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## WOMEN'S ROLE IN SOCIETY: A GANDHIAN APPROACH

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### **Introduction:**

In India, woman is often referred to as Ardhangani since she constitutes half of the body of man. In basic ethos a woman was regarded as Jagat Janani (creator of the human race) embodiment of cosmic energy, mistress of home, and as a companion in the pilgrimage towards God realization. She is the first of the divinities to demand worship Matru Devo Bhava, Guru Nanak observed, why should she be condemned when she has given birth to kings and emperors. But the mortal woman did not benefit from the above epithets.

Gandhi's basic ideas on women's right were equality in some spheres and opportunities for self development and self realization. He believed that 'woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities, and realized that her contemporary subordinate position was the result of domination by man.

The social and legal system arising out of the existing faults reflects the prevailing norms and progress to a greater or lesser degree in different areas. Women comprise less than 50 percent of the entire population of which 8 percent of the women are expectant mothers and have close relationship with children for the stability of the group. This aspect according to Gandhi is the women being the procreator and rearer have played a big role in the development of children. The problem posed before us regarding their scope of employment under economic stress should be solved without damage to their role as the Queen of Home, the up bringer of children and the perseverer of our culture. Karl Marx stated "Social progress can be measured with precision by the social position of the female sex."

According to Gandhi Man-Woman relation is very fundamental. "The basic reality in life is not politics, not industry but human relationship – the association of a man with a women and parents with a child." It is not masculinisation of the woman in spite of her

advance in politics, professions and business. We are living in a society where a male child is preferred where the last funeral rites are a taboo to a woman, where a woman should not participate in any religion ceremony during her periods. The bright side of women as equal partners in the constitution. He brought out the woman's fruitful and significant life like that of Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, etc. Woman and man are the two wings of the same bird. The woman who is attached to her husband by means of love is indeed a flower radiating a perfume. She is a precious gem, shedding luster in the family.

### **Woman- The Home Maker**

The woman is the seedbed of the nation; the house is its nursery and the country gathers the harvest. The hand that rocks the cradle rule the world so goes the saying. The child imbibes all personality traits from its mother. The house becomes a home because of woman in it. She is the rallying post of its embers enjoying parental care, fraternal affection and filial tenderness in different stages of life. The girl fulfils herself in the wife and the wife finds her completion in the mother.

Woman enjoyed a complementary equality with man subject to reservations arising from the physico-biological differences and feminism (a society where woman can live a full self determined life). The increasing opportunities due to modern influence and the question of inter caste, international and inter-state marriage of the higher strata of society must in no case be allowed to disturb the cohesion and amity of the home.

Is it possible to retain the virtue and ideals of Indian woman in the face of urbanization and industrialization and certain crises in family life such as debt illness or loss of her husband's job.

The sphere of activity of a woman has extended to society and have involvement in various sectors of public life. Man being the bread earner used to go out on his professional pursuits. He has little time to worship household duties. This obligation has fallen on the woman to do the same for herself and her family. If this practice is abandoned by herself having to go out to earn or by her being sophisticated as to look these old things as deadwood which she may throw away, this will affect the well being of home and the society.

Roots of morality and spirituality being in her home/office the utmost duty is to water the roots by her precept and example so that her works may have an abiding influence

on her offspring. Under no circumstances she must act off the stream of spirituality flowing from the country's glory and irrigate their hearts with pure water.

It has been emphasized by experts in the changing world that mother's milk is the best for the child's development as the child is to be more subject to natural selective bond between baby and mother in any society/group – poor or rich, rural/tribal or urban, cannot be undermined.

### **Women and Career:**

The growth of modern education, equal opportunity and urbanization have encouraged women folk to enter into new jobs. She should take up a job without damaging her role in the home. The government machinery and existing voluntary institution have to safeguard her sanctity in relation to her jobs such as nurses, teachings, telephone operators and liberation the area giving preference to poor section. She can even engage her self in self employed schemes such as cottage industries, domestic industries, coaching class, etc, which will enable a house-wife to do justice to both her roles that of a house-wife, looking after family members and that of an employee outside her home. In any case the service of women may be utilized in socio-economic reconstruction of the country in a global prospect.

The basic problems arising out of two roles - Home and work (employment) – need careful analysis in the male dominated society so that a woman worker can work efficiently both in her home and in her work place. Home management requires great skill in ironing out conflicts and meeting household budget. These days mothers have to put in great effort in home management.

