

Gandhian Perspective of Emancipation of Women - A Critical Study

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CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION



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The foregoing chapters of the dissertation has consisted of an exposition of status of women in Indian society from the ancient times to dateon the one hand, and their empowerment and emancipation initiated by the reformers culminatingin Gandhi, the reformer par excellence, on the other. Gandhi's views on emancipation of women in India is interpreted and critically appraised here; its conclusion and evaluation is drawn in the following pages.

In fact, society is a product of woman. She plays a vital role in the life of the society; in a single life her multiple roles are acknowledged and accepted. She acts as sister, mother, wife, and a daughter; all rolled into one. She normally commands three generations in one life of hers. She is the creator and the protector of a family. She gives birth to a generation, develops it and forms a society. But in spite of all her greatness and importance attached to her personality, she had been least respected in the society in general and in India in particular. That is why the 19th century women literature compares woman as 'a bird in the cage'.

Over thousands of years in India woman has not been able to get freedom from her shackles and chains; that is an irony. On the other hand, it is to be noted, as far as law is concerned, it has always been there in existence. In fact, the scriptures of all religions have norms to protecting them, protecting their rights and personal liberty. But it is unfortunate that poor women folks enjoy no rights and liberty at all. Over the ages they have been forced to live under the dominance of men. Practically they are 'have notes' and 'bad lots', a bitter fact indeed!!!! ⁶⁶³

Therefore, the need for emancipation or liberation was long overdue. Movements for the women liberation are about a century old. Even in India there had been awakening regarding feminine matters and gender justice for

seven to eight decades under various governments, even the alien ones earlier, and our own democratic one. After independence we have devoted enough time and energy to solve the problems of women and weaker sections, producing innumerable reformers and reforming works, and framing of rules for women's development and emancipation. However, the practical output has not been satisfactory. Truly speaking emancipation of women in India is not so easy given the socio-cultural set up of India. One needs a great will, social awareness, a great determination and an initiative coming from within. Most probably Mahatma Gandhi was the first to recognize the importance of women power; hence worked for women's emancipation tirelessly

Gandhi's life and thoughts presented in the course of this thesis make clear that he was a multi-dimensional personality with many facets; a multifunctional personality who had time and energy to think on every aspect of life. His life itself is like an epic. He appeared as an ordinary man talking to and living with the common man, but at times he rose to heights for which it is difficult to find a parallel. He started his life and career as an ordinary man. But through self-examination and self-effort he developed his personality and became virtually a human miracle. His ceaseless sincere effort to realize himself, his eagerness to serve others and his capacity to suffer infinite pains in response to the restless moral urge had been the unique qualities of his character which had made him a great phenomenon.

Gandhiji was not an 'armchair' philosopher interested in weaving theories, he himself stated "there is no such thing as Gandhism and I do not want to live any sect after me. I do not claim to have originated any new principle or doctrine"⁶⁶⁴but a pragmatic philosopher who developed a dynamic philosophy of life and action based on moral principles with self-realization and Sarvodaya or the welfare of all as the aim. His was the philosophy of a unique spiritual pilgrim deeply concerned with the well-being of all. He never wrote a philosophical text. He neither claimed any special divine insight, nor aspired for sainthood. He neither pretended of his total involvement in and full

engagement with life, or dogma after him. His philosophy prevailed because of his total involvement in and full engagement with life, making mistakes, publicly owning them and rectifying them. Indeed, the totality of his philosophy depended not on details, but on a dynamic approach which stemmed from the primacy of truth in his scheme of men and matters.

Gandhian thought isintensely practical. He was a man of action, a practical idealist who continuously tried to show that the ideal was the practical. He gave the greatest value to action and practice and least to theory. He did not like to speculate on the Absolute Truth. Rather he loved to experiment with the truth of day-to-day life. What mattered most for him was the daily, hourly experience of life and the urge to fight the evil in such a way as to establish the Kingdom of the True, the Good and the Beautiful. He preached what he himself practised. Often, he practised before he preached. He was no determinist. His attitude was experimental and scientific. He tested his ideas whenever the conditions demanded and changed them to suit the needs of the times. It was this flexibility and experimental attitude that made his thought practical.⁶⁶⁵

Gandhiji was the greatest humanist because of his intense love for all that live and deep concern for the welfare of all. In the beginning he was an ordinary man with ambitions. Slowly he developed the saintly qualities of selfless love, service and sacrifice. He voluntarily renounced all material ambitions, identified himself with the downtrodden and worked for the welfare of all. No wonder, for him the entire universe was a moral order and the society one family.

Gandhiji practically experimented with every subject from peanuts to politics, from nature-cure to self-realization. He used all the diverse subjects as a valuable laboratory for his ceaseless experiments with Truth. In his life he neither ignored nor underrated the demand and value of the immediate for the sake of the ultimate and laid stress on it. One step was enough for him only to

draw further strength for attaining his ideal. He concentrated fully on the immediate and attended to it with his whole being. He dreamt but acted too. Essentially, he regarded human life as a whole and never liked it to be cut up into separate compartments. He deeply thought over the total order always in which moral, social, political, economic and intellectual orders were all inseparable parts of the integrated whole. He slowly developed an integrated, coherent and even holistic world-view of humanity and human affairs. This did not mean that he lacked in a sense of distinction of different values. He could be at home in huts and palaces and in communities with different faiths, customs etc.

