
GANDHI'S SOCIAL ACTION TOWARDS THE ERADICATION OF SOCIAL EVILS

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Abstract: In the first half of nineteenth century, several social evils were followed in the name of tradition and custom in India. Perhaps, nobody have courage to fight against the evils and eradicate the same. However, some of the intellectuals and reformers were express their views in their writings and actions. On the great path, Gandhi condemned and wants to reform the social evils like Child marriage, Sati, Devadasi system, Widowhood, and Dowry and Pardah system. However, he never starts organisation for empowerment of women. But he move forward against social evils by his own way. Empowering women in India at the time of Gandhi was a herculean task. But he never compromises anything against the empowerment of women. By the way his writings, speech action were always against the social evils. Finally, he gave a solution for women empowerment that education only change the status of women. This study mainly focused on Gandhian vision on social action towards eradication of social evils.

Keywords: Empowerment of Women, Education, Social Evils Social Action and Tradition.

Introduction: Mohandass Karamchand Gandhi was an eminent leader from India who honoured as "Father of Nation", "Mahatma" sometimes called as "Bapu" for his freedom movement. Indeed, He sacrificed his life for getting freedom against British, he utilizing his Policy of Non- violence and sweeps the freedom successfully. Apart from freedom movement, Gandhi touched almost all the fields in India, to find the problem and think wisely for solve the problem. On the consequences, Gandhi realised that certain customs and traditions of the Indian society were anti-ethical to the spirit of development of women of the tradition. Indian traditional society is believed that women should remain confined to their husband or other male family members . Besides, he was the great believer of traditions in India. However he never compromises anything against the empowerment of women. Perhaps, he quoted against tradition "It is good to swim in the waters of tradition; but to sink in them is suicide". Therefore, he was completely against many social customs, traditions, norms and values and social evils like child-marriage, widowhood, the dowry system, the purdah system and prostitution, the witch- hunting etc. which are threats to the development of the society. So, Gandhi started his crusade against social evils with new emphasis on cultural regeneration through congress organization. This paper traces the Gandhian vision on social action towards eradication of social evils.

Gandhi's Perception of Women: Gandhi wants to empower women in India to eradicate the social evils. Earlier, this stance taken by other social reformers and leaders, prior to Gandhi created a helpless image of the Indian women Gandhi emerged as a leader with new action of favour to women constantly gained currency. According to Gandhi, women were not a play thing in the hands of men, neither their opponents. Both Men and women were essentially enforced with the same energy and therefore have identical problems. Women are at equalence with men, one integrate the other. According to Gandhi, education for women was the need of the time that would ensure their moral development and make them capable of occupying the same platform as that of men. Gandhi beliefs that, "Man, by nature, is physically strong, and therefore he puts in hard labour to support and protect the family. Women, by nature, love, and therefore, they are equipped by nature to play the role of a mother and the caretaker of the home. Both these duties are equally important and necessary; this must be realized by both men and women" Also Gandhi was not only a politician par-excellence, but also an individual, integrated within the social milieu and aware the contradictions and the need to transcend them.

In Gandhi's perspective, women are never being treated to be the weaker sex. Indeed, women for Gandhi were symbol of virtues like ability, kindness, tolerance, sacrifice and belief. These qualities were essential prerequisites for imbibing the virtue of satyagraha. The capability of enduring endless suffering can be witnessed only in the women, according to the Mahatma. The idea of ahimsa as propounded by Gandhi assimilated the virtue of adversity as is visible in the women. Hence, Gandhi conceived a crucial role for women in institute non-violence. Gandhi adjures to illustrate of ancient role models who were embodiment of Indian womanhood, namely Savitri, Draupadi, Damayanti and Sita, to reveal that Indian women could never be fragile. Women have equal mental abilities as that of men an equal right to freedom. Gandhi express his ideology in the form of words; "The wife is not the husband's slave but his companion and his help-mate and an equal partner in all his joys and sorrows - as free as the husband to choose her own path."

