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## **Gender Inequality and Gandhi's Theory of Education**

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### **Abstract**

*Traditional system of educations/ attitudes of a large number of humans towards women in India and the rest of the world have been criticizing by many great thinkers some of them we call feminists. Feminists have shown us that traditional ways of thinking have undervalued women's experiences. It has focused mainly on masculine cultural traits like reason, autonomy etc. and undervalues feminine traits like interdependence, emotion, etc. The aims and objectives of feminism are to create gender-equal society. Mahatma Gandhi who is the champion of our modern education system is one of the critics of the traditional education. To him education is backbone of society and is largely responsible for its uplifting. Gandhi's education offered to the whole mankind should be incorporated to the realm of modern feminist education. My concern in this paper is to frame a conceptual framework of domination of men over women. I shall also show how in the patriarchal society women are received discriminations in many ways. One of the reformers, Gandhi has taken people of all types poor and rich, educate and uneducated, boys and girls to give education. Gandhi has a belief that until and unless women, on the basis of education and knowledge do not find their proper place in social and economic fields, they could not be achieved self-dependence and self-respect for themselves. If feminism is an attempt to revise, reformulate and rethink those traditional attitudes articulated by patriarchy, Gandhi's vision of proper education to women is a genuine alternative to take place. So, the so called traditional system of education that we endorsed as the ideal and viewed with the world around does really not work. Those, who claim to be an educated/ humanist in true sense without travelling en route feminism, are not serious in their proclamation. Following Gandhi and also the feminists, first bridge the gap of status and dignity between man and woman, seek gender equal education, and then only we may proceed to the realm of real humanism.*

**Key words:** *Androcentricity, education, inequality, feminism, gender, patriarchy*

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**Introduction:** Traditional system of educations/ attitudes of a large number of humans towards women in India and the rest of the world have been criticizing by many great thinkers some of them we call feminists. Mahatma Gandhi who is the champion of our modern education system is one of the critics of the traditional educational system. According to him, education is backbone of society and is largely responsible for its

uplifting. He also says "By education, I mean an all-round drawing of the best in child and man in body, mind and spirit."<sup>1</sup> To feminists traditional education emphasizes on masculine ways like reason, justice and also appreciates men viewing world is superior to women viewing, but depreciates the women views and experiences of the world. We mean by feminism is: (a) a belief that women universally face some form of oppressions or exploitations; (b) a commitment to uncover and understand what causes and sustains oppression, in all its forms and (c) a commitment to work individually and collectively in everyday life to end all forms of oppression (Maguire, 1987, p. 79)<sup>2</sup>. Gandhi's education offered to the mankind especially women, would play a great role and should of course be incorporated to the realm of modern feminist education, through which such sort of evil attitudes towards women by men can be abolished.

Unlike the western thinkers, Gandhi thinks that a conceptual framework has been grown up to discriminate both man and women in different educational manners, today what feminists labeled it as 'patriarchy' which is embedded in our social, economic and political arena to which women is grown up, nurtured, and educated. As we know his education system is unique of any kinds of education whatever, it is far from all forms of discriminations, under the education system he has taken people of all types poor and rich, educate and uneducated, boys and girls to make the ideal. Gandhi has a belief that until and unless women, on the basis of education and knowledge do not find their proper place in social and economic fields, they could not achieve self- respect for themselves. Nor they could become self- dependent in any of the walks of life. He emphasizes education should be offered to all irrespective of any gender like men and women, the gender equal education that we need today actually Gandhi has prescribed earlier.

If the feminism is an attempt to revise, reformulate and rethink those traditional attitudes articulated by patriarchy, Gandhi's vision of proper education to women would be a genuine appeal to take place. To say if our aims and objectives are to make a society which is free from all sort of oppressions and depressions then Gandhi's method of education would come into the forefront and could be a way out. We may call Gandhi as a feminist because he always emphasizes such an education that must be gender equal which is of course the spirit of feminism.

This paper contains different sections. Section I includes the definition and the goal of feminism. A brief note on some western thinkers has been kept for record of differential thinking about women in section II. Section III would be reserved mainly on a conceptual scheme of gender discrimination, sex and gender distinction, and different levels of women hating. A special emphasis on Gandhi's education of women and a report from the Government of India in this regard would be given in section IV. And lastly a concluding remark would be drawn for the society uplifting i.e., the abolishment of the gender issue, the end of all types of oppression that women received from the society, and to show Gandhi's prescription can bridge the gap between the status and dignity of men and women.