Satyagraha as a philosophy of life, as a moral equivalent to war or even as a technique superior to war and as a tool for social change is Gandhiji's greatest contribution to the world. In fact, the very word Satyagraha was his creation in which its novelty begins. He had given new meanings to the old expressions and enriched them with fresh interpretations. But, in the practice of Satyagraha there is a good deal that is original and new, especially in the application of this principle to solve inter-group conflicts and also the problems in social, political, economic, personal and international fields of activity without any loss to the conflicting parties and without leaving any bitterness. Its essence is hating the evil, but loving the evil-doer intensely. As such, it is far superior to war as a means of solving inter-group rivalries and international conflicts. It can serve as a tool of social change. As such, it represents the path of love and non-violence. Here the aim is the conversion of the heart of the opponent through really loving him and taking upon oneself voluntary suffering.⁶⁶⁶

Gandhiji paid equally great attention to the political and economic spheres of life. His greatest contributions were the view that politics and economics were not ends, but only the means for the achievement of self-realization and Sarvodaya and the attempt to spiritualize these two fields of activities. Spiritualization of politics and economics means the application, in

these spheres, of moral principles that hold good for personal life and thus the avoidance of the double standard of morality. It goes to the credit of Gandhiji that he boldly applied the moral principles on an unprecedented scale in the domain of politics and economics in which they have not been used before. The key point in his political thought is that power must belong to the people. The real swaraj, according to him, was a multiclass swaraj. It was based not on the tendency to sympathize with the poor, rather on a feeling of solidarity and identification with the masses. Thus, the Gandhian concept of swaraj represented a definite departure from the orthodox ways. The substitution of the ideal of moral state for that of legal state may be considered to be his supreme contribution in the field of political thought and his emphasis that the enjoyment of rights should depend upon the due performance of duties and the new interpretation of the concept of freedom that he gave may be viewed as his other great contributions to political thought. He tried in his own way to build a social order based on a novel kind of power - power from below. He was not at all a political theorist, but a dynamic and practical political thinker and activist.⁶⁶⁷

Gandhi's economic thought is based on human considerations. In other words, he applied morality into economics. Voluntary renunciation, contentment, the greatest good of all, work as worship love of selfless service and other noble principles serve as its assets. Gandhiji never segregated economics from ethics. He offered solutions to almost all the economic problems. His suggestions must be viewed in the light of the British impact. The British rule was mainly responsible for undermining the Indian economy and reducing India to a poverty-stricken condition. The measures he suggested for rural reconstruction were improvement of agriculture, more food production and revival of cottage industries. His originality can be seen in his doctrine of trusteeship and in his emphasis on political and economic decentralization.⁶⁶⁸ What is original was the emphasis he laid on them and the way he interpreted them. He wanted to revive cottage industries, particularly

charkha and khadi with a view to engaging the leisure hours of the villagers and also providing them with an additional source of income.

Another valuable contribution of Gandhi is his dynamic social thought. It consists mainly with reference to culture and civilization, religion, moral principles, education, untouchability, drink and other social maladies, woman and her status, war and Satyagraha. As a social scientist, Gandhiji was deeply concerned with the progress of society. As his aim was self-realization through the lovely service and sacrifice and through pursuing the altruistic ideal of the good of all, he was not satisfied if the healthy change that he was able to bring about was confined only to the personal life of the individual. It was his relentless moral demand that such dynamic transformation must also be reflected in social life. He studied the society in an objective way and was essentially concerned with the dynamic nature of society. He brought a new approach to different problems of life. In consonance with the basic principles and the existing conditions in society he tried to solve problems as they rose. No wonder his entire constructive programme was based on the spirit of intense social service for achieving Sarvodaya. He advised one and all to break down all barriers of caste, creed and race in one great. Collective effort for the all-round progress of all and demonstrated through his own life that it was possible. In bringing about social reforms leading to social equilibrium he revealed his originality. In short, he sought the transformation of society through the reformation of the individual.⁶⁶⁹

He broadly defined culture as the sum-total of the everlasting ends of life with spirituality as its source and the all-round development of human personality and Sarvodaya as its purpose and interpreted culture in the light of the old cultural tradition and the impact of the west. In keeping with the Indian tradition, he advocated the peaceful co-existence of cultures mutually-assimilating the best from each other, but maintaining their individuality and thus living and growing. Unbiased attitude, reason and spirit of inquiry should be their watchwords.

In Gandhiji's terminology the ideal man may be called the Satyagrahi. Herein lies the originality of Gandhiji. He also held the culture should uphold freedom and sanctity of human personality, laid great stress on heart culture and on the view that art should only be a means to moral development of the people. He never hated science and technology what he vehemently opposed was the emphasis on material values and on a system which allowed a few rides on the back of the millions. For, he judged modern civilization and its products from the standpoint of humanity and its real welfare.

Gandhiji gave a new definition for religion, as the disinterested search after truth, as the everlasting element in man, as the belief in the moral governance of the universe and as an emphasis on the moral worth of man as spirit and on his sacred freedom of conscience. As he believed in the spiritual unity of all that live and in the equality and validity of all religions, he was completely opposed to senseless religious fanaticism, superstitions and indigestible narrow dogmas. Religion, according to him, was not merely a means for personal purification, but a highly powerful social bond binding man to man and man to God. Social Service was the only path to illumination of one's soul and to deepen one's spiritual sense. The central principle of his religion was that the basic religious tenets had to be made concrete in the individual and social life. For this, moral training of the individual is necessary.