### **Women as maker of a child's mind:**

The elderly women in the family are more or less influential figures in domestic works and training of children. There cannot be any substitute for the mother and grand-mother for providing scope for the mental and physical development of children. Infants absorbed through their ears understanding fables, moral lessons and advices that women sang in their lullabies as they kept the babies in their bosom or rocked them in the cradle. We may explain the situation in early Meitei society with an example like this – “The grand mother turns the Kaptreng/spinning wheel with the sounds of Neng Neng Kot and drawn out the thread, while all her thoughts and world are concentrated on the tales or riddles for the children. She was of

infinite capacity for making proverbs and maxim. It was also a pleasant obligation of an elderly woman to relate popular tales to their children. It was an engaging pursuit of young children to follow the hero and heroine if the fables.

Today moral lesson are acquired form stage, screen and T.V. We are losing our intrinsic values today.

### **Women as the Conserver of Culture:**

Women, festival, tradition, culture are inseparable. Culture and religion continue to be a living force in the life of our people. The priestess (Masbee) medicine women and Devadasis are still recapturing the cultural impulses by their dedicated works. Eminent Maibis are still in great demand everywhere for conducting rites, divinatory process and medical works. They used to receive training under the elderly women of the group as student and apprentices. By their duties they earn social confidence and some mark them differently from the roles occupied by their counter parts in the western countries.

The practice of Devadasis in South Indian society had become the sex objects by men who wanted extra-marital sex. They became commercial prostitutes. Their children suffered degradation in society.

Such misuse of a human being as means for physical gratification and robbing of the full meaning of human relationship and spiritual equality were seen as major obstacles to their social security and economic betterment.

### **Aversion of Crimes by Women:**

The alarming phenomenon which threaten women and home are the sexy cinema, cheap advertisement and songs, especially of the mind imported from the west – pernicious war between two sexes, intoxication, change of dressing etc. Others expressions in disciplines is lack of reverence for authority, vulgarization in public and private lives.

Mahatma Gandhi asked to work on the life and texture of our people by looking at the mundane, the real and not as the mere metaphors and rhetoric. We must have the wisdom and courage to give the correct lead of the weaker section. Woman writers can be harbingers to make our children free from negative approaches crime sex and discord.

Ruskin in his book *Sesame and Lilies* speaks of the true place of women. She is complimentary to man. If man is made for conquest, she is made for rule. She has the supreme power to be the queen, the ruler of home and the temperament to arrange and set things right.

### **Gandhi and Women's Rights:**

Gandhi's basic ideas on women's rights were equality in some spheres and opportunities for self – development and self – realization. He believed that woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacities, and realized that her contemporary subordinate position was the result of domination by man.

However Gandhi's view of women's equality was located within a religious sense of the word and within the patriarchal system projecting the concept of women's role as being complimentary to that of men and embodying virtues of sacrifice and suffering. In 1921 he stated: 'To me the female sex is not the weaker sex, it is the nobler of the two; for its is even today the embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge.

Gandhi believed that every man and woman had a duty to perform in the interest of self-realization and social well being while arguing that 'she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by men' and denouncing the sheer force of vicious circumstances by means of which even the most ignorant and worthless men have been enjoying a superiority over women which they do not deserve and ought not to have'. He was all in favour of educating women, but the emphasis must be different for men and for women. He said; 'In framing any scheme of women 's education this cardinal truth must be kept in mind. Man is supreme in the outward activities of a married pair, and therefore, it is the fitness of things that he should have a greater knowledge thereof. On the other hand home life is entirely the sphere of women and therefore in domestic affairs, in the upbringing and education of children, women ought to have more knowledge.'

He spoke against double standards for men and women 'There is morbid anxiety about female purity? We hear nothing about men's chastity.' Why should men arrogate themselves the right to regulate female purity? To Gandhi, self-restraint in sexual matters was a great virtue but it had to come from within the individual. Marriage was a sacrament; the dowry system should be abolished because it debased marriage, reducing it to an arrangement for

money. Divorce was preferable to the continuance of a marriage which had ceased to be a vehicle for self-realization.

Gandhi was very conscious of the power that women could have in a struggle based on the concept of non co-operation. He stressed the importance of their participation in political and social matters and exhorted them to join the nationalist struggle.

If only the women of the world would come together they could display such heroic non-violence as to kick away the atom bomb like a mere ball. Women have been so gifted by God. If an ancestral treasure lying buried in a corner of the house unknown to the members of the family were suddenly discovered, what a celebration it would occasion. Similarly, women's marvelous power is lying dormant. If women of Asia wake-up, they dazzle the world. 'My experiment in non-violence would be instantly successful if I could secure woman's help.'

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