**I**

The term 'feminist' first used in 1851, and multiple definitions of 'feminism' have existed ever since, reflecting different understandings of what the term means: "The belief and aim that women would have the same rights and opportunities as men."<sup>3</sup> "A phase of protest against the standards and values of the dominant tradition, and advocacy of minority rights and values."<sup>4</sup> "The Feminist reader is enlisted in the process of changing the gender relations which prevail in our society, and she regards the practice of reading as one of the sites in the struggle for change."<sup>5</sup>

Feminism is a political, economic, cultural, and social movement aimed at eliminating systems, structures, and attitudes that create or maintain patterns of male domination and female subordination. Naturally question rises what does it mean by eliminating systems, etc.? They want to eliminate the traditional system of attitudes by incorporating the feminine qualities of care, emotion, etc. into it. We may say no system is rational when it gives absolute values of its own. Traditional systems hold that man viewing world is absolute and with this everything is formulated. Any system can said to be scientific only if it does have the flexibility and magnifying capacity to grasp something and modify it with the foreseeable favourable arguments. What patriarchy is claimed is not scientific because it places the reason at the acme of the system. And there is no room left for emotion, passion, care, etc to be considered in its fold. Traditional attitudes always undervalue such sort of qualities and overvalues to reason, abstract thinking, etc. Feminists contended that same treatment dues to the values of care, emotion, etc. as reason, mind etc. deserve.

The most useful sense of the term 'feminism' is to mark this simple conviction that women suffer systematic injustice just because of their sex. And a feminist is a person who believes in the full equality of woman vis-a-vis man. Anyone irrespective of male or female who supports this ideology in thought and action, can be said a feminist. The goal of feminism is concrete equality with men and that means to recognise both that women can do what men have done (be fire- fighters and corporate executives!) and that men can do what women have done (be stay-at-home fathers and secretaries!). Feminism proposes to explain why women are suppressed, oppressed and depressed, and to suggest morally and theoretically desirable and practically feasible ways to give concrete justice to them.

The feminists' contentions, e.g., are:<sup>6</sup> a) Traditional society does not recognise the importance of the acts performed, and problems that arise, in the so called private sphere (in which most of the women have to spend most of their time!), e.g., in which they cook, clean, and care for the young, the old and the sick. b) The traditional corpus of knowledge shows little concern for women's interests, rights and identities vis-à-vis men's. c) It overvalues so called masculine traits, e.g., mind, reason, independence, transcendence, etc., and undervalues feminine traits, like body, emotion, interdependence and immanence, etc. d) It supposes that women are not, as if, properly developed as an autonomous moral agent, as men are. e) It favours culturally masculine ways of reasoning that emphasize on rules,

universality, impartiality, etc. over feminine ways of reasoning that emphasize on interrelationship, particularity, and sometimes even partiality.

## II

Even philosophy is riddled with misogyny (women hating) and androcentricity (male centrism). For examples: Aristotle says that the courage of a man lies in commanding, a woman's lies in obeying; that 'matter yearns for form, as the female for the male and the ugly for the beautiful;' that women have fewer teeth than men; that a female is an incomplete male or 'as it were, a deformity': which contributes only matter and not form to the generation of offspring; that in general 'a woman is perhaps an inferior being'; that female characters in a tragedy will be inappropriate if they are too brave or too clever'.<sup>7</sup>

Kant writes 'Labourious learning or painful pondering, even if a woman should greatly succeed in it, destroys the merit that are proper to her sex and because of their rarity they can make of her an object of cold admiration but at the same time they will weaken the charms with which she exercises her great power over the other sex.' 'Her philosophy is not to reason, but to sense.' 'I hardly believe that the fairer sex is capable of principles...' 'As culture advances, each party must be superior in his own particular way; the man must be superior to the woman by his physical strength and courage; the woman to the man, however, by her natural talent for gaining mastery over his desire for her.' 'It is by marriage that woman becomes free: man loses his freedom by it.' 'As for the scholarly woman, she uses her books in the same way as her watch, for example, which she carries so that people will see that she has one, though it is usually not running or not set by the sun.' 'A woman, regardless of her age, is under civil tutelage (or incompetent to speak for herself); her husband is her natural curator, though if a married woman has property of her own, it is another man.' '(S)he cannot personally defend her rights in civil affairs for herself, but only through her representative.'<sup>8</sup>

Hegel writes: 'Women are capable of education, but they are not made for activities which demand a universal faculty such as the more advanced sciences, philosophy and certain forms of artistic production. ... Women regulate their actions not by the demands of universality, but by arbitrary inclinations and opinions.'<sup>9</sup>

## III

In order to explore and to understand the nature of systematic injustice, we take a note of some distinctions, first, between sex and gender, and secondly, among different levels of misogyny.

