The Role of Woman - According to Mahatma Gandhi

Dr. Suneetha
PDF (Post-Doctoral Fellow),
Department of Philosophy,
Manasagangotri, University of Mysore,
Mysuru- 570006, Karnataka, India

Abstract: Woman is an important concept in contemporary Indian Society. She is the embodiment of love and self-sacrifice. It is said that the greatness of any society depends on the highest place given to woman. She is not a commodity to be possessed or sold. She is an enlightened person who has given her lot to the betterment of society. But in contemporary Indian Society, her position is often declared as crisis-ridden. Is she really free? This is the dominated question. What different roles she is expected to play? Is Indian Society male dominated? These are questions related to woman and are to be analyzed and critically discussed. According to Mahatma Gandhi, woman is not to be treated as a weaker sex. She is strong enough to be assigned responsibilities of all sorts-army, nation governance and freedom and so on.

Key words: Role of woman, Mahatma Gandhi, betterment of society, National governance, equality

I. Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, sought to bring about a revolutionary change in the status of women in the first half of the 20th century. He had expressed his views and had written on numerous issues concerned with the Indian society in particular, and humanity in general. This article examines the importance and relevance of his views on issues that directly or indirectly impacts the role of woman. Gandhi did not stop at opposing the practices which were harmful to woman but also forcefully advocated in favor of various rights of women. He believed that education was needed to awaken in the minds of women a consciousness of their present condition. He believed that education will enable women to assert their natural right and to exercise them wisely and to work for their expansion. However he also believed the since home life is entirely the sphere of women. They ought to have knowledge regarding domestic affairs and upbringing of children. Hence courses of instruction should be based on an appreciation of basic roles of men and women. He was not against economic independent of women. Some people feared that economic independence of women may lead to spread of immortality among them and disrupt domestic life. To that his answer was that morality should not depend upon the helplessness of a man or woman. It should be rooted in the purity of hearts. He wanted woman to take up some work so as to supplement the earning of the family. He recommended work like spinning which will not disturb the home as he regarded their duties at home to be as important as men’s duty to earn. He recommended equal payment to women. He did not want women to be restricted from any activity and went on to say that there may be no legal bar against a woman hunting or wielding a lance.

II. Wives as equal to husbands

Gandhi wanted every husband to treat his wife as an ‘Ardhangini’ and ‘Sahadharmini’. The wife is a comrade with same freedom which the husband sees for himself. She should have the right to participate in the very minutest details in the activities of men.

III. Women are equal to men

Gandhi believed that men and women are equal as the same Atma (soul) dwells in the women’s body. Since soul is sexless men and women are perfectly equal in the eyes of god. He recommended equal remuneration for women. He believed that women have equal mental capacities; have the right participate in the minutest details of the activities of men, and have same right to freedom and liberty as men.

He believed that women of India had strength, ability character and determination to stand on her own and work shoulder to shoulder with men in every walk of life. He had full faith in their sincerity and was sure that they would not lag behind in producing perfect performance.
IV. Women in economic sphere

He believed that the loss of spinning wheel brought about India’s slavery and its voluntary revival will lead to freedom. In his view women are best suited to take up spinning and the propagation of Khadi and Swadeshi. To him for middle class it should supplement the income and for very poor women it could be the means of livelihood. He believed that it would mean a few coppers in hand where none existed before. Besides it will bring about metamorphosis in the lives of women. Women should participate in political arena: He called women to join Indian national congress and participate in the freedom struggle. There was a breath taking abruptness about the entry of women into political life due to his influence. One moment they were not there the next they were in the fore front of scene. Women participated in political meetings and protest marches; bore Lathi charge; courted arrest and even got shot.

Women could do so because Gandhi chose a particular form of struggle which suited women, women did not feel limited or unequal to men. He mobilized women politically through his speeches writings and personal example. Due to him women participated in freedom movement, the presence of women in public sphere gained acceptability in India. It was made possible because men folk knew that the honour of their women was safe in a non-violent struggle guided by Gandhi. Women in constructive programme: Women were at the forefront of constructive programme. They organised themselves; manufactured contra band salt; sold it from house to house picketed wine, opium, and foreign goods shop; spun and wore Khadi participated in prabhatpheris, demonstrations, prayers, meetings, marches; worked for Hindu – Muslim unity; and removal of untouchability. They also provided support to families when men are away.

V. Awareness of rights

As women got educated and participated in public arena they became aware of their own position and rights. As a result many associations for women came up. Women are superior to men; Gandhi considered women not only equal to men but in many superior to men. To him bravery lay in dying and not killing; he defined bravery in the highest sense of suffering and sacrifice. Hence to him the courage of self sacrificing women was superior to men of brute force. Gandhi believed that women have been gifted by God but their marvellous power has been lying dormant. If they realise their power they can dazzle the world. He did not want women to neglect their families or leave the traditional role of nurture. He wanted women to attend to the bringing up of their children give peace to the husband when he returns home tired; she is minister to him. Soot him if he is angry and do any work they can staying at home. He also believed that women’s education should be based on their role as nurtures and that women are to share their husband’s privileges.

VI. Conclusion

It is important to remember that Gandhi was neither a feminist nor anti feminist. He was a great soul who was saddened by the deplorable condition of Indian women and wanted to uplift their status; rid them of suppressive customs; and wanted them to play important role in social, political and economic life of Society.

References


Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges all the authors and publishers whose information has been cited in this research paper.