Constrains over Women's Empowerment: Empowering women in India at the time of Gandhi was a herculean task. Perhaps, nobody have courage to interfere the traditional customs in India. He felt that the work of social organ cannot be postponed until the achievement of political goal. Therefore, in Gandhi we find a person too revolutionary in his times who could challenge the very. Gandhi gave powerful support to the cause of women's emancipation and vehemently criticized various social evils afflicting Indian womanhood. He wanted shastras to be read and understood in the right manner and if they contained a contradictory statements on a particular issue, his advice to be follow the ones which were favoured by reason. He further remarked: "No progress and reform is possible if one is not prepared to get out of the rut of orthodox tradition" Gandhi criticized various social practices and evils which were justified on the ground of their traditional sanctions which included the custom of child marriage, enforced widowhood, sati pratha, dowry etc. In a Gandian frame work women have to realize their own potential and inner strength. Simultaneously they must accept truth and non-violence as their guiding principle.

Social Evils in Indian Society: In the course of many centuries several ugly social customs, religious dogmas, usages and traditions developed and most of these social evils and any reformer who showed an audacity to ostracised. The reaction of conservative people who wanted to maintain the status-quo was very sharp to any initiative for social reform, Indian society suffered from various social evils such as sati, child marriage, polygamy, infanticide, untouchability, purdah system, caste system and ban on widow marriage which gnawed at the very vitals of the nation leading to paralysing immobility of social life and economic stagnation. In Indian society the womenfolk had been the most exploited class. But all the evils began to die and disappear on after another, due to the efforts of the reformers. On the consequences Gandhi was the predominant leader in India who made effort to eradicate social evils. Also he revealed his views about social evils and fight against the same by his actions. Moreover , Gandhi remarked that all that is published in the name of scriptures should not be taken as the word of God or the inspired word , since they often contain false interpolations and argued that in any case scriptural injunctions which are obviously in conflict with true morality need not be followed. In expurgation by some authorities body of all those texts in the Samritis which were repugnant to the moral sense.

Child Marriage: Marriage is one of the important social institutions and it is a means of establishing a family through within the society perpetual. Besides, child marriage is one of the burning problems of Indian society, despite amended laws advocating 18 as the legal minimum age at marriage for females, earlier it was 15. Indeed, Gandhi was against child marriage, which he considered as an immoral and inhuman act, for it undermined, our morals and induced physical degeneration. Repudiating the claim that child marriage had a religious sanction, Gandhi argued, smritis which enjoined early marriages do not depict the true essence of Hinduism and must be rejected as interpolations. Gandhi believed that no real upliftment of women was possible without the radical reforms in the marriage system. The Hindu marriage custom had many abuses such as polygamy, infant marriage, prohibition of widow remarry and heavy dowry etc. Gandhi advocated opening of special institutions like Mahilashramas for rescuing young girls who fell victims to the evil designs of such lustful men or were sold by their parents for the sake of a paltry sum of money and exhorted educated and enlightened women to work among such girl wives and widows so as to gradually cultivate a social climate wherein wedding of little girls

would become an impossibility. He never thought that a child widow is a widow in true perspective. So he strongly advocated, in the teeth of opposition from the Santana Hindus for the remarriage of so called widows and quoted from Sastras that they are acceptable to reason and dignity of womanhood.

Dowry System: Basically, the purpose of the dowry system was to provide “seed money” or property for the establishment of a new household, to help a husband feed and protect his family, and give the wife and children some support if he were to die. Gandhi vehemently opposed the dowry system and called it „the hateful system, marriage by purchase and a, degrading practice. He saw the inherent evil in it for both the giver and reserve because it create the bondage, because it is like buying and selling, bargaining, and because this system turns human beings into things. The age at which the girls are ordinarily married gives a clue of the position of the women in the society. Gandhi had seen the pitiable positions of girls as child, wives, and widow. Gandhi condemned dowry as a cruel custom which was responsible for turning women into cattle to be bought and sold. Mahatma Gandhi, whose passion as a reformer surpassed even his commitment to riding India of the British Raj, denounced the evil custom regularly in his newspapers, Harijan and Young India, and shamed men for agreeing to be purchased,. He advocated that women wait to get married until they found grooms who would not demand gifts. Marriage is a sacrament. The aspiration of marriage is to get regency but all regency that is born now is the concern of passion, compromise and perfidious.