Sex is simply a biological category, determined primarily by sex organs, and secondarily, by accompanying sexual and reproductive functions, and also by some differences in behavior-patterns.<sup>10</sup> An XX chromosomal structure is female, whereas an XY chromosomal structure is male. Gender, on the other hand, is a cultural category, constructed and determined by social and religious codes and customs and distinct role-prescriptions for men and women. Females exhibit 'feminine' traits and males exhibit 'masculine' traits. As sex is a natural endowment, where we have hardly any option to

exercise, and we also are not in a position to change something in it, the cultural category of gender is man-made, a socially constructed structure or 'a lens' through which we see ourselves and others, and here we have the opportunity to change something and do our level best. Some thinkers, like Margaret Mead, think that 'the notion of gender has emerged from that of sexual roles'.<sup>11</sup> Simon de Beauvoir emphasizes: 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.'<sup>12</sup>

According to Allan G. Johnson, a sociologist, "misogyny is a cultural attitude of hatred for females because they are female."<sup>13</sup> He argues that misogyny is a central part of sexist prejudice and ideology and, as such, is an important basis for the oppression of females in male-dominated societies. Traditional system of education to be achieved humanism, so far formulated, is based on androcentrism. It takes an assertion that the male point of viewing things in this world is the human view-point. Such 'androcentric' education system fails to take seriously of the specific interests, rights and identities of women *vis-à-vis* men; and to recognize women's ways of thinking and doing as valuable as those of men. Anyhow, to understand the gender discrimination there is three levels of misogyny<sup>14</sup> these are sexism, patriarchy and phallogocentrism to be noted carefully. Sexism is easily identifiable by males' overt behaviours against females, like teasing, scolding, beating, raping, etc. 'Sexism is the unfair treatment of people, especially women, because of their sex'. All these are supported by patriarchy, the second level of misogyny. Patriarchy is the systematic and institutional structure of customs, practices, role-prescription with male supremacy, with power and control of women's productive and reproductive acts. The third and deepest level of misogyny is phallogocentrism – the discrimination against women at the conceptual and theoretical levels. Concepts, theories, language, etc. are infected with male glorification and female humiliation. Phallogocentrism is a discursive series of themes and procedures established by androcentric reason *vis-à-vis* feminine intuition.

Let us take a look at the conceptual scheme of domination of women by men. A conceptual scheme is a socially constructed structure of thought through which we think and act. The scheme becomes oppressive, when it purports to justify domination and oppression. Some features of oppressive conceptual scheme<sup>15</sup> are as follows:

- i) *Value-hierarchical thinking*, e.g., up-down thinking which ascribes higher value to what is *up*, and relatively lower value to what is *down*;
- ii) *Value-dualism*, i.e., exclusive disjunctive pairs, in which one disjunct is taken to be oppositional to the other, and which places higher value and status on one rather than the other (reason/emotion, male/ female, aggressive/submissive, physical/mental etc.);
- iii) The *logic of domination*, i.e., a structure of argumentation that leads to a justification of oppression and subordination of the 'lower'.

The logic of domination<sup>16</sup> is very significant: it is not just a logical argument, but a thought-structure that involves a substantive value (moral) judgment, as an ethical premise is needed to justify this subordination. The justification is made on the basis of some alleged characteristics, which the dominant (male) is said to have and the subordinate (female) does not. The following reasoning may be considered:

Men are identified with the human and the realm of the mental, and women are identified with the nature and the realm of the physical. Whoever is identified with the human and the realm of the mental is superior to whoever is identified with the nature and the realm of the physical. Thus men are superior to women. For any x and y, if x is morally superior to y then x is morally justified to subordinate y. Hence men are justified to subordinate women.

#### IV

Although Gandhi believed in the different workload division between man and women yet he thought that the distributions are not fixed forever, in the sense when he said that man and woman are of equal rank but they are not identical. Admitting equal ranks the status and dignity are due to both man and woman. They are a peerless pair being supplementary to one another; each helps the other, in a society we should make a cooperative relations among our fellows, so that without the one the existence of the other cannot be conceived, and therefore it follows as a necessary corollary from these facts that anything that will impair the status of either of them will involve the equal ruin of them both.<sup>17</sup> In framing any scheme of women's education this cardinal truth must be constantly kept in mind. Man is supreme in the outward activities of a married pair and therefore it is in the fitness of things that he should have a greater knowledge thereof. On the other hand, 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. Not that knowledge should be divided into watertight compartments, or that some branches of knowledge should be closed to any one; but unless courses of instruction are based on a discriminating appreciation of these basic principles, the fullest life of man and woman cannot be developed.<sup>18</sup> When knowledge from both interior and exterior world should be offered to learn both to men and women, and then only discriminations from the society could be abolished.

