

REVISITING GANDHIAN THOUGHT: AN EPILOGUE TO THE WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION

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Gandhi Felsefesini Dikkate Almak: Kadın Haklarına Dair



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ABSTRACT

The most remarkable feature that underlies the practical philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi is that he attempted to achieve changes in the society not on a superficial level however at a more profound level the change must be brought from very deeper level, this is the thing that he thought and worked upon until his last day to heavenly abode, subsequently setting a model for the future ages to follow. According to him the change must be brought from very deeper level. Gandhi's influence made women aware of their potential in contemporary society he gave them encouragement and confidence, making them realize that they are equal human being as men, and their role is important as men in society and both men and women are supplementary and dependent to each other. So, women's role is important for freedom fight so, national movement would not succeed without their involvement. I will be discussed about the Gandhian concept, womanhood and how he made women capable to take participation in various sphere like, household, society and national movements. Gandhi always included women in his discussion of "human being". He brought out them of their homes and made them participate in social and political activities.

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ÖZ

Mahatma Gandhi'nin felsefesinin altında yatan en dikkat çekici özellik, toplumdaki değişiklikleri yüzeysel olmaktan ziyade daha derin bir düzeyde gerçekleştirmeye çalışmasıdır. Gandhi'nin, ebedi istirahatgâhına kadar düşündüğü ve üzerinde çalıştığı ve gelecek çağlar için bir model oluşturduğu şey budur. Gandhi, kadınların çağdaş toplumdaki potansiyellerinin farkına varmalarını sağlayarak onlara cesaret ve güven verdi. Erkeklerle eşit olduklarını ve toplumdaki rollerinin erkekler kadar önemli olduğunu; hem erkek hem de kadınların tamamlayıcı ve birbirine bağımlı olduklarını fark etmelerini sağladı. Dolayısıyla, kadınların rolü özgürlük mücadelesi için önemlidir; ulusal hareket onların katılımı olmadan başarılı olamazdı. Gandhi, "insan olmak" tartışmasına kadınları her zaman dâhil etti. Gandhi onları evlerinden çıkardı; onların sosyal ve politik faaliyetlere katılmalarını sağladı.

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1. Introduction

In any plan of life, Gandhi believed in the autonomy of women so, he maintained, woman has equal rights to “shape her own destiny as man has to shape his” (Gandhi, Constructive Programme, 1945). It is interesting to consider what Gandhi’s concept of an Indian womanhood was. Gandhiji had the novel idea and understanding that a woman is an individual in her own right as man have.

According to Gandhi, both men and women are dependent and supplementary to each other; Gandhi believed that, consciousness of women for her ‘chastity and ‘purity’ is the real strength of a woman. According to Gandhi if women were to be ‘free’ they had to be ‘fearless’. Gandhi properly understood that it was progressively a matter of psychological fear and helplessness, socially forced upon women by society and physical shortcoming which kept woman disabled (Kishwar, 1985). His consistent message to them was that were not the restraining infrastructure of men. Gandhi’s fantasy was to treat every individual as equal human being irrespective of caste and creed so, he thinks every individual should get equal opportunity to participate in everywhere in the society. When Gandhi felt that the condition of women is not as equal human being as men so, he raised a voice against the abuse of women. He was a religious and secular personality so; he links womanhood and manhood with the Upanishadic idea that the human soul (atman) is identical to the transcendental Brahman. *“There is the same atman in women as in man. It is not affected by differences in caste, sex, or country.”* (Gandhi, Letter to Sharadhabehn Kota, 1927).

Gandhi, after getting familiar with the women of country, realised, women, in India, are sufficient to be an equivalent member as the quiet specialist for the prosperity of the family and for nation as well. Women assumed the significant job as the partner of man in the field at the hour of sowing and reaping. Many of our movements stop halfway because of the condition of our women. Much of our work does not yield appropriate results, *“Anything that will impair the status of either of them will involve the equal ruin of them both.”* (Gandhi, Speech at Bhagini Samaj, Bombay, 1918).

Nevertheless, there is no question that there is a division anywhere. Although all are essentially one, it is also equally true that there is a crucial distinction between the two in there is difference in bodily makeup. Therefore, the vocation of the two must be distinct as well. The task of motherhood, which is often performed by the vast majority of women, involves attributes that man does not need to attain. She is passive, he is active: she is the bread keeper and distributor. In either meaning of the word, she is the caretaker (Parathara, 2016: 1409). The art of bringing up the infants of the race is her special and sole prerogative function. Without her care the race must become extinct. Females conceive, raise and feed infants from their bodies and have always taken responsibility for the maintenance, that is, the protection of the whole human species. Given their contribution in the primary sectors, they were not seen as contributing economically to their communities or being inside the manufacturing processes. The growth capacity of women is far from completely exploited due to socio-economic limitations and they have been forced back into the social hierarchical structure.

