

Analysing Women Education: Gandhian Perspective

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Abstract

Education is one of the most effective tools to meet the challenges faced by a nation or a society. Right from the beginning of human civilization, Education played a pivotal role in power, progress and prosperity of men and women all over the world. Undoubtedly, India is not an exception where education has been a source of inspiration to the ancient world and a master tool of modern development. This paper is an attempt to focus spot light on women's education in our country and Mahatma Gandhi's bold and long-sighted endeavor in making education accessible, and inevitable for Indian women who comprised almost half of the country's population.

Key Words:*Civilization, Education, Prosperity, Pathetic, Humanity, Violence, Injustice*

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Introduction

The culture and civilization of a nation are bound with the goal of knowledge, methods of instruction and the standard of education. Study of a nation's soul means studying its educational aims and ideals, methods and systems, achievements, growth and future potential.

This also relates to women's education from every point of view woman are equal halves of men and thus, stake holders in every aspect of life. But unfortunately, our society has a tendency to treat this so called 'weaker sex' as weaker intellectually. On this ground this prejudiced social set up has deprived the women of their legitimate and equal rights. This is why in every community the education of women is a more complex and challenging task than that of men. A woman has to perform a significant role in the development and progress of family in dual manner. In spite of our unique culture and inherited high social ideals we have not been fair and judicious to our fair sex which almost makes half of our massive population. But one man claims the devotion and gratitude of women whose pitiable condition worked as the strongest stimulus for formation of his social, political and economic planning. He was none other than Mahatma Gandhi whose very self-got jostled by pathetic position of Indian women whose enormous potential was lying untapped and ignored.

Being a worshipper of humanity and staunch foe of injustice, he strove hard for the cause of women. He took woman not only a 'better half of man' but also acclaimed her as 'the mother, maker and silent leader of man'.

His educational philosophy evolved during his life time and in due course of time got familiarized as Gandhian School of Education. Gandhi said, 'Real education consists in drawing the best out of a person. What better book can there be than the book of humanity? Like many great thinkers, prophets and philosophers, Gandhi Ji was convinced that injustice, violence and oppression manifest from human heart and only education could mould in individual into a wholesome personality. He took education as a tool to fight against war, violence, injustice, violence and oppression manifest from human heart and only education could mould an individual into a wholesome personality. He took education as a tool to fight against war, violence, injustice, oppression and other social evils so that man could live in a social set up where peace, harmony and good sense prevailed.

Mahatma Gandhi was of the opinion that of all the evils of man the abuse of women was most degrading, shocking, brutal and inhuman. he strongly advocated for liberal education for women and wanted them to be treated with respect and dignity. He linked their illiteracy with the inferior status with which they were unjustly brandised. It was Gandhi's conviction that all human beings are one and share the same Atman (soul) and therefore there is a need of Sarvodaya or the uplift of all.

This universal uplift was only possible through education which should be universally available and include men and women both. He strongly reiterated that education provides congenial condition for overall amelioration and elevation of the weaker and less fortunate members of the society. Gandhi wanted to provide that kind of education to the girls which leads to salvation i.e. freedom of mind.

Gandhi expressed his new approach to education in a series of articles in 'Harijan' and 'Young India'. He strongly advocated for change in lack of education and enthusiasm among women were the main reasons of women's pathetic condition. High rate of illiteracy and rampant ignorance among women were some of the prominent causes of India's subjugation by foreign forces. He realized that the educated women would contribute to the nationalist movement and simultaneously become a powerful tool of their upliftment. Thus, education would not only meet political obligations but also make the women aware of their rights as home makers and national builders. According to Gandhi, harmonious development of women's personality is possible only through education. He recommended the imparting of instruction through mother tongue and free compulsory education for all boys and girls from seven to fourteen years. He was of the view that the students should be trained to think independently, critically and creatively so that they could develop abilities, attitudes, aptitudes and positive values for the development of a progressive society.