Gandhi was a protagonist of women education. He advocated that there should be no distinction in equality of status between men and women in society. Opposing the Purdah system and widowhood Gandhi shows a great respect to the womankind. To him, purdah system was 'vicious, brutal and barbarous'. It is nothing but a cunning way to dominate women in the domestic arena. He questioned the basis of the practice of pushing women in seclusion: Why is there all this morbid anxiety about female purity? Have women any say in the matter of male purity? We hear nothing of women's anxiety about men's chastity. Why should men arrogate to themselves the right to regulate female purity?<sup>19</sup> Asking these questions to the society Gandhi shows that there is no reason for discriminating and depriving women rather advices to respect women that she deserves. Eliminating such prejudices and practices mean that no one in his views is superior to anyone. He also says that "To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is a man's injustice to woman."<sup>20</sup> He wanted to free women from social serfdom. So, the number of girl students considerably rose in various educational institutions inside the country. Thus, Gandhi emphasized the need of women education to improve the lot of society. One of his suggestion to take care of accepting of vocational education which would bring among the society the equal rights,

opportunities and the recognition of the work that women face in the domestic realm. What today feminist proposes to adopt the education which should be gender-bias free in the sense that both men and women should have the opportunities to enter into the private and public realm, so that men and women can get recognition of their works, Gandhi offers that as vocational education. Introducing vocational education he means that acquiring the capacity for doing both the work in the home and outside the home, they can understand the necessity and value of their own work. His prescription was that not only humans confine themselves in the abstract theoretical based work but should show a love for manual work which should be injected in the mind of children. This is not a compulsion but the child will learn it by doing so. Being free from mere bookish knowledge, a student should resort to manual work. He, thus, put emphasis on vocational and functional education. We may say that each and every work has value; no work is more valuable than other. Our recognition of works would not be confined only in the world of professions or business but extends to the domestic world. So taking vocational education into the realm of our traditional mode based on merely theoretical work, we need not want that theory-based education only but which today we think that education would come in a practical way that is more important for the demolishment of discrimination.

Gandhi's idea on education deserves novelty. His idea of vocational education was unique and very much relevant for the revision of differential treatments, although we late yet now are being promoted by the government in India. With this education humans can share their work to each other. Feminists also claim that it is not enough for women to enter the public world; men need to assume their fair share of domestic and parental responsibilities in the private world. Gandhi himself also after marriage with Kasturba used to assist many of the domestic work in many ways. To get proper education he advocated for free and compulsory education for all-boys and girls between 7 and 14 years. By giving the opportunity for free education to all girls gets the opportunity to come outside from the four wall boundary and to expose their views to the external world. And he also believed that a free primary universal education is to be imparted to all the children in the village. This will make the backbone of a society and after all a country become strong.

The education system that feminists hold is gender equal education and for that not only the knowledge of the external world but knowledge from interior world that is value education should come to the same direction. Gandhi, by education means the improvement of morality within a student. Without being bookish, a student should adopt certain moral codes like truth, nonviolence, charity, care and so on which will illumine his character. From the beginning child needs to inculcate proper education. What feminists think is that to get proper education we must keep in mind the feminine traits which would play a great role to become a good human being. Character building education was a prime concern for Gandhi and through which gender discrimination could be addressed and proper education would be given.

One thing we should keep in mind is that morality cannot only be categorized by the so called abstract principles articulated by patriarchy but by some sort of concreteness like

emotion, passion, care and so on. As we know morality is concerned with guiding actions, we actually forget that particular problems to be addressed and confine ourselves to the left brain exercises only. As Wollstonecraft identified reason, rather than sentience as the characteristic that distinguishes humans from non-human animals. She contrasted manners, such as any mindless automaton one might master, with morals which require critical thinking. Discrimination starts from home, as parents teach boys morals, they teach girls manners, she said. More generally, society as a whole encourages women to cultivate negative psychological traits like “cunning,” “vanity,” and “immaturity,” all of which impede women's moral development. (Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, p.117). Wollstonecraft reasoned that the best way for women to become full-fledged moral agents is for them to start thinking and behaving like men. It did not occur to her to question whether men's morality was in fact human morality. All she knew was that on the face of it, men's morality seemed better than women's morality and was therefore a superior candidate for the title “true human morality.”

