

Gandhi And Tagore`S Views Of ‘Women Empowerment’

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ABSTRACT

‘Women empowerment’ is burning and universal issue all over the world. Its refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women to ensure equal- right to women and to make them confident enough to claim their rights in community, society and workplaces. Here I discuss in this paper the views of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation and Rabindranath Tagore, proponent of Indian National Anthem. They had expressed their views and had written on numerous issues in particular and humanity in general. This article examines the important and relevance of their views on issues that directly impacts the status of women in India. Gandhi is being considered the flowing issues of women like – equality of sexes, marriages, purdah, dowry system, widow remarriage, divorce, women`s honour, education and co-education, birth control, sterilization etc. Tagore also considered the women equality, education, poverty, imbalance of income health and demographic change, education globalization, women environment etc. If we take these views in our life then it can change our society and motivate our humanity.

KEYWORDS: Empowerment, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, improving , Education, Globalization

DETAILS

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Gandhi`s view of women empowerment:

Equality of sexes: Women must not suffer any legal disability which is not suffered by men. Both are perfectly equal (Young India, 17th October, 1929). Sexual equality does not translate into occupational

equality in spite of the absence of a legal bar. Women instinctively recoil from a function that belongs to men. Nature has created sexes as complements of each other. Their functions are defined as are their forms. (Harijan, 2nd December, 1939).

The Mahatma's view on sexual equality will not be taken kindly either by the modern man or the woman. The instinctive recoiling of women from a function that belongs to men is a consequence of historical indoctrination. What belongs to men and what belongs to women is deeply embedded in the psyche of men and women. The question is therefore who should complement whom. It should be matter of choice both for the man and the woman as husband and wife as to what vocation they should take up. It is unjust to expect the women to complement as a matter of an unwritten rule. To say that their functions are defined as are their forms is to emphasize on the sexual division of labor. The theory of sexual division of labor has been set aside by the developments since the departure of the Mahatma. Today men and women, compete and co-operate, complement and even supplant each other. However, the Mahatma's view on women being a complement of man should be looked at from the point of view of his intention. The Mahatma's intention was honest. He wanted to protect the institution of family and at the same time exalt women with equal status.

Marriage: Marriage is a sacrament. It is a natural thing in life (Harijan, 22nd March, 1942). Thinking of the state of affairs in our country, very few Indians need marry at the present time. The purpose of marriage is to get progeny but all progeny that is born now is the issue of passion, mean and faithless. Gandhi advised young men not to marry till 25 or 30. He preferred arranged marriages but the young man needs to be consulted by the parents if he is more than 25.

Marriage has become a contract between consenting individuals. It is an artificial fact of life. However, considering the fact that the population of India grew from 23 crores in 1891 to only 25 crores in 1921 and that from 25 crores in 1921 to 36 crores in 1951, a phenomenal increase in the latter period, the Mahatma was duly alarmed by the rapid increase in population and therefore was right in saying that "very few Indians need marry at the present time". His views on the age at marriage for young men are however relevant to this day. His view that marriages should be arranged by parents and that a young man of more than 25 should be consulted by the parents reflects upon the fact that the Mahatma had a traditional view of life and that he wanted reforms within the tradition.

Purdah: Chastity cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of the Purdah. It must grow from within and it must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation (Young India, 3rd February, 1927). Why is there all this morbid anxiety about female purity? Have women any say in the matter of male purity? Female or male purity cannot be superimposed from without. It is a matter of evolution from within and therefore of individual self effort (Young India, 25th November, 1926). The Indian man has been unduly obsessed with female chastity right from the ancient times. The Mahatma was different to the extent that he demanded male chastity also. That the Hindu Purdah or the Muslim Purdah cannot protect chastity and that only self-control and purity of mind can do that is absolutely right.

The Dowry System: The dowry system is a product of the caste system. The abolition of caste will lead to the abolition of dowry (Harijan, 23rd May, 1936). Demanding dowry is akin to discrediting

womanhood. Young men who demand dowry should be excommunicated. Parents of girls should cease to be dazzled by English degrees and should not hesitate to travel outside their little castes and provinces to secure true, gallant young men for their daughters (Young India, 21st June, 1928). The Mahatma was a very complex personality. He expected the women to play a complementary role in the society and wanted women to scale the highest peaks of life in the female domain, not realizing the fact that the complementary status of women was a product of the caste system. However, when it came to the dowry system, he wanted the abolition of the caste system. He came down on the dowry system very strongly and wanted the dowry demanding husband to be ex-communicated. He advocated inter-caste marriages and expected gallantry or chivalry from men. He wanted women to wait till the ideal suitor comes. The Mahatma had a very sublime and soft view of women and did everything to protect the pleasing side of the traditions.