The moral principles prescribed by Gandhiji represent the totality of his ethical code and reflect his philosophy of life. They are meant to lead mankind to its destined destination of peace, harmony, justice, and happiness.⁶⁷⁰

Gandhiji was also a great educationist. He considered education in the light of his integral and synthetic view of life. To him the educational system was as important as political freedom. For he looked upon education as the most significant nation-building activity and was convinced that if a nation were to achieve real progress, it must first learn to think and develop the personality of each one of its members so that he can be able to express himself

to the fullest. So, he defined education in a comprehensive way as the system seeking to develop the personality of the individual in an integrated and all-round manner. He showed his originality by laying down two sets of educational aims, viz., immediate and ultimate.⁶⁷¹

So, he formulated a dynamic programme of education popularly known as Wardha Scheme or Basic National Education. It was certainly a very great national experiment. Taken as a whole, his educational scheme is quite excellent. It upholds dignity of labour and considers all kinds of useful work honourable, seeks to establish close relationship between education and the student's life, social and physical environment, lays down that there should be an organic partnership between school and society and helps the students to carry the outlook, attitudes, knowledge and skills acquired in the school-environment into the wider world outside.

Gandhiji fully deserves the highest seat in the history of humanity was for his fight against the evil of untouchability. He coined a new name for the untouchables. He affectionately called them Harijans or children of God and named his weekly journal after them. He also started the Harijan Sevak Sangh to focus the attention of the Hindus on this blot on Hinduism and to prick their conscience. He even undertook a fast unto death to oppose the British move to separate the Harijans from the Hindus. Certainly, his influence was responsible for making abolition of untouchability an important part of the Indian Constitution. The Harijans to-day are guaranteed representation in all legislative bodies. They are given all types of material assistance. Unfortunately, all these have only served to encourage them to remain as Harijans. For by remaining so only they can get all sorts of material benefits. Public speech on Harijan welfare has become only a means for winning elections.

Another serious problem on which Gandhiji focused his attention was the evil of drinking. He very correctly analyzed its causes and deadly effects

and suggested the measures of total prohibition and provision of harmless recreational facilities as well as healthy food stuffs to the victims. Unfortunately, free India has forgotten his advice and to-day this evil is used by the government as a means of revenue. Gandhiji also bestowed considerable thought on gambling, smoking, use of opium, drinking of coffee, tea and cocoa and crime.

Gandhiji richly deserve all the praises for the work which he had done for the emancipation of woman. He rightly said that real freedom of the country needed woman's freedom and the general progress of society would depend upon the betterment of woman's lot. This is his unique contribution to nation and women of India in particular. Thus, the Gandhian social thoughts deserve to be called dynamic, pragmatic, synthetic and progressive.

The status of women became the bone of contention in the first half of 19th c. when British historian James Mill in his influential ‘historian of British India (1826)’ argued that women’s position could be used as an indicator of society of advancement. His statement “among rude people the women are generally degraded., among civilized people they are exalted; as society become advanced the condition of the weaker sex is gradually improved till they associate on equal with men; and occupy the place of voluntary co-adjudors”⁶⁷². In fact, after having studied about Hindu society through reading Hindu religious works, translation of code of Manu, accounts written by travelers and missionaries he concluded and held that status of Indian women are in extreme degradation. This comments actually wounded Indian pride and intellectual nationalist started to write the history of India to highlight the India’s gloriest past. There were also instances putting blame on Muslim rule of India almost four hundred years; nonetheless, it is the fact that the status of women was much deteriorated by the time of Muslims entered India with the only exception in early Vedic period where Sati, Purdah, child marriage and other evil customs were not known; during this period women were giving freedom and opportunity in intellectual and spiritual pursuits

The gradual decline of position of women started in later Vedic period; women gradually were losing their honor. This stage was age of Upanishads and Samhithas. During this time the birth of girl child itself is a bad omen and misfortune; the gradual decline of girls' education both in secular and religious was main features of the time. As a consequence, the religious rights of women were stopped thestatus of women further declined.

It is during is during sutras and Epics the status Women were considered equal to Sudras, a semi servile status also called fourth caste within Indian society. The rights of Vedic sacrifices and upanayana completely banned for women. Child marriage and other evils got stabilized. Women were considered chattels. This period was considered a very dark and dismal period in Indian civilization for women. During Smrithi and digest writers the most derogatory writings against women came to fore. It is Manu who is considered to be the Hindu Law giver did much harm to the prestige of women of Hindu society by putting forth 336 derogatory verses against women. It is during this period the most of the evil customs became consolidated, and transferred as hereditary one into Hindu society. The same evil customs and traditions reached its nadir stage and continued in the Indian society when Mohammadans landed here and started their rule here over four centuries. The position of women in India suffered still under mohammadan rule as adding insult to injury. It is during British rule the question of women's degraded position being used as a tool for putting India under uncivilized category in the world. This gave a clarion call to wake up Indian intellectuals and nationalists for the reform of society to raise the status of women

The broad aims of earlierreformers in the social sphere were specially emphasizing caste reform or caste abolition, and improvement in the rights and status of women and generally against social and legal inequalities. It involved an attack on certain social institutions and practices like child marriage, position and treatment of widows, seclusion and the denial of women's rights to property and education, the roots of which lay in the religious traditions of

different communities. On the other hand, the impact of education and Christian values propagated by missionaries resulted in a number of movements for social change and religious reform in the 19th century. According to Gopal Krishna Gokhale in Rao & Singh (1934): "The first impact of Western teaching on those who received it was to incline them strongly in favour of the Western way of looking at things and under this influence they bent their energies, in the first instance, to the reexamination of the whole of their ancient civilization or their social usages and institutions, their religious beliefs, literature, science, art as also in fact their conception and realization of life. Therefore, the leaders of the reform movements realized that it was difficult to separate social reforms from religious reforms⁶⁷³

Leaders like Ram Mohan Roy had believed that it was possible to reform all religions together, bringing out the basic unity that underlay all religious faiths, such attempts met with resistance, and failed; nevertheless, he is the pioneer of Indian social reforms.