“There are no women blacksmiths and carpenters. But men and women work on the fields, the heaviest work being done by the males. The women keep

and manage the homes. They supplement the meager resources of the family, but man remains the bread winner." (Parathara, 2016: 1409).

Further he said, *"My own opinion is that, just as fundamentally man and woman are one, their problem must be one in essence."*(Gandhi, 1940b). Some difference in their vocations and roles is to be expected and accepted. Her biological makeup is different but, it does not mean she is there for ill treatment. It must be continually kept in mind that women are naturally entitled to enjoy the equal rights and liberty the same rights as men. *"Woman is gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest details of the activities of man and has the same right to freedom and liberty as he."*(Caplan, 1987: 290). Gandhi's point of view, women must be cognizant and mindful to feel and acknowledge at each progression of their life that they are builders of their country and the peaceful world. This suggests man should build up the delicacy and the separation of woman; and woman should push off her demureness and become bold and gutsy. In Mahatma's view, tremulous woman implied more extensive and wider occupational horizons for her. Regardless of the way he felt that each sex may will all in all win in a substitute extent of occupations, he denied that such bracketing was in the normal request of things. To illustrate the kind of occupational distribution he had in mind, he was given the examples of:

"Cooking is considered as the occupation of woman. But a soldier would be worthless who cannot cook his own food. Moreover, whilst woman naturally cooks for the household but, if we practically see cooking at large is scale is always done by men throughout the world."(Reyland, 1977: 134).

So, he said both of them should work in their field without gendering the task and without losing their own identity as well and cooperate each other. He did believe that *"A man should remain man and yet should become woman; similarly, a woman should remain woman and yet become man."* (Gandhi, Talks to Ashram women, 1926).

Gandhi knew that it is not easy to come over the prejudices and customs which had become ingrained in the collective subconscious of his culture since a long time. Gandhi concern the sacredness of the women's pride and their freedom to take decision and She had the right to say 'No' even her better half, he wanted to see women as autonomous body as men. *"I want woman to learn the primary right of resistance. She thinks now that she has not got it."* (Gandhi, Harijan, 1936). Gandhi said, the women as a human being as men should be entitled to have the right to her own body which she does not surrender for a lifetime with marriage. Be that as it may, this view is personally connected with his perspective on a noblewoman as a sexless being and real sex as just that which is intended with the end goal of multiplication. Gandhi contended that men should effectively liberate their spouses from house-hold affairs by sharing. This did not imply that women should surrender their house-hold job totally for some other occupation. Indeed, Gandhi was traditional enough to hope that a wife's primary place would, in keeping with the gentleness and patience he attributed to women. *"Be in the home, particularly in the sense of caring for children."* (Gandhi, The Evil of Purdah, 1929).

When he asked to summaries his views on women's rights in marriage, he provided the statement: The vast majority of women perform the task of motherhood, which will still be fulfilled by, involves attributes that man does not need to possess. *"She is passive, he is active. She is essentially mistress of the house. He is bread-*

winner, she is the caretaker and distributor of the bread she is the caretaker in every sense of the term” (Bose, 1948: 240). The role of educated middle-class women in public life was an extension of her domestic place of selfless service. The opportunity for women to teach the art of reconciliation to the worrying world thirsting for this nectar was given. Literally, the capacity for passive suffering that Gandhi idealized was one of the major signs of her subordination. Yet Gandhi made another of the signs of subordination, the glorious cult of immortal womanhood. The symbol of our barbarism is to Gandhi, the domestic slavery of women. It is high time our women were liberated from this type of incubus. Domestic work does not require the time of a full-time woman. Gandhi blended in himself the best of both the masculine and feminine traits that he tried to merge in the men and women of India to make them whole and unified people. In the creation of his dream of a non-violent society, Gandhi envisaged a major and active role for women (Parathara, 2016:1412).

2. The impact of Gandhi’s feminism

Many eminent women joined Gandhi in the movement for the emancipation of women in India (Sahin, 2018). Sarojini Naidu (1879-1949), a well-known political leader and poet who worked relentlessly to spread the word among women, was among them.

Naidu worked closely with Gandhi and in her Presidential address in 1922 referred to him as the “flute of Sri Krishna”. She was one of the thousands who joined him against the salt-tax in the “March to the Sea”. Sarojini Naidu made strong and emotional speeches to the huge crowds who assembled to listen to her, travelling across the length and width of India. It was not just Indian women who were inspired by Gandhi. Inspired by him, Annie Besant is also one of them who became successful female orators of her day. In London (1887), she first encountered Gandhi (Norvell, 1997).