Widow Remarriage: Widowhood imposed by religion or custom is an unbearable yoke and defiles the home by secret vice and degrades religion. In order to save Hinduism, enforced widowhood must be ridden. Child widows must be duly and well married and not remarried. They were never really married (Young India, 5th August, 1926). One cannot have a better view on Widow Remarriage than what the Mahatma has presented. He was clearly against Child Marriages and wanted child widows to be well married because they were not really married. He was the man who led the country by example. In 1918, when Hirala's wife died of influenza, he was fifty and wanted to remarry. Gandhi did not allow his son to remarry. He later on relented but wanted Hirala to marry only a widow. Hirala was emotionally bankrupt after his wife's death and took to alcohol and women, only to be found dead in the Sewree hospital in midtown Bombay.

Divorce: Marriage confers no right upon one partner to demand obedience of the other. However, divorce is not the only alternative. Marriage is a state of discipline. When one partner breaks discipline, the other can break the bond. The breach here is moral and not physical. It precludes divorce. Hinduism regards each as absolute equal of the other. Hinduism leaves the individual absolutely free for the sake of self-realization, for which and which alone he or she is born (Young India, 21st October, 1926).

The Mahatma believed that marriage was not serfdom for men and women and that men and women had equal status. The loss of discipline is a moral breach and divorce is not a solution. Moral breach can be corrected by moral restraint and repentance. More importantly, he says that Hinduism offers the freedom of self-realization for both men and women. The Mahatma is clearly against any kind of male chauvinism.

Woman's Honor: It is physically impossible to violate a woman against her will. The outrage takes place only when she gives way to fear or does not realize her moral strength. If she cannot meet the assailant's physical might, her purity will give her the strength to die before he succeeds in violating her, for example, Sita (Harijan, 14th January, 1940). When a woman is assaulted, her primary duty is self protection. God has given her nails and teeth. She must use them with all her strength and if need be, die in the effort (Harijan, 01st March, 1942). Perhaps due to the overriding importance given to female chastity in the Indian society, the Mahatma emphasizes once again on female chastity and purity. His solution for the helpless woman under sexual assault to die before the violation takes place is a very traditional view of what women should do when they are sexually assaulted. It is akin to hara-

kiri or jouhar. In the days of armed sexual assaults and gang or group sexual assaults on women, the Gandhian solution is inadequate. Further, chastity is not an exclusively female virtue. The male person who assaults sexually also loses his chastity and therefore, he must also die. In fact, chastity as a virtue has been imposed upon women since times immemorial and has been the single most important cause of her degraded status in the society.

Women's Education: Education enables women to uphold their natural rights. Men and women are complementary to each other. Man is supreme in the outward activities and therefore he should have a greater knowledge thereof. Home life is entirely the sphere of woman and therefore in domestic affairs, in the upbringing and education of children women ought to have more knowledge. Unless courses of instruction are based on a discriminating appreciation of these basic principles, the fullest life of man and woman cannot be developed (Harijan, 27th February, 1937). The Mahatma's views on women's education are based on family ideals because he assumes that man is supreme in the extra-mural activities and that woman is supreme in intra-mural activities. Hence, education imparted to both men and women should be according to their pre-ordained stations in life. The Mahatma's views on women's education are based on his belief in woman being a complement of man and are therefore out of sync in the modern context.

Birth Control: Brahmacharya is an infallible sovereign remedy. Artificial methods are like putting a premium upon vice. They make man and woman reckless. Adoption of artificial methods must result in imbecility and nervous prostration. The remedy will be found to be worse than the disease. It is immoral to seek escape from the consequences of one's acts. Moral results can only be produced by moral restraints. All other restraints defeat the very purpose for which they are intended (Young India, 12th March, 1925). The use of contraceptives kills the desire to exercise self restraint. Man must understand that woman is his companion and not a means of satisfying his carnal desire. The purpose of human creation was wholly different from that of the satisfaction of animal wants (Key to Health, pp.52-54). Sex is only meant for creation. Any other use is a sin against God and humanity (Harijan, 28th March, 1936). Woman must be taught the art of saying no even to her husband. She has rights as well as duties. The first thing is to free her from mental slavery, to teach her sacredness of her body and to teach her dignity of national service and the service of humanity (Harijan, 02nd May, 1936). If Brahmacharya was to be taken as a solution to birth control, we would need to spiritualize India as a whole. Given the impossibility of the task, the Mahatma's solution of Brahmacharya, although virtuous in every sense of the term, can only be considered as one of the remedies of birth control.

