

GANDHIAN THOUGHTS OF WOMEN UPLIFTMENT CONTRASTED WITH THE CURRENT WOMEN PROBLEM

SANGITA SAHA

Abstract: The milestone of the 69th year of Republic urges India to examine its problem, progress and paradoxes. The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times, through the low points of the medieval period to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers. One of them is Mahatma Gandhi. The history of women in India has been eventful. In modern India, women have adorned high offices in India including that of the president, prime minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Leader of Opposition etc. the current Chief-Minister of West Bengal is a woman. In fact, its credit goes to Mahatma Gandhi. In India, he involved women in Political movement like Satyagraha.

Key Words: Feminism, Marriage, Society, Women.

Introduction: Women, urban and rural, educated and uneducated, Indians and foreigners, have attracted to his ideas and deeds. While some like Sarojini Naidu, Lakshmi Menon, Sushila Nayyar and Rajkumari Amrit Kaur rose to prominence, there were thousands of unsung and unnoticed heroines of India who learnt the meaning of liberation from him and contributed with all their energy to the struggle for independence. However, at present time there are various issues and problems, which women generally face in Indian society.

Role and Status of Women in Ancient India: In India the Rig Vedic Women enjoyed high status in society. Their condition was good. The women were provided opportunity to attain high intellectual and spiritual standard. There were many women Rishis during this period. Though monogamy was mostly common, the richer section of the society indulged in polygamy. There was no sati system or early marriage.

However, from enjoying free and esteemed positions in the Rig-Vedic society, women started being discriminated against since the Later-Vedic period in education and other rights and facilities. Child marriage, widow burning, the purdah and polygamy further worsened the women's position

Issues and Problems faced by Women in India: There are various issues and problems, which women generally face in the society in India. Some of the problems are mentioned and described below.

1. **Domestic violence and status in the family:** It is the abuse or violence against women.
2. **Child Marriages:** Early marriage of the girls by her parents in order to be escaped from dowry. It is highly practiced in the rural India.
3. **Status of widows:** Widows are considered as worthless in the Indian society. They are treated poorly and forced to wear white clothes.
4. **Disparity in education:** The level of women education is less than men still in the modern age.

Female illiteracy is higher in the rural areas. where over 63% or more women remain unlettered.

5. **Inadequate Nutrition:** Inadequate nutrition in the childhood affects women in their later life especially women belonging to the lower middle class and poor families.
6. **Sexual harassment:** It is the form of sexual exploitation of a girl child at home, streets, public places, transports, offices, etc by the family members, friends or relatives.
7. **Dowry:** It is another problem generally faced by girls of low or middle class family during or after the marriage. Parents of boys demands a lot of money from the bride's family to be rich at a time. Groom's family perform bride burning in case of unfulfilled dowry demand. In 2005, around 6787 dowry death cases were registered in India according to the Indian National Crime Bureau reports.

Gandhi has given equal attention to women's: In a letter written to Rajkumari Amrit Kaur from Wardha on 21, October, 1936 **Gandhi** writes, "*If you women would only realize your dignity and privilege, and make full use of it for mankind, you will make it much better than it is. But man has delighted in enslaving you and you have proved willing slaves till the slaves and the slave-holders have become one in the crime of degrading humanity. My special function from childhood, you might say, has been to make women realize her dignity. I was once a slave-holder myself but proved an unwilling slave and thus opened my eyes to my mission. Her task was finished. Now I am in search of a woman who would realize her mission. Are you that woman, will you be one?*"

Women position in society according to Gandhiji: Of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or as brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity to me, the female sex, not the weaker sex. It is the nobler of the two, for it is even today the

sacrifice, silent suffering, humility faith and knowledge. He said about sex, gender, education, self-protection, perversion of place. Marriage confirms the right of union between two partners to the exclusion of all the others when, in their joint opinion, they consider such union desirable, but it confers no right upon one partner to demand obedience of the other to one's wish for union. What should be done when one partner on moral or other grounds cannot conform to the wishes of the other is a separate question. Personally, if divorce was the only alternative, I should not hesitate to accept it, rather than interrupt my moral progress, assuming that I want to restrain myself on purely moral grounds. Voluntary widowhood consciously adopted by woman who has felt the affection of a partner adds grace and dignity to life, sanctifies the home and uplifts religion itself. Widowhood imposed by religion or custom is an unbearable yoke, defiles the home by secret vice, and degrades religion.

If we would be pure, if we would save Hinduism, we must rid ourselves of this poison of enforced widowhood. The reform must begin by those who have girl-widows taking courage in both their hands and seeing that the child-widows in their charge are duly and well married-not remarried. They were never married. I believe in the proper education of woman. However, I do believe that woman will not make her contribution to the world by mimicking or running a race with men. She can run the race, but she will not rise to the great heights she is capable of by mimicking man. She has to be the complement of man. Those who see in Sita a willing slave under Rama do not realize the loftiness of either her independence or Rama's consideration for her in everything. Sita was no helpless, weak woman incapable of protecting herself or her honors. Women are special custodians of all that is pure and religious in life. Conservative by nature, if they are slow to shed superstitious habits, they are also slow to give

up all that is pure and noble in life. Legislation has been mostly the handiwork of men; and man has not always been fair and discriminates in performing that self-appointed task. The largest part of our effort in promoting the regeneration of women should be directed towards removing those blemishes, which are represented in our Shastras as the necessary and ingrained characteristics of women. Who will attempt this and how?

In my humble opinion, in order to attempt, we will have to produce women, pure, firm and self-controlled as Sita, Damayanti and Draupadi. If we do produce them, such modern sisters will receive the same homage from Hindu society as is being paid to their prototypes of yore. Their words will have the same authority as the Shastras. We will feel ashamed of the stray reflections on them in our Smritis, and will soon forget them. Such revolutions have occurred in Hinduism in the past, and will still take place in the future, leading to the stability of our faith

Steps taken by Government regarding Women's Safety: There are various rules, regulations, act and laws made by the Indian government regarding the safety of women in India. However, a new act (Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill, 2015) has been passed by the Indian government by replacing the earlier one of 2000 (Indian juvenile delinquency law of 2000) to reduce the juvenile age from 18 to 16 years especially in case of heinous offenses (after Nirbhaya case).

Lastly, we can conclude that the position of woman in India compared to other countries is poor. In some villages, they are considering woman as a kitchen bee. This type of attitude has to be changed. But compared to the early days, these day's women are coming out freely and participating in every field. It is a good sign of women upliftment. So, today we also need to know Gandhijian thought of women upliftment.

References:

1. Dr. Suneetha .V., The Changing Trend in Matrilineal Family As A Threat; Human Rights International Research Journal : ISSN 2320-6942 Volume 2 Issue 1 (2014), Pg 186-193
2. M.K. Gandhi: *Village Swaraj*; Navjivan publishing House, Ahmedabad
3. Harijan patrika
4. Young India
5. Web: www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chapter60.htm
6. N. Jayapalan: " *Indian Society And Social Institutions*"; Atlantic publishers and distributors, Delhi, V-1,2.
7. Dr. Krishna Prasad Gogoi, A Study on the Perception Level of Women Towards Family Environment; Human Rights International Research Journal : ISSN 2320-6942 Volume 3 Issue 1 (2015), Pg 204-206.

Sangita saha/ Research Scholar of T.M.B.University/ Department of Philosophy/ Part-time Teacher (DPI approve) of Samsi College under Gour Banga University/ W.B./