Host of men reformers entered into the arena of reforming the society. The goal of the male reformers was progress. Without social reform to substantially improving women's status and regeneration seemed doomed to failure. Humiliated by their colonial status, Indians of the late nineteenth century were obsessed with the issues of strength and power. Therefore, the changes envisaged by these reformers were only partial. They aimed to change the position of women within the family and the domestic framework and did not foresee any radical change in the social structure.

None of these movements aimed to make the woman an equal partner of man in the societal roles outside the family. The movements were also limited in their appeals; while the Brahmo Samaj and Prarthna Samaj appealed only to a limited section of western educated urban Indians, the Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission and other revivalist movements appealed to a wider group, including the urban lower middle-class. The general impact of all these

movements has been most pronounced on the urban middle-class; it was difficult for them to fight for their own rights. A few outstanding exceptions faced great opposition from their communities. Pandita Ramabai, having incurred the wrath of the orthodoxy by marrying out of caste, ultimately turned to Christianity to aid her campaign to improve the condition of women. Dhan Korbai suffered great hardship for marrying after widowhood. Vidyagouni Neelakant faced bitter opposition to obtain education.⁶⁷⁴

The two social ideas which really threatened the basic structure of Indian society during this period were 'women's emancipation', and 'mass education'. Since the reform movements were not prepared to identify themselves with such extreme, radical ideas, their efforts to emancipate women, could be only limited effect.

It has to be remembered that the most towering personalities in the movement for improving the lot of women came from individuals who were indifferent to the religious aspects of the reform movements. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Jotiba Phule wanted to free Indian society not only from religious superstitions, but from the social inequalities that oppressed all the weaker sections, including women. It was however left to Mahatma Gandhi, and the freedom movement to place the movement for women's emancipation in its proper perspective, as a part of the larger movement for social transformation and eventually their emancipation and empowerment.

However, credit goes to Basaveswara for his work for the emancipation of women as early in 12thc. in Karnataka. Dr. Ambedkar's attempt to introduce Hindu code bill in parliament with reference to the emancipation of women in India is also praise worthy.

In fact, the reformers especially of 19th c were concerned with modernizing women's role. Had they not done, the 20th century empowered women could not have been there. 19th century reformers focused their attention on Sati, child marriage, widow remarriage, and most importantly

female education. They saw the world through a particular caste/ class lens and the net effect of their efforts was to bring women especially women from their own families into the new world created by the colonial rule. The decisions made by this man meant that women whether they wanted or not would become the part of the new society.⁶⁷⁵

Those women who liked the new world thrived in it and norm of female seclusion offered them opportunity to form their own organization relatively free from male tutelage but not free from patriarchy. They began to establish the women's organization given call for women movements for equality, demand for women's franchise, and sending deputation to parliament. They could find the realization of their effort in getting voting right for women with restrictions. Many of these women joined movement through a uniquely Indian feminist nationalism. It was the ideology of Gandhi and Nehru; both supported it.

After independence the Indian constitution and its basic doctrine promised equality in the participation in national building, and new valuation of women. But this did not mean women had attained equality. Nevertheless, after independence many women were pleased with what they have gained with but the equal participation remained a chimera

Toward equality was the wake-up call. The women who wrought it asked how a country that called itself democratic could continue to live with worsening conditions for half its population. This report and the subsequent studies alerted educated, middle-class women to the worst inequities in their society. And as these newly awakened women carried out research projects, wrote and spoke about these problems, and attempted to institute new programs, they too faced new challenges. Their own institutions and families were less supportive than expected and the recipients of this attention were not always-grateful.⁶⁷⁵

Indian women at the end of the twentieth century would argue that they still have a long way to go to attain gender justice. The issues of the moment and the unsolved problems must not be allowed to negate the victories of the past. It is important to temper the interpretation of the present with an appreciation of the enormous sacrifices Indian women have made to bring about change. This is not the first time that legislative measures have been found wanting or that women's concerns have been set aside in favor of other issues. Women have moved from being objects of legislation to initiators. For many women the family no longer exercises total control over their destinies. A general awakening has begun and it cannot be permanently suppressed.

In the political field the participation of women in various fields, though increased, the representation is very low; even lesser than third world countries. In the economic field the work participation of women is 80 percent labour force. Still women are not entitled to property rights in many traditional families; law is not enforced in this regard. In the society in rural areas and traditional families patriarchal dictates prevail. The evils of patriarchal tradition like dowry system, preference for male child, imbalance of sex ratio remain unchanged. Female infanticides, discrimination in nutrition and health, education, child marriage etc. are indications of male bias. Bride burning, honour killing of women, not allowing widow marriage is signs of women discrimination. Women movements are not strong because of communalized nature of organizations.

Violence/crime against women was not a new issue but whenever it has been raised in the past, it was recast to serve a male political agenda; it is growing day by day. Among them rape and domestic violence are rampant. Human rights violation of women is reported every day. According to one report, India has shown utter disregard and disrespect for women; rape, marital rape, sexual assault and harassment, female infanticide, go unabated. India is branded as the most unsafe country in the world to be a woman, as if not a country for women.

The relative ratio of women seems to have fallen behind after independence. This is a sign of women's low rate of participation in the market economy and the low valuation placed on them as human beings. Work force participation too is skewed in rural urban comparison.