Widowhood: To lose a martial partner through death was leads several changes in the financial arrangements and subsequent economic in management. They have faced several constrains on the form of tradition. Gandhi’s heart naturally wept for the helpless conditions of Indian widows. He was against the standards in this matter especially in India where this slave mentality in this regard is assiduously cultivated from childhood. Gandhi believed regarding child widows that they should be married off by their parents. It should not be called remarriage, if the girl is widowed before reaching the age of 15. In the case of young widows they should be self-free to divide for themselves whether to marry again or remain a widow. He respected voluntary widowhood and believed that it is a priceless boon in Hinduism, while enforced widowhood is a curse. Widowhood imposed by religion or custom was an unbearable yoke, and defiled home by secret vice and degraded the religion.

Devadasi System: The evil of prostitution was vehemently criticised by Mahatma Gandhi. He said, “of all the evils for which man had made himself responsible , none is so degrading , shocking or brutal as his abuse of the better –half of humanity, the fairer sex”. Gandhi posted against prostitution, which he considered as moral leprosy. He did not however condemn prostitution that was forced to live a life of sin. In this opinion men visiting these places were equally responsible for perpetuating this evil. He was practical enough to recognize that the men would be as fallen as the women if this profession spread. He bestowed with a solution for overcoming for this dreadful disease by leading a chaste and simple life with Charkha. For which he pleaded and practiced for whole life. He appealed to all Indian men to ponder over the fate of the thousand of the sisters who are destined to a life of shame for their unlawful and immoral indulgence. Hence he questioned, what is worse or more hurtful to society to steal property or to steal the honour of the women. This period saw the emergence of many women organizations. The Women’s Indian Association was founded in 1917 by Margaret Cousins, an Irish and an Indian Nationalist, The National Council of Indian Women in 1926 and All India Women’s Conference in 1927 in 1920s and 1930s women participated actively in the Civil Disobedience Movement. Gandhi tried to make women participate in all the activities of non-cooperation movement. Gandhi specially entrusted this task to women because he was convinced that at no rate women can ever be suspected of resorting to violence. Gandhi has been called the mentor of modern social welfare. He brought about the transition from social reforms to social welfare.

Sati Pratha: Gandhi considered sati-pratha as barbarous in the present age. He believed that self-immolation on the pyre of the husband is a sign that of enlightenment but of gross ignorance as to the nature of soul, the soul is immortal, unchangeable and imminent. It does not perish with the physical body but journey from one moral frame to another. It completely emancipates itself from earthly bondage. He suggested women to prove their sati hood not by the mounting the funeral pyre but by

renunciation, sacrifice, self-abnegation and the dedication to the service of her husband, his family and the country. Though Gandhi criticized Sati Pratha whole heartedly, but his criticism did not extend to the then existing social norms which required total self abnegation on the charity in law and society.

Pardah System: Gandhi attacked the constricting the system of pardah, the seclusion and veiling women, prevalent in the society. It is not only denied the freedom to the women, who had been caged and confined in their light houses and courtyard. He pointed out that interfering with the growth of free and independent spirited men. Gandhi further opinion that, we would be incapable of defending ourselves and healthily competing with other nations, if we continue to allow our better halves to remain paralysed. It accounts for our weakness, indecision, narrowness and helplessness. Repudiating the argument that pardah protects the virtue of women as the safety value against the corruption, Gandhi firmly believed it was not pardah but purity which works as a shield and give protection to women against malicious intensions. In support of his viewpoint, he further remarked, “chastity is not a hot house growth. It cannot be super imposed. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of pardah. It must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation. men as the latter are compelled to trust them and must help them to come out of their veils and breather in the fresh air.

Conclusion: Some of the peoples were born who have changed the history by their thought and writings. They reflected while the social discrimination happens to others particularly women, they were called as intellectuals and reformers. Perhaps, Gandhi is a multi talented personality who identified the all evils from society and gave a solution on the same. At the time of Gandhi, several social evils were followed by the society in the name of tradition and custom. However, women were the vulnerable group who have survived their life always. Gandhi condemned and wants to reform the social evils like child marriage, sati, devadasi system, widowhood, and dowry and pardah system. However, he never starts an organisation for empowerment of women. But he move forward against social evils by his own way. Finally he gave a solution for women empowerment that education only change the status of women.

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