

Gandhian Model for Women Education

Abstract

One of the noteworthy results of Mahatma Gandhi's life-work has been the awakening of women, which made them shed their deep rooted sense of inferiority and rise to dignity by getting educated. Gandhi regarded woman as a complement of man. He laid emphasis on women education on two grounds. If a woman is literate only then she can attain equal rights and position in the male dominated society as well as an educated woman can transform her children into responsible ideal citizens of the country. Thus, Gandhi believed that to obtain the knowledge of their true self, it is compulsory for women to get education and become literate.

Keywords: Women Education, Illiteracy, Knowledge, Harijan, English Language, Complement of Man, Letters and Speeches.

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the Nation, who has been known as a practical idealist, not only showed his concern for various grave issues such as, dowry, widow-remarriage, divorce, birth-control, women honour but also worked with the principle of sexual equality. To bring a revolutionary change in the status of women he put emphasis on the need of their education. As he himself has written in a journal named 'Harijan', "I believe in the proper education of women."

He believed that, "Education is an all round drawing out of the best in the child and man. System of education has three aspects. It leads to the development of the mind, body and soul.... and true education must correspond to the surrounding circumstances or it is not a healthy growth."

According to Mahatma the curriculum of basic education should consist of the study of craft, study of mother tongue, Social-Studies, Natural Science and Music. On secondary level he added Mathematics with Science. Social Studies, Drawing and Music were also there in the curriculum so that creativity would be developed in both boys and girls. Domestic Science as a subject was also included especially for girls.

About woman, Gandhi wrote that besides the biological differences, woman is not different from man but religion, customs and laws from times had relegated woman to the backyards of civilization. These customs have been taught women to regard themselves as slave of man. The customary and legal status of women is in a bad condition, which demands a radical change. Women from ages have tolerated domination of men in the society. They have suffered an oppressive social-system and became a victim of it.

Gandhi pleaded for women by saying that women must realize their full status and play their part as equals of men. In one of his speeches, he said once, "Woman is gifted with equal mental capacities and therefore she has equal rights. However, due to the force of customs, ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying superiority over women."

According to Gandhi it is only education which can empower a woman so that she can be able to up hold her natural right. He had a clear notion about the different spheres of men and women. He had an opinion that men and women are complementary to each other. Man is supreme in outward activities and home-life and domestic affairs combine to form the sphere of woman so both of them must have knowledge related to their spheres. Hence, education imparted to both men and women should be according to their preordained stations in life. Mahatma's similar views were published in 'Harijan', where he wrote, "I do believe that woman will not make her contribution to the world by mimicking or running a race with man She can run the race but she will not rise to the great heights she is capable of by mimicking man. She has to be complement of man."

Mahatma firmly believed that the education of woman must be based on family ideals because he assumed that man is supreme in extra-mural activities and woman is superior in intra-mural activities. Thus, his



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idea of woman education was entirely based on his belief in woman being a complement of man.

Gandhi pointed out that it is not proper for men to deprive women or deny them equal rights on the ground of their illiteracy. Education is necessary for enabling women to uphold their real position in the society. They cannot attain the knowledge of their true self if they are illiterate. According to Mahatma,

“Men and women are of equal rank. They are peerless pair being supplementary to each other, each helps the other. Without one, the existence of the other is not possible, so if anything impairs the status of either of them it will result as the equal ruin of both of them.”

That's why keeping this cardinal truth in mind education of both the life- partners become compulsory. Man needs more extensive knowledge and a kind of education that can help him throughout his life as he is supreme in outward activities. In case of women the condition is same. A woman has to bear so many domestic responsibilities such as upbringing and education of her children so she ought to have more knowledge.

Gandhi had a clear notion about the illiteracy of women. He believed that main cause of women illiteracy is not her laziness or disinterest in study but her status is the major factor which obstructs her to gain education. In 'Harijan' he wrote,

“A more potent cause of woman illiteracy is the status of inferiority with which an immemorial tradition has unjustly branded her. Man has converted her into a domestic drudge and an instrument of his pleasure, instead of regarding her as his helpmate and 'better-half. The result is semi-paralysis of our society.”