Women have made substantial gains in the profession and in certain sections of the service industries. But these gains have been neutralized by women's disappearance from other areas-of the economy

Due to weak enforcement of laws protecting them, women continue to have little access to land and property. In India, women's property rights vary depending on religion, and tribe, and are subject to a complex mix of law and custom, but in principle the move has been towards granting women equal legal rights, especially since the passing of The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005.

When Gandhi entered political arena of India he was offered the mantle of leading India in freedom struggle. He had to face the twin challenges. Along with the leadership the women question was thrownup to him by the Raj(British). Actually, it was a blessing in disguise to work for the emancipation of women and oppressed classes of the society.

Though Gandhi did not produce a formal and systematic theory of emancipation of women, he worked for the cause of emancipation of women and devoted his life for that objective, and he not only worked for emancipation of women but wrote and spoke about empowerment and emancipation of women in India (as about everything else), from a religious and ethical perspective, namely of faith and tradition. There was an underlying unity and development in the life and thought of Gandhi, blended very much into the unity and development of India's own ancient but on-going history.

As his thoughts were also evolving remarkably and hence his programme of action were becoming more and more flexible, practical and

useful. As a result, his thoughts, words and actions were always cool and comforting, fresh and fascinating like the mountain spring, unhampered by the slippery slosh of unreasonable conventions and unjustifiable customs. They had been planned and nurtured unique moments in all walks of life; inspired and altered the lives of countless persons and like the beacon he showed them the new and noble way of cultured living.

For Gandhi women issue was as important as the issue of freedom of the country; because women question was the high ground of moral idealism for the British Raj, despite its ironical origin in political expediency, provides almost invariably, a vital argument and the most comforting illusion for the legitimization and perpetuation of imperial system in India.

Gandhi said, “the goal of emancipation he believes, depends on the threefold revaluation: Firstly, to change in their lives; secondly, to create a change in their lives; and thirdly, to change the social structure.”⁶⁷⁶

To Rajakumari Amrita Kaur what he wrote underlies the entire gamut of his vision of emancipation of women. “If you women would only realize your dignity and privilege, and make full use of it for mankind, you will make it much better than it is. But man has delighted in enslaving you and you have proved willing slaves till the slave and the slave holders have become one in the crime of degrading humanity. My special function from childhood, you might say, has been to make women realize her dignity. I was once slave-holder myself but Ba proved an unwilling slave and thus “opened my eyes to my mission.”⁶⁷⁷

Gandhi was influenced by his mother. His devotion to women began with his devotion to his mother and his wife Kasturba, most particularly to woman as mother. Motherhood became increasingly his model for liberation of India and his own life. Gandhi visualized a fundamental role for women as instruments of social change because they constituted the primary influence on the future citizens of the country and half the nation’s strength in terms of

population. Gandhi's unconscious guide in shaping his attitude to women was his mother, Putlibai, whom he deeply revered for her "saintliness". His intellectual guide was the image of the ideal wife of Hindu literature, whom he describes as ardhangani, the better half, and sahadharmini, the helpmate.

He was profoundly influenced by Annie Besant, a British militant feminist and a Theosophist, Sarojini Naidu a trusted Gandhi's co-worker, and Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya, a fiery Satyagrahi. Variety of co-workers and number of women who came to his public life also add to this list.

Gandhi's Contribution to the Emancipation of Women is immense and total. Gandhi espoused the cause of women with great concern. He had advocated the abolition of all economic and legal disabilities from which women in India suffer today. It was Gandhi, who brought the emancipation of women in line with India's ancient cultural traditions, emanating enlightenment referring Gargi, Draupadi as paragons of virtue. He injected new learning to the definition of womanhood and stressed emphatically for a status and a definite role to influence and promote society as a whole. Mahatma Gandhi was a warm support of the demands of the organized women's movement in India, but he felt strongly that women should eventually define their own goal and take the lead in solving their problems. Before making a call to women in India for winning Swaraj he had its trial act in South Africa where he achieved success in involving women for the movement.

Gandhi brought about the transition from social reforms to social welfare; he has been called the mentor of modern social welfare. According to him the role of women in the political, economic and social emancipation of the country was of overriding importance.

Participation in freedom movement played great role in emancipating Indian women in politics; because Politics is essentially an art of acquiring and exercising power, the power to effectively influence the decision making processes and policies, to reverse the existing situation wherever they are

disadvantageous and to bring about the necessary changes. Movements also injected the ideals of communal harmony, purdah unveiling, social work, sanitation, removal of caste and untouchability, promoting women leadership etc.

Gandhi's call to women to involve themselves in the freedom struggle had far-reaching results in changing their outlook. "The cause of Swaraj swept all taboos and old customs before it". Many women in their individual lives shed their age-old prejudices against the caste system. They had no hesitation in leaving the boundaries of their protected homes and going to the jail. They even broke their glass bangles (a sign of ill omen for married women) when they were told that they were made of Czechoslovakian glass. Women's participation in the freedom struggle feminized nationalism, and the nationalist struggle helped them to liberate from age-old traditions.

Mahatma Gandhi believed that satyagraha was the most powerful weapon in a nonviolent struggle. Satyagraha involves defiance. It involves the willful, peaceful, breaking of laws that are unjust. It means picketing, protesting, squatting, obstructing, challenging and publicly resisting wrongs.

Gandhi considered women as the most nonviolent and ardent lovers of peace, so participating in Satyagraha could be sharpened and extended as a weapon in women's struggles; Participation eventually accelerated the process of women's regeneration in Indian society. "When woman, whom we all call abala becomes sabala, all those who are helpless will become powerful" is realized in this act.