He was of the opinion that education was the most potent instrument for the regeneration of women and country's moral, material and spiritual progress would not be a reality without women's emancipation through education. Gandhi advised women to rely on themselves and cultivate complete fearlessness and inner strength. He argued that education was the most important instrument to bring about desired change and simultaneously enable womenfolk to assert for their rights and exercise them rightly.

Gandhi wanted Indian women to work freely with men and get emancipated from male domination. About co-education, Gandhi opined that men and women were of equal ranks but they were not identical. He, therefore, advised distinct education for men and women based on their specific needs, spheres, capacities and abilities. He believed that men were more efficient in activities outside home whereas women were more equipped for domestic duties like upbringing and education of children.

He also advised the women to conserve the best tradition of Indian culture and refuse to mimic the manners of the West. Gandhi's keen insight and deep understanding of men and women enabled him to think of the best kind of education for men and women. He held women in high esteem and was deeply pained by unjust and prejudiced treatment of women. He attributes illiteracy among women to

ill-treatment and injustice that men did to women.

Therefore; he wanted to emancipate women from terrible and inhuman traditional bondages. This could only be done by educating and training women so that they could discharge their responsibilities well.

In his educational experiments he did not find the results of co-education encouraging. He observed the complexities of co-education and suggested it up to the age of eight years. Even till date great experts and psychologists have not been able to arrive at a definite stand on the issue of co-education. Gandhi did not give his ultimate views on co-education but suggested that after the sixteenth year the boy and girl should decide whether to study together or separately. In Wardha Scheme of Education; parents had an option to withdraw their daughters from co-educational institutes after the age of twelve.² About co-education Gandhi said, 'The question of co-education has been left open. It will regulate itself according to the time spirit. Personally, I have an open mind. I think that there are just as valid reasons for as against co-education. And I would not oppose the experiment whenever it is made.'³

Gandhi believed that the education of little boys and girls could be more effectively handled by women than by men and by mothers than by maidens. Gandhi was a great lover of mankind and could not tolerate any type of injustice to women. In his address to students at Karachi he said, "Instead of making their wives queens of their homes and of their hearts, they had converted them into cattle to be bought and sold. Was this the lesson that they had imbibed from the reading of English literature? Woman had been described as the ardhang or the better half of man. But they had reduced them to the position of a slave and the result was the state of paralysis in which they found their country."

About molestation of girls at the hand of boys Gandhi encouraged the victims not to yield to the brute in man at any cost. He was of firm conviction that with strong will all bonds, compulsions and helplessness can be firmly resisted. But he knew that such heroism and stoic resistance cannot be developed unless girls were properly educated and trained.

The concept of the modern-dayself-defense was not strange to Gandhi who wanted the women to learn the art of self-defense to protect them from immoral and unchivalrous youth. Gandhi was much pained by the lack of civility among boys in schools and colleges. he was grieved at the loss of sense of hivarly among men and wanted them to honor women as their sisters or mothers.

For him the whole education was useless and vain if did not train them in good manners and etiquettes towards womenfolk. Though Gandhi was very enthusiastic in emancipating women from various bondages, restraints and injustices, he was very critical and discouraging to those girls who loved to be Juliets to dozens of Romeos and dressed impressively to attract attention of onlookers.⁴

He was against the artificiality and show parading which was the product of Western English Education. Being a social reformer, he wanted to introduce education of character building which could revolutionize the mentality of the nation's youth.

He wanted the education system to equip the people in such a way that they could defy the indefensible and worn-out customs so he wanted the girls to fight against social and other evils and dare to challenge the misguided and rude youth.

Gandhi was revolutionary in this approach to social justice and equality and advised the girls to remain spinsters if they did not get suitable match for them. Thus, he was not hesitant in disobeying and breaking down inhuman customs and practices. He believed that marriage should only be based on mutual love and consent and the dowry and other consideration should not play any role.

Gandhi wanted parents to educate their daughters in such a way that they could openly condemn the degrading practice of giving and taking dowry. He even advised parents to move out of their caste and provinces to find a suitable match for their daughters. But this all was possible if girls if girls get an education which would make them self-reliant and self-dependent.