There are some degrees of patriarchal system through which women are bound to maintain. Women should enjoy no *svātantrya* (independence): they should be under father's control while child and adolescent; while young under husband's control; and in old age under the control of son. They are seen to be mere instrument for giving birth, preferably male-child. Later it was observed that all forms of domination and oppression are connected with each other, due to their having the same logic of domination. As such, no one form of domination can be completely understood.

Economic and political independence is not sufficient to liberate women. Women must be men's economic as well as educational and political equals before they can be as powerful as men. There are so many layers in the gendered social structure as well as in our psyche that should be dismantled and overthrown to ensure women's equal status with men. Juliet Mitchell, a feminist, there are four structures – production, reproduction, sexuality, and the socialization of children overdetermine women's condition. She also adds in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, a woman's interior world, her psyche, must also be transformed, for unless a woman is convinced of her own value, no change in her exterior world can totally liberate her.

Women's role in Pre-colonial social structures reveals that feminism was theorized differently in India than in the West.<sup>21</sup> In India, women's issues first began to be addressed when the state commissioned a report on the status of women to a group of feminist researchers and activists. The report recognized the fact that in India, women were oppressed under a system of structural hierarchies and injustices what feminists and activists called the root of patriarchy. During this period, Indian feminists were influenced by the Western debates being conducted about violence against women. However a report<sup>22</sup> was prepared to the government of India regarding gender discrimination and made some suggestions for removing such evils accordingly:

We believe that

- 1 Equality of women is necessary, not merely on the grounds of social justice, but as a basic condition for social, economic and political development of the nation.
- 2 In order to release women from their dependent and unequal status, improvement of their employment opportunities and earning power has to be given the highest priority.
- 3 Society owes a special responsibility to women because of their child-bearing function. Safe bearing and rearing of children is an obligation that has to be shared by the mother, the father and society.
- 4 The contribution made by and active housewife to the running and management of a family should be admitted as economically and socially productive and contributing to national savings and development.
- 5 Marriage and motherhood should not become a disability in women's fulfilling their full and proper role in the task of national development. Therefore, it is important that society, including women themselves, must accept their responsibility in this field.
- 6 Disabilities and inequalities imposed on women have to be seen in the total context of a society, where large sections of the population –male and female, adults and children –suffer under the oppression of an exploitative system. It is not possible to remove these inequalities for women only. And policy or movement or the emancipation and development of women has to form a part of a total ,movement for removal of inequalities and oppressive social institutions, if the benefits and privileges won by such action are to be shared by the entire women population and not be monopolized by a small minority.
- 7 If our society is to move in the direction of the goals set by the Constitution, then special temporary measures will be necessary, to transform de jure into de facto equality.

**Concluding Remarks:** As the main focus of our discussion based on gender equality, the importance of consciousness raising and an intention to empower women and change power relations and inequality. Whereas half of the human race suffers different types of institutionalized injustice simply because they are women by birth, by sex, the net of so called humanism, as traditionally conceived, appears insufficient to catch hold of the specificity of women's subordination by men. If feminism is an attempt to revise, reformulate and rethink those traditional attitudes articulated by patriarchy, Gandhi's vision of proper education to women is a genuine alternative to take place. Gandhi also proclaims that women were not mere toys or dolls in the hands of men neither their competitors. According to him, "Intellectually, mentally and spiritually women is equivalent to a male and she can participate in every activity." He also claims to undermine the women oppressions in his *Speeches and Writings*, Gandhi said that in many matters, especially those of tolerance, patience and sacrifice, the Indian women is superior to the male. As Wollstonecraft said that women cannot be forced to be "domestic", she also suggested that women need to be educated like men so that they can become rational, responsible,

independent adults. She noted that if women were to be “really virtuous and useful,” (Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*) they needed to be economically independent of men. We must keep in mind while giving education to humans what Ruby Manikan says “If you educate a man, you educate a person; but if you educate a woman, you educate a family.” We want the education that must make a breeze of the gap between reason and emotion, men and women.

So, the so called traditional system of education that we endorsed as an ideal and viewed with the world's altogether do really not work. Those, who claim to be an educated and as a humanist in true sense without travelling *en route* feminism, are not serious in their proclamation, if we take a lesson from feminism only then we can achieve humanism that should be the goal of our education. If there is any new terminology to be offered by defining humanism/education in true sense then ‘Feminist’ humanism’ that is ‘Gender-equal humanism’ would take place. Following Gandhi and the other feminists, first bridge the gap of status and dignity between man and woman, and sought an education that must be neutral from any gender-bias and discriminations and then we proceed to the realm of real humanism.

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