Gandhi's perspective of emancipation of women is largely concerned with the social evils rather than economic or political. It is no doubt that it is he who in the twentieth century did commendable work to improve the lot(destiny) of Indian women. Gandhi respected traditions of the society, but not at the cost of loss of individual dignity. His practical and dynamic advice was "It is good to swim in the waters of tradition, but to sink in them is

suicide"⁶⁷⁹ He never hesitated to criticize the evils which had gripped the Indian society. Gandhi strongly criticized the social cultural customs and rituals that had held women in subordinate position for centuries; he attacked the evils of child marriage, the system of dowry, devadasi system, satipratha, purdah, enforced widows, polygamy, etc., and all that connected with it.

Gandhi believed that no real uplift of women was possible without the radical reforms in the Hindu marriage system. Most of the disabilities from which women suffered were due to the evil which had crept into the institution of marriage itself. The Hindu marriage custom had many abuses. 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, he said.

Speaking about equality of sexes, he says 'both are perfectly equal'. Sexual equality does not translate into occupational equality in spite of the absence of a legal bar; for him women are not mere toys in the hands of men, neither their competitors. Men and women are essentially endowed with the same spirit and therefore have similar problems. Women are at par with men, one complementing 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.

In Gandhi's view, women can never be considered to be the weaker sex. In fact, women for Gandhi were embodiments of virtues like knowledge, humility, tolerance, sacrifice and faith. Their functions are defined as their forms. 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 strength; purity will give her the strength to die before he succeeds in violating her.

Gandhi's ideas on sex and sexuality are the outcome of his personal experience. Gandhi considers celibacy an important component who wants to live a higher life; on the other hand, it is not possible to everyone; it is also a precondition to Ashram life.; Gandhi says the purpose of sexual union is only for the procreation of the children; other types are sinful and immoral. Gandhi admonishes others to follow him with regard to self-restraint. In his view, unmarried/ single life is better than married life.

Critical observations /comments

The cumulative amount of study made in this research could establish the following observations / findings.

Women were subjugated, oppressed and an inferior status was given in all the ancient civilizations of the world. The subaltern status of women was common in all the religion based civilization in the world. India being one of the most ancient civilizations of the world,maintains goddess status to women on the one hand,but on the other hand,attributes most derogatory statements to them. It has got scriptural sanctions too, and so deeply rooted in the life of every Hindu/ Indian ethos. The deterioration of status of women was gradual;with the only exception was equal status seen in early Vedic period. The deterioration reached its worst phase by the time of arrival of Muslims in India and establishing their empire here. Later, the position/ status of women got more vitiated under the Muslim rulers because they too imposed stricter rules on women. Europeans arrived in India in end 16th century; when they established their rule observed and commented on inferior status of women in India, and labeled Indians uncivilized on the basis of women position in the society. It is in the first half of the 19th century under British rule the educated Indians got awakened to the new world of civilizations. They realized the bad condition of their women folks. The women writers of the time expressed their anguish in their books the agony of women. Subsequently the need for emancipation of women was raised by the reformers in 19th century.But they could not do much for the women's cause or for the freedom, equality and

justice or for their liberation. On the other hand, they mainly concentrated on improving family, caste and class circles.

It is perhaps Gandhi for the mass participation of women in the freedom movement opened the way for women mobilization and women leadership towards the real empowerment, and thereby attempting their emancipation. It is but for his ardent humanism to free mankind from any form of exploitation. His unflinching dedication to truth as God, and relentless search to realize truth as love and justice, could do much service to humanity. His views on emancipation of women is comprehensive, touching every aspect of women's life; ideas that is essentially radical. He did not see women as helpless objects of reform but self-conscious arbiters of their destiny. Neither did he think of bringing change only in some spheres of life, such as marriage or education. His vision of change was comprehensive. He touched women's entire social, political and economic aspects of life

Gandhiji's mobilization of women in mass scale motivated them to strive for country's liberation – a unique phenomenon. It not only altered their self image but guaranteed among them the confidence to lead their own struggle against patriarchal dominance- which further resulted their empowerment and hence their emancipation. Gandhiji encouraged it through his articles in news papers, and in his speeches. His appeal that widows too have the same freedom as that of men gives dignity to women. The part women played in freedom movement will be written in the letters of gold.

Gandhi's philosophy of women finds a new identity to them; to shed their inferiority complex and rise to dignity and self esteem. The preference to education of women in Gandhi's philosophy helps them to come out from the chasm of caste and class. His views on women help realize that there would not have the norm of male dominated politics; they can evolve their own perspectives and methods. Their involvement in national struggle brought

miraculous result and helped them become aware of their inner strength on one hand, and injected the human and moral element in the politics on the other.

Gandhi's views on women changed the very outlook of them and its consequences as a far-reaching effect in the general attitude towards women; he is instrumental in arousing political consciousness in poor and illiterate and women as well.

Gandhi worked not only for political emancipation of the nation but for the liberation for all the suppressed and oppressed section of the society. It would be no exaggeration to say that no one in recent time in India has done more than Gandhi for raising the position of women. He is the one who worked ceaselessly for the regeneration of Indian women and reconstruction of Indian society in which women would be able to rediscover her individuality she had lost to the years of subjection.

By participation in the national movement, equality between men and women accepted as the one of the objectives of the fundamental rights of the constitution. In Gandhi's scheme of things it reveals that in the order of justice and equality between man and women there is no confrontation and competition. Even he invited women to ignore their duty as housekeepers, mothers, molders of future generation and builders of nation but not putting any limit in the role in practice in order to take part public and political life of the country. Moreover, his teaching is unique blend of modernity about the role of women in Indian society; whereas social reformers and leaders prior to Gandhi created a helpless image of the Indian women. There was a marked departure of Gandhi's perception of women from that of others. The approach of Gandhi to women problems was quite different from that of the reformers. For them it was just a speech or drawing room discussion. But for Gandhi it was burning issue involving women; he himself joining them with volunteers. Perhaps the women found in Gandhi a leader who took up their cause and agitated against the prevalent practices that were detrimental to their welfare.

