personal development. He has presented his views about the condition of woman and the man's consideration about her and suggested many ways and asserts the development of woman in his autobiography.

The Story of My Experiment with Truth has been an immortal autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi which is itself the mirror of Mahatma Gandhi's life. The father of Nation, the Mahatma, the follower of truth and non-violence Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was the greatest social and political reformer. Mahatma Gandhi has not only written about his doctrines, principles in his autobiography but also he devoted completely his life for the observance of these doctrines and principles. The thought and action are two significant pillars of Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi has stated that in his life his mother Putlibai and his wife Kasturba Gandhi are source of inspiration to him for various matters particularly the greatest doctrines of spirituality, non-violence- the peaceful resistance. He considers woman a queen of household. He laid down his views against the contemporary consideration of woman as weak, helpless. He states about woman's rights of education, her self-protection, her status, dignity, her rightful place. He calls woman as an embodiment of faith, humility, and self-sacrifice. The great Indian writers as R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Mulkraj Anand have great impact of Gandhiji on them regarding his views about truth, non-violence, and women.

Kasturba Gandhi was so simple woman, who never wished to wear necklaces, fineries, she used to wear simple sari. Here we find simplicity of the thoughts of woman who considers pure heart to be real jewelry and beauty of woman and not the decoration. To love a man doesn't mean to fulfill his whims and fancies, but it is to give him that come from the true love of heart. At last man is born of woman and the flesh of the man is the flesh of the woman. We find true love of Kasturba Gandhi for Mahatma Gandhi when even though she loves him much but did not accept his all things but on the other hand resist it but peacefully, with non-violence. When Mahatma Gandhi used to say something to Kasturba against her views she used to resist it peacefully that made him change his decision and accept her views. This taught him value, need and importance of non-violence- peaceful resistance. It means

his wife was main source of inspiration to cherish non-violence and act accordingly. His mother Putlibai was a pious lady, she used to do fast and never took meal without prayer. Gandhiji found in her saintliness qualities. He was deeply influenced by her. Her inspiration made him strong and he could do fast for a long time in his later years.

Mahatma Gandhi opposed the contemporary views of the man about woman. According to Gandhi to call a woman the weaker sex is a libel. Gandhi considers woman more powerful than man, superior to man. Woman is morally powerful. She is caring, self-sacrificing, tolerant, and courageous. The man's existence is nothing without woman. Comparing a man with woman, woman is non-violent and non-violent action only can maintain peace. The future in this way we find with woman. Therefore according to Mahatma Gandhi woman must not consider herself to be weak, object of man's lust. Rather she can find remedy which is in her hand. She has much strength in her. She is personification of self-sacrifice. She must realize her good qualities latent in her and not to work under the hypnotic influence of man. Equal opportunity to woman with man will bring wonder and glory in the world. Woman and man are companion, they both have equal freedom, equal liberty, equal right. The man considers himself to be superior to woman and woman for him is powerless and weaker. There is intense need the man to be conscious and to use his conscience to change thinking about woman and stop his false consideration that woman is his tool. Mahatma Gandhi says that if the woman raises her voice against man's institutions of-course non-violently, it will be more effective which will take woman to the highest peak. Woman has to change her mind and has to learn to say "no" to those who go against her pure opinions. She has to stay along him side by side and seek her equal position in family and society. However Mahatma Gandhi feels fear when he sees some modern girls love to Juliet and Romeos, she wears the dress which cannot protect her from wind, rain , sunlight, but instead she wears it for attracting the attention of others. These some modern girls want to look extraordinary. This attitude does not suit to her and her nature. He advises women to rely on their strength and not to find help from men to protect themselves. Women are adamant once they stick to the pure thoughts, good habits they don't give up them easily. They are moral, ethical and work honestly with full devotion. Their hard working habit and humanitarian thinking make them teacher of the world.