Aloo J. Dasrur and Usha H. Mehta argue that Unlike other reformers, who tried to seek an intellectual solution to women’s problems,

“Emotionally, Gandhi tried to emancipate them. The fact that women united to his conviction that they were strong and unshakeable, and he made them understand that their strength lay in their gentleness, commitment, tolerance, and maternal affection shows his appeal. In addition, they may be a catalyst to build a culture that is non-violent.” (ibid.1997: 12)

Gandhi envisioned an active role for women in walks of life dominated by men. For example, “he asked women to share in guarding the Sabarmati Ashram from thieves.” (Kishwar, 1985). It was female involvement in the national movement which seemed to concern him most. On a political level one could cite Gandhi’s keenness to include women in “Satyagraha” as another piece of evidence that, he was in fact a feminist. In discourses and compositions, he continually encouraged Indian women to participate in his satyagraha campaigns, especially in the charkha movement (Ryland, 1977). The section of women in the satyagraha struggle gave the movement another force. The women in India came out of purdah and effectively partook in the peaceful battle. Gandhi realized that, *“the women can be a leader in satyagraha which does not*

require the learning that books give but does require the stout heart that comes from suffering and faith.” (Gandhi, Harijan 1940a).

Gandhiji made women’s capacity for his brand of nationalism with its emphasis upon tolerance and converting the opposition by suffering and sacrifice was better than that of men. He advocated that, it is given to woman to show the art of peace and harmony to the warring world. He had significantly said that the woman is the incarnation of Ahimsa: ahimsa implies interminable love, which again implies boundless limit of tolerance.

“I do believe that it is woman’s mission to exhibit Ahimsa at its highest and best... For woman is more fitted than man to make explorations and take bolder action in Ahimsa... For the courage of self-sacrifice woman is any day superior to man, as I believe man is to woman for the courage of the brute.” (Gandhi, Harijan, 1938)

We should rediscover status of women and give them full regard and support, whenever they needed, in household and outside home.

He advocated his conviction by expressing that ahimsa requires limitless love, courage, and an ability to suffer voluntarily, when the event emerges. Gandhi had planned his technique and picked his specific forms of battle consciously and deliberately to empower this. In an effort to connect their struggle with the struggle for national movement, Gandhi actively included women. In this revolution, the crucial thing being that women were designed in a way that they don’t need to leave their home affairs, they could stay at home and still contribute to the movement. As a masterpiece, the influence of Gandhi’s support and inclusion of women was felt in the revolution (Kishwar, 1985).

Congressmen were approached to boycott government educational schools, law courts and legislatures as part of non-cooperation, and to challenge the British government by ahimsa for its unfair and discriminatory rules. The positive scheme, though, was about boycotting British products and spinning and wearing khadi. Both of these were famously placed by their positions in the household on the participation of women, for whom Gandhi had no significant squabble. In reality, his women’s program supplemented their house-hold position and also managed to give them a sense of purpose in their prosaic life.

“The restoration of spinning to its central place in India’s peaceful campaign for deliverance from the imperial yoke gives her women a special status. In spinning they have a natural advantage over men. Spinning is essentially a slow and comparatively silent process. Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and therefore, non-violence. Her occupations must therefore be, as they are, more conducive to peace than war.” (Gandhi, Letter to Triambaklal Popatlal, 1939).

Since nature has created sexes as complements of each other, their functions are also defined as are their forms. It was with a profound intuition that Gandhi could make women an important social basis for revolution without leaving their conventional position in society. Gandhi said that spinning and weaving was for women, “The first lesson in the school of industry.” (Gandhi, Message to Gujarati Hindu Stree Mandal, 1917).

While for the middle-class women the charkha as companion and would supplement the income of the family, for poor women it was a means of livelihood. Further,

“The spinning-wheel should be, as it was, the ‘widows loving companion.’ But for the educated, well-to-do women, Gandhi’s appeal presented spinning “as a duty, as dharma”-a means by which to relate their lives with those of their poor country-women.”(Gandhi, Young India, March, 1921)

While it meant spinning and weaving for the mass of women, the well-to-do spinning yarn would not only allow women to be economically autonomous, but would also contribute to middle-class wealth, often even the only source of subsistence for lower-class families. Women were encouraged not only to give up their international finery, but also to perform khadi, which cleaned both soul and body, and the last thing is “khadi” became a sign of solidarity, or we may say that women from various walks of life have made a common bond. A huge movement took place during 1921 for burning foreign cloth which is called “Asahyog Andolan”. Sarla Devi Chaudharani took initiative to wear khadi sâri in daily life and she started to go even to parties as well in her swadesi khadi sari. Many other women joined her in this movement who become symbol of women hood. Gandhi showed equal importance of women in “Swadesi Andolan” because Gandhi knew that without participation of women, this movement cannot be controlled. He justified his idea by saying that; women’s sphere belongs to house-hold activities like, look after children, to dress them etc. It is necessary that women should be fired with the spirit of Swadeshi. He also considered women are more suitable than men in the movement. As he wrote in the Harijan on November 5, 1938,

“Women is more fitted than man to make explorations and take bolder action in ahimsa.” The depth of Gandhiji’s respect for women may be said to have been extraordinarily simply stated.”(Kishwar, 1985).