However, Gandhi's delineation of the role of women in society is blurred with gender-dominated patriarchal value system, though progressive for his time; Gandhi could only conceive of women's role as that of a mother and homemaker. He did not support the idea of her working in public life, "politics and professions were to be, by and large exclusively male domains".Gandhiji views everything through the mirror of tradition hence accepting the patriarchal dominance.

In his perspective of women, the overriding importance of female chastity could be seen; because, it is not exclusively a female virtue.

, the male person assaults loses his chastity, therefore he must also die. But chastity as a virtue has been imposed upon women since the time immemorial and has been the single most important cause of her degraded status in society.

In the days of armed sexual assaults and gang or group sexual assaults on women, the Gandhian solution is inadequate. Gandhi's attitudes to sexuality too sometimes appear to be eccentric.

Gandhi failed to understand that 'oppression is not an abstract moral condition but a social and historical relation, related to production relations'.

Gandhi's idealizing the image of women as the embodiment of sacrifice and extolling the strength that comes from suffering helped strengthen the prevailing oppressive stereotype of women as selfless companions and contributors to a social cause defined by men, in the tradition of Sita.

Gandhi does not even question the other institutional practices of contemporary Hindu marriage like the rules governing the choice of marriage partners based on the caste system. In fact, he affirms his belief that marriage should only take place within particular varnas and condemns intercommunity and inter-varna marriage. That, Gandhi is only partially critical of contemporary Hindu practices that is accepted by Gandhi himself; and marriage remains sacrosanct and remains the 'essence' of modern Indian

society. It is no wonder that the present-day women's movement is now attempting to fight this legacy through its struggle.

Nevertheless, Gandhi remains the unquestionable leader par excellence and the champion of women's emancipation, India ever seen.

Parting Homage: When the researcher ventured writing thesis on Gandhi, was bothered with questions 'Is Gandhiji relevant today'? He was challenged over Gandhi's credibility to be called as champion of emancipation of women in India. The following lines will certainly refute their allegations and prove that Gandhi is the ideal person to be called future light / prophet of the 21st C.

It is important to note that Gandhi himself saw no contradiction between his role as an Indian political leader and his role as a teacher of mankind. (Of course, he did not use such expression as the teacher of mankind to describe himself). On the other hand, he thought that one role supplemented the other. While replying to a friendly critic who maintained that Gandhi's grouping unities conflicted with "the larger mission of uniting the world", he said that he was more cosmopolitan than his critic. He added: "unless I group unities I shall never be able to unite the whole world". In the same statement he said earlier: "What was the larger 'symbiosis' that Buddha and Christ preached. Buddha fearlessly carried the war into the enemy's camp and brought down on its knees an arrogant priesthood. Christ drove out the money-changers from the temple of Jerusalem and drew curses from heaven upon the hypocrites and Pharisees. Both were for intensely direct action". While declining to accept the invitation of many Americans to visit their country and spread his message there, Gandhi said: "If I go to America or Europe, I must go in my strength, not in my weakness, which I feel today—the weakness, I mean of my country". For, the whole scheme for the liberation of India is based upon the development of internal strength. It was a plan for purification. The impact Gandhi made on American Negroes and particularly their leader Martin Luther King, is the evidence of his wisdom what he said on that occasion.

No one also hears about Gandhi's Influence such as using "non-violent non-cooperation movements 'by Czechoslovakia in driving away foreign armies in sixties'.

Although Gandhi did not visit foreign countries to spread his message, he expressed his views on various international important internal questions of other countries. They include struggles of the Negroes and the Jews for the ending of discrimination against them, the problems of the Arab refugees, the struggles for freedom of Czechoslovakia, Poland and China.

He also wrote open letters to Hitler, to "Every Briton and to every Japanese" during the war giving his views on the armed conflicts and their resolution.

Gandhi's ideas and his methods of social and political action are enriched by many others who have followed him. This refutes the arguments of those who contend that non-violent campaigns can be undertaken only by a people like the Indians with their unique traditions and only against a government like that of the British with their inherent liberal and democratic orientation.

Moreover, Gandhi too should be treated as a human being with faults as well as greatness. He has made Himalayan blunders and some of those he had not admitted because he was not aware of them. His attacks on modern civilization, machines and medicines cannot be fully-defended now, even if they can be explained as useful slogans in the period when they were made. His support to the khilafat is another one of his acts which cannot be defended. Of course there are so many non-essential elements in Gandhi's thought and practice which had become fads now. But In India there is no "de-Gandhisization" in the realms of thought and activity. A new look at the problem is called for under the changed circumstances of today. The Indian Government's policies with regard to birth control and popularization of modern medicines are other striking examples where it has taken place in the

realm of action. The ongoing women empowerment and emancipation programme, and the involvement of women in more numbers in local bodies and national level politics are striking examples. Gandhi's view on trusteeship and structural reforms in regard to economic institutions should also be followed and critically examined. Gandhi was fully justified in giving priority to employment before the introduction of machines in many fields of economic activity. There are some fields where the present leaders of India have taken the clock back from Gandhi in practice, but not in theory. A most striking case is the slogan of "Self-reliance" as far as economic plans are concerned. Decentralization of political power is another. A third relates to the narrowing of the gulf between the rulers and the ruled and the fourth the reorganization of educational system for that and other purposes.