Gandhi laid more stress on character building and personal purity than making people merely literate. He asked women not to imitate the manners of the West and rather practice their indigenous methods to eradicate ageless social evils. He wanted the women to extract the best from their and foreign culture and bring a revolutionary awareness in Indian villages. He was of the opinion that character is the expression of the whole personality.

Gandhi also took Ahimsa as an integral part of education and believed that by practicing it the students would live like brothers and sisters and develop love, respect, trust, empathy and feeling of sacrifice.⁵ In this way sense of charity, sacrifice and service will come to forefront and social evils like child marriage, dowry practice and domestic violence would cease and come to an end in a short period of time.

Gandhi wanted women to develop independent thinking and free themselves from chains of caste, creed and dogmas so that their strength of sacrifice and persistence could bloom up to its full capacity. To eradicate social evils, Gandhi advocated legislative provisions but strongly believed that women would only become powerful if they developed self-confidence and resist injustice strongly. He called upon the educated and enlightened women and requested them to contribute to the welfare of masses and fighting inequalities. Gandhi knew that women had immense reserves of inner strength and no obstacle could block their progress. Therefore, he wanted social reforms, physical mobility and easy access to learning to stimulate women's keen desire for progress.

Gandhi's views are a unique blend of tradition and modernity. He never appealed the women to forsake hearth and become family's bread winner, rather he

wanted them to be guided by traditional Indian ethos, ethic and work culture. He took women as an individual social being that had her own moral, social and developmental role in a gender equal, participatory public life.

Thus, Gandhi's contribution to the upliftment and empowerment of Indian women has been immense and matchless. He strongly argued that women were morally more superior to men and this fired the very imagination and self-confidence of women. For Gandhi, education was a process which included physical, social, economic, cultural, aesthetic, religious and spiritual dimensions.

In a speech delivered on February 20, 1918, Gandhi said, "Education is essential for enabling women to assert their natural rights, to exercise them wisely and work for their expansion." Gandhi never detached education from the reality of life and always despised any approach that snatched a woman's heart, bond of love, affection and motherliness.

He was of the view that education to arouse human sensibilities begins at home where women teach the lesson of the harmony of human relations and behavior to their children. Gandhi believed that fundamentally men and women were one and complimentary to each other. But unfortunately, the men have dominated women from ages and resultant; women have developed an inferiority complex.⁶ To eliminate man's coercive which would make bring them to the forefront. Gandhi elaborated women's special qualities and broadened the spectrum of the role of women education. His ideas on education were based on psychological, sociological and economic principles.

To make education effective, Gandhi wanted to correlate all subjects with out. He believed in learning by doing. His emphasis on vocational education was aimed at self-supporting education which is also the need of present-day education system in India. Gandhi's programme of education was based on values and aimed at raising the sincerity, devotion and dedication of people. Ironically the present-day education stresses on intellectual aspect which does not address the complexities and contradictions of present-day India. Gandhi contributed to social education and selfless service which took masses away from ignorance and superstition. For him education was the total involvement of life.

Thus, for Gandhi, education was much more than in intellectual affair. In one of his speeches he said, "I have never placed an unnecessary high value on the knowledge of the three Rs. I am only attempting to assign its proper place to it."⁷ His educational plans reflect his vision of humanism and strong sense of aesthetic consciousness. He extended leadership to women so that the essence of humanism could spread far and wide and women could shake off the inferiority complex they had suffered for long. He brought women to the forefront so that man's supremacy could be brought down and the society could develop without any sense of superiority,

inferiority, strong and weak and capable and incapable. For Gandhi the ultimate aim of women education was to enable her mind to be a living fountain of new ideas, concepts and creative things.

Presently women are stronger and strive hard for human and democratic values. But still now much more is yet to be done to make Gandhi's dream a reality. Even today there is sufficient room to create congenial condition and perfect platform for the growth, achievement and recognition of Indian women.

Today's good education is tomorrow's safe and bright future and the educated women will play a key role in preparing the solid ground for perfect progress of successful democracy like India. We, billion plus Indian might not have been able to make Gandhi's dream a reality, but his efforts have placed Indian women on brighter horizon of progress, prosperity and prominence.

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