Gandhi was of the opinion that women are superior to men in their moral and spiritual strength. They had great power of self-sacrifice and suffering. On this account, women are capable of infinite strength which they only needed to realize through gaining proper education. If she is educated she can mould values and traits of her child in a direction that could lead him/her to social progress. An educated woman could be able to view her family in a larger perspective of an entire human-family and could transfer some of her concern and devotion to the latter one. With the backing of education and the discriminating use of their political rights, women could affect the process of decision making in the nation and could initiate appropriate changes to promote the values of social and economical equality. Gandhi made strong appeal to women of India that, “... politically and socially conscious women should agitate for the framing of legislation, which accorded them equal status in the society.”

of their own 'uplift' by gaining proper education but also to attack the scriptures, social customs and conventions that had devalued their status and upheld women's social, political and legal equality. As far as his perception of women as instruments of social change was concerned, he felt that women could play a dynamic role in society by

contributing through their revolutionary thoughts and actions.

Thus, one of the noteworthy results of mahatma's lifework has been the awakening of women, which made them shed their deeply existed sense of inferiority and illiteracy and rise to dignity and self-confidence. For Gandhi, “When woman, whom we all call 'Abla' becomes 'Sabla', all those who are helpless, will become powerful.”

Women, urban or rural, Indian or foreign, educated or uneducated, were attracted to his ideas. There were thousands of unsung and unnoticed heroines of India who learnt the meaning of liberation from him through attaining proper education.

At that period Indians were tolerating strict rule of the Britishers and at that time to get good government jobs knowledge of English was necessary. That's why Indian people were more eager to get knowledge of 'English language' instead of learning their mother-tongue 'Hindi'. Mahatma was quite aware of this fact so in his speeches and books he always gave more importance to promote Hindi as a language. He, in one of his speeches confidently reflected his views regarding English that, “To introduce English education in schools meant for women, could only lead to prolongation of our helplessness. I have often read and heard people saying that the rich treasures of English Literature should be opened alike to men and women. I submit in all humility that there is some misapprehension in assuming such an attitude.” Gandhi believed that in the ordinary course of lifeneither man nor a woman needs to have any knowledge of English because English is necessary only for making a living and for active association in political movements.

For the women who wanted to learn English he said that, “There is no one on earth who can prevent them from studying the literature of the world. Rich treasures of English are open alike to men and women both.... A few women, who desire to have English education can very easily have their way by joining the schools for men....”

Gandhi had a clear-cut perception regarding the development of Indian society. To divert the interest of Indian people towards their mother tongue, he emphasized the necessity of translating various important books of English into Hindi language. According to Gandhi,

“In asking our ... men and women to spend less time in the study of English, my object is not to deprive them of the pleasure which they are likely to derive from it.... Other languages can well boast of production of similar excellence and that can only be done if our learned men will undertake to translate them for us in our own language.”

Speeches and writings of M. Gandhi, 426, 20-02-1981

Gandhi firmly negated the idea that a woman should work for a living or should undertake commercial enterprises. Gandhi had an opinion that the spheres of work for men and women are different.

According to him, "She (woman) is passive, he (man) is active. She is essentially the mistress of the house. He is the bread winner. She is the keeper and distributor of the bread. She is the caretaker in every sense of the term." Gandhi had a firm opinion that if a woman have to work outside the home, she should do so without disturbing her household duties.

Aim of Study

Education makes the man perfect and capable to perform certain duties during the years to come. Education helps the man to brought out the hidden in every and each person who are living in the universe. At present there is a essentiality inculcate quality education among students. The real difficulty that people have no idea what type of education is perfect. We assess the value of education in the same way as we assess the value of other articles which are lying around us or in our society. We want to provide only such education as would enable the students to earn more. We hardly give thought to the improvement of character or improvement of all round development.

Conclusion

Gandhi wrote his ideas about woman about 70 to 80 years ago. If we set aside some of his views such as woman being a complement of man in matters of occupation and education and she should not go to work for a living as she is only a keeper, care-taker and distributor of bread which is earned by man etc.; which are now days completely out of sync; he still can be considered a true well-wisher of woman.

There is something in Mahatma's ideas that is essentially radical. He did not see woman as helpless object of reform. He didn't target to bring change in some spheres of her life, such as marriage or in her social status. Gandhi's vision of change was to bring a social, political and moral revolution in the

status of woman in Indian society. Thus, Mahatma's purity of thought and honest intentions about woman are beyond question.

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