Now to the question, Is Gandhian principles or his thoughts relevant today?"It is to be noted that Gandhiji's ideas on various subjects are based on certain essential principles which were relevant during his lifetime, are equally, if not more, relevant today and will continue to be relevant for centuries to come. This is because the Mahatma was a realistic idealist and possessed a very logical and scientific mind. He called even his Autobiography 'The Story of My Experiments with Truth.'

However, we should not forget the fact that the scheme of things Gandhiji wanted to envisage was not given serious consideration in India at the time of drafting of the Constitution. The kind of political system and industrialization Gandhi had in mind became a suspect since no serious efforts were made to restructure the economy and politics as he wished; structural changes which Gandhiji had suggested, were never taken seriously. The well-planned and balanced industrialization that he advocated involved restrictions of several kinds, particularly on aspects such as unlimited growth and undue profit. Gandhiji expressed, 'The Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not for anybody's greed'.

The beauty of this great man was that he never claimed that he had discovered or invented new idea or a new philosophy. However, his contribution lies in developing the age-old knowledge and ideas and infusing in them new meanings. He applied Satyagraha to change our society. He was fully convinced that real social change implied change in our values, ethos and ideologies and it was sheer nonsense to think that one could change anybody's mind or idea by external or physical force. On the contrary violence destroys many, divides the survivors who are infected with rage, intolerance, confusion, restlessness, constant fear and hatred. As a result, there is no peace, no rest, and no individual freedom and as a result no development has taken place.

In the face of terror and violence it is quite significant and relevant to mention here that the manner in which violence is spreading in the emerging global context is the biggest concern not for any individual but for the whole humanity; under such circumstances Gandhiji's concept of non-violence is very much relevant today. Non-violence is a universal phenomenon having its relevance and significance for all times. It has been very effective and instrumental in solving all kinds of conflicts in society. However, its result depends upon its understanding and proper application. The present scenario of violence and exploitation all over the world has become a very serious issue.

The celebrated British Philosopher C.E. M. Joad saying about Gandhi, the hope for humanity: the barbaric days interpersonal disputes were decided on the principle of 'Might is right'. It showed not the superior justice but the superior force of the winning party. Today, we apply that barbaric practices in the adjudication of inter country conflicts. Gandhiji sought to extend the principle of peaceful and just settlement of interpersonal disputes to conflict among nations.

Others have preached nonviolence and peace but it was left to Gandhi to give a practical demonstration of the efficacy of the principle of nonviolence by winning independence from British imperialism for what then was one fifth of

the human race; it is the vindictive power of nonviolence which never had tried nor have achieved such colossal successes in the history of nations as Gandhi preached. It may be harbinger a new trend to change the direction of the world. Even Mr. Gorbachev the leader of the one of the world's most militarized nations advocated nonviolence and peaceful coexistence as two of his ten principles in the joint communiqué.

As Nehru said, the alternative to coexistence is co destruction. Either the world accepts the nonviolence as the method of settling international disputes or there would be no world left. Such is the armaments and arsenals in the hands of nations. It is a fact that there would be no victors or vanquished but all would perish if at all a nuclear war erupts; and the pathetic situation of our earth to spin like a moon in the space without human life.

Again, there is rat race of super powers for conquests and influences over people and land; it breeds war, violence, hatred and sense of pride in the victor and humiliation of vanquished. Would Indians value our own great man? But others who respect and follow his values. That is evident today. Gandhian principle of unity of all religions thrown into dogs in the present scenario of Indian life.

The cut throat competition among nations and people, causing sweeping tensions and sleepless nights to the business enterprises and the ordinary as well; Gandhian ideology if followed only will lead to change of heart and the change of direction of wind; but alas! We Indians do not rightly value our own great men and things unless we get foreign certificate.

In the modern age of paradoxes and statism, people are living in disbelief, mistrust, suspicion, tension and constant fear; latest modern communication net work like smart phones and computers doing much harms than good to the new gen; youths are misguided and have no respect for human values. The discontented and frustrated youths resort to evils, they resort to crimes for their sustenance. Terror and terrorist ideas spread immediately. In

this context to raise the question like the relevance of Gandhiji's principles and teachings is like asking the question, "What is the relevance of the Sun to the Solar System?" His principles are for endless time or for the eternity. He gave us the priceless gifts of self-respect, and the matchless weapon of Satyagraha—a message of peace for the whole world.

Gandhian thought gains significant relevance because many things which have happened since Gandhi passed away have not diminished but heightened its relevance because crises that Gandhi faced obviously not over but has been deepening and solutions he proposed in his own time not outdated. Gandhi still is living challenge to economic thinking, planning and action not only in his own country but in all countries of the world. His principles of selfless action, sustainable practices of law of love, and progress in identification with all that lives are even more relevant in the present day where threat to pluralistic nature and unity of our country is looming large.

His work of emancipation of women, for sure, is showing results as more and more women participating in political, economic and social life of the country. The recent court orders with regard to the entry to temples and holy places for women which was prohibited once, the credit must go to Gandhi.

Therefore, let Gandhi's message, and perspective especially regarding women be a leading light to everyone and every nation for peaceful existence and progress. Putting his statue, visiting his Samadhi every year, offering garlands, extolling him sky high on his birth day and martyr's day, but denying him and his teachings in our action is the greatest injustice we do to our father of nation, the prophet of 21st century. As a loving homage, let's study him deeply and follow his teachings and principles in our life as we celebrate his 150th birth anniversary this year. A thousand salutes to Mahatma, the great soul!!!!!!