To talk about the views of Mahatma Gandhi regarding Ahimsa, non-violence, in his views woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa. According to him Ahimsa means infinite love. This Ahimsa requires infinite tolerance; it means it is infinite capacity for suffering. Woman has this capacity of tolerating sufferings. Woman is the mother of man who tolerates the pain of her child in her womb for nine months and thereafter the pain during the birth joyfully. She runs her house successfully with determination. It is she who plays the role of a mother, maker, and teacher. She is the greatest creation of Nature. Man may not do the work of a woman as honestly and devotedly which she does. Though the man earns money she distributes bread, she takes care of the whole house, and she brings up the children and develops them.

Mahatma Gandhi does not compromise with the matter of women's rights. For him son and daughter are equal. He does not make any distinction between men and women. Politics is the way for the woman by which she can raise problems and bring about revolution in the society about the social status of woman. She should enter the politics and toil for the development and dignity of woman. The patriarchal domination that crushes the woman's freedom will come to an end and there will be equality in dignity in the family and in the society. Mahatma Gandhi advises the women to resist peacefully against the brutal and unworthy restrictions imposed upon them by the men. It will bring about for them their dignity.

Dowry system in India has been brutal way to fix the marriage. Today though this system has decreased at some degree but even this is going on in India. Mahatma Gandhi strongly condemned this evil practice. Marriage is not arrangement of dowry and then selection of the girl but a pure bond between boy and girl. Asking for the dowry is disrespect of education and dishonor of woman. He advises the parents to think beyond the caste and find a suitable partner for their child even from outside the caste. So it requires moral and ethical education which will create humanitarian approach in the men and will cease to take dowry.

The widowhood was a curse for the widow. This custom was brutal which did not permit the woman to remarry after her husband's death. She had to live without husband in her entire

life. Mahatma Gandhi felt it to be degradation of religion and felt the need to save Hinduism from this hazardous widowhood. The widow has right to lead her life with her life partner.

According to Mahatma Gandhi woman should be fearless. She is morally strong but only fear can make her strength weak. No man can have the power to go against her will as long as she does not surrender herself to the will of the man. She can do anything for her purity and if any cruel man tries to spoil her chastity, she will resist it fearlessly and also she may prefer to die rather than to become his victim. For Mahatma Gandhi real bravery of non-violent woman is to die in self-defense without retaliation, anger or malice or while defending the honor of womenfolk if she has no other way.

Conclusion:

Mahatma Gandhi respected women much and found mother in the woman. His mother Putlibai and his wife Kasturba were source of inspiration for him which taught him importance of spirituality and peaceful resistance, non-violence respectively. Fast was the way of resisting peacefully for Kasturba when Mahatma Gandhi tried to impose his sayings and decisions on her. He learnt this non-violence from her. He made efforts for the equal rights, equal opportunities of woman. He strongly condemned patriarchal domination and men's consideration of women as weak and tool for them. She is not tool and slave of the man. He advised the women to be determined and adamant and strongly but non-violently oppose the evil, unworthy, undesirable things which go beyond her worthy and ethical thoughts. She must not seek for the help of man for her defense rather she should defend herself. He has tried to eradicate bad customs which were poisonous for Hinduism and for women's sake. He wanted women to be politically, socially, personally equal to men and stand side by side her husband. He wanted her educational, economic, political, personal, professional development. Mahatma Gandhi's wish is not fulfilled yet completely. We find in this contemporary world women have not got that kind of equality which is expected. The customs which become hurdles in the way of her progress are not eradicated completely. Today we find the suppression of women's wishes and she is yet somehow considered inferior to men. This male dominated society though has become powerless in some way but is not vanished completely. If we are true follower of Mahatma Gandhi and respect the women we must change our attitude and comply with the strength and equal values of women. She is the mother of man.

References

Barry Peter, Beginning Theory, Viva Books Private ltd, Manchester University Press, third edition 2013.

Gandhi M.K. The Story of my Experiment with Truth, translated from Gujrati by Mahadeo Desai; Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad edition 1959.

Prabhu R.K., Rao U.R. The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi, Navjivan Publishing House, edition April 2010.

Shailesh Kumar edited book My Non-Violence: M.K. Gandhi, Navjivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1960.