Gandhi had upheld three particular distinct level of women participation in the national development. To start with, women who had house-hold responsibilities, for example, care of kids and aged were to fulfill just their essential responsibilities which were not to be surrendered for the sake of national development. Second, a group of women from whom he expected a sacrifice of the pleasure of housekeeping and child rearing. On the off chance that previously wedded these women were required to live as celibate for the country. Third, it was expected that full time workers would remain single and devote themselves completely to the fight for independence. Ketu Katrak maintains that Gandhi, like other Indian social reformers, reinforced British liberal and imperial policies because they didn’t take any initiative to improve the inferior and subordinate position of women in the patriarchal family system. (Patel, 2020). For Gandhi, it was a long-term process to reform people’s cultural mindsets and solve the plague of misogyny and bigotry he internalized as a young man. The process was not an easy task however, he made an incredible progress from the perspective of social feminism. However, Gandhi seems to have been very influential in molding the personal aspirations of many a woman, who came into the national movement, away from marriage. Undoubtedly, Gandhi was a karma yogi who conscientiously sought to translate what he knew into the concrete discipline of moral conduct. Gandhi seems to have been extremely influential in molding the individual aspirations of numerous a woman, who came into the freedom fight, away from marriage. Without a doubt,

Gandhi was a karma yogi who scrupulously tried to make an interpretation of what he knew into the solid order of moral conduct. There are two realities which Gandhi acknowledged to take cooperation of women in opportunity, initial one is women covers the half of the population. He appealed to women to join the movement in large number. He said,

“Indian body would not be able to do its work properly if one half of it, namely the women, remained inactive and so he would appeal to his sisters of India to join the satyagraha movement in large numbers.”(Gandhi, The Bombay Chronicle, 1919)

Secondly as we all know Gandhiji wanted to get freedom through non- violence so, he chose women for this job because of their “inherent” capacity for non-violence. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur said,

“Of all the factors contributing to the awakening of women in India none has been so potent as the field of nonviolence which Gandhiji offered to women in his ‘war’ against British domination of India. It brought them out in their hundreds from sheltered homes, to stand the furnace of a fiery trial without flinching.”(Grover&Arora: 46, 1999).

He had a natural comprehension of women problems and their issues and had a profound withstanding compassion toward them. He was an unrelenting enemy of all unrighteousness and oppression, a friend of the humble and the downtrodden. Under his inspirational leadership, his supportive concern and caring encouragement, women could play a major role in the freedom fight.

3. Conclusion

No one did as much as Gandhi did to get millions of illiterate women out of the four walls of their homes. Born in 1869, to a man of his day. Among the women working in the Indian national movement and feminist movement, Gandhi became an affectionate personality as he spoke in their language, did what men wanted to do and urged other men to go with the same trend of Gandhi’s attempt to model Indian public life. The idea of equity feminism seemed unfamiliar to most women during the Indian Nationalist movement, with the exception of a limited percentage of middle-to-upper-class women who lived mainly in towns. Gandhi was remarkably forward- looking in his attitude toward women. He not only attacked the obvious social disabilities they suffered, but also elucidated more subtle aspects of discrimination, such as the preference for male children, exploitative male sexual attitudes, and the relegation of women to the home - all of which had been too long ignored in his own day, as in ours. If Gandhi was not always consistent in affirming his feminist ideals, it was because, like all human beings. No one has done as much as Gandhi has done. This is no mean tribute to Gandhi’s ability to mobilize Indian women. This is no mean tribute to Gandhi’s capacity to assemble Indian women. For a man of his time, conceived in 1869. Gandhi was astoundingly forward-looking in his opinion toward women. He not just assaulted the undeniable social disabilities they suffered, but also elucidated more subtle aspects of discrimination, for example, the inclination for male children, stereo- types of female timidity, exploitative male sexual mentalities, and keeping of women beneath the roof of home - all of which had been ignored in his own day, as in our own. If Gandhi was not taken initiative in insisting his women ‘s activist goals. Gandhi’s ideology made

women to find a new dignity in public life, an equal role model in the national mainstream, a new self-view and a consciousness and confidence that they could rebel against any evil to save themselves. From passive objects, women could become dynamic subjects or agents of reforms of their own issue as well as of the entire society.

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