Sterilization: I consider it inhuman to impose sterilization law on the people. I am against the use of contraceptives in case of women. I do not mind voluntary sterilization in case of man since he is the aggressor (Amrita Bazaar Patrika, 12th January, 1935). While the Mahatma conceded Sterilization for men because he thought that man was the aggressor, he was clearly against the use of contraceptives by women. His thoughts about self control and purity seem to have clouded his mind and prevented him from making practical big time solutions to big time problems like the problem of population explosion.

The Mahatma was convinced about the need of self control in matters of sex. The overriding belief in self control was also because of his personal success in pursuing Brahmacharya. While self control is

a very good solution, a virtuous solution by every means, it cannot be expected from the entire population. The Mahatma always led the society by example. In South Africa, a young Indian married woman successfully assaulted Manilal's continence (brahmacharya). When the dereliction was discovered, Gandhi made a public scandal, fasted, persuaded the woman to shave her hair and said he would never allow Manilal to marry. He only relented under Ba's pressure, in March 1927 when Manilal was thirty five.

Rabindranath Tagore's view of women empowerment

Women and Economic Growth: According to the development theorists, increase of investment in women education plays a vital role in economic growth. They explain that increased investment in education creates much qualitative and skilled human capital which develops technology and which, by utilizing existing technologies and productivity contributes a great deal to the increasing of productivity.

Women and Productivity: Increasing of women productivity is the main contribution of education. Women education creates skills in workers, and as a result, productivity is increased. A skilled worker can influence his co-workers indirectly and gear up their working capacity and ensure their quality service. If women can be related to productivity, we can have other advantages too. Firstly, the process of education can be run well. Secondly, it will help build up characters of the learners. Thirdly, socialization of the learners will take place. Fourthly, the society will be benefited. Some of the ways of relating education with productivity are: i) Giving importance on scientific and technical education; ii) Increasing opportunities for vocational training; (iii) Taking steps for vocational education at the secondary level and iv) Creating opportunities for scientific and technological research (Grossman, 1980).

Women and Poverty: Women education contributes a lot to poverty alleviation and helps remove imbalance of income. Spread of education among the poor class people can play an important role in freeing them from the curse of poverty. When literacy rate increases, inequality of resource distribution diminishes. Women education further makes the poor workers aware of their rights and they understand whether they are exploited or not by others.

Women Health and Demographic Change: Women can be aware of their basic rights. It changes their attitude towards life and world. Chance of education increases the standard and quality of life and living. For instance, the man who has received health education must be aware of her own health and it will have positive impact on his family and on her neighbours. Thus a healthy man can reduce social expenditure in health sector and with the saved money he can contribute to the economic development of the society. In this way, they can indirectly play a role in development activities. Again, an educated couple can reduce birth rate and contribute to population control. Couple with few children get much time for productive works and their health remains sound. Thus, women play an

important role in preserving health and controlling population in a society. That's why; Grossman opines that much investment and they produce a positive impact on health and population control.

Women and Globalization: Today is the age of globalization. To survive in the keenly competitive world market, there is no alternative of women. The country whose economy has highly qualified, skilled and flexible labor-force, can easily keep pace with the changing challenges of globalization. Women education and information is directly related. If information is not available, an individual cannot be exalted, nor can a society. To build up globally acceptable and world class manpower, countries are now giving topmost importance on education. According to the experts, the countries which invest much in education and technology, can take much advantage of knowledge-based global economy and globalization, and thus can make their economy stronger and more sustainable.

Women and Environment: With the exploration of science and technology, multifarious problems have also emerged side by side with rapid advancement in various spheres of human life. Disaster in environment is a serious issue people are now concerned with. It poses a major threat to the economic growth of all the countries of the world. For this, conscious people have raised the demand that development must be environment-friendly and sustainable. Keeping the next generation in mind, development must be eco-friendly and longer lasting. Education on environment can play a positive role in this respect. In all issues of education stated above, Rabindranath's thoughts and attitudes are expressed some way or other. His philosophy of education has been deeply influenced by the way he thought about life and the norms he had firm belief in. In respect of philosophical thought, he was an idealist and for his deep intimacy with nature, he was a naturalist also. Again, in terms of performance, he is also called a pragmatist. All these traits contribute much in the formation of Rabindranath's philosophy of women education. That is why, we notice his frequent emphasis on the relationship between women and nature, upholding Bengali culture, introducing scientific and humanistic education, creating self-dependence, empowering women, all-out flourishing of young learners etc. He thought that if we can integrate all these aspects with education, our education system will be a fruitful one and it will bring greater welfare to the people. Hence, he relates education with nature and environment; so that human souls can be elevated with the serenity, quietness and vastness thereof.

Both Tagore and Gandhi looked the women from a post-colonial perspective. Their experimentations bore the stamp of India's national heritage. If we take their views in our life then it can change our life and motivate society.

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