A Critical Study Of Gandhian Approach To Woman In The Light Of Sujata Patel’s Essay “Construction And Reconstruction Of Woman In Gandhi”

Dr. Jayashree Deka

Abstract: The main aim of this paper is to provide a critical analysis of Mahatma Gandhi’s approach towards woman in the light of Sujata Patel’s essay “Construction and Reconstruction of Woman in Gandhi”. This paper analyses how Gandhi was different from the other 19th century reformers who were not concerned about self-conscious identity of woman. At the same time this paper also tries to show how Gandhi was to some extent not free from patriarchal biasness in constructing the various programs for woman in Indian National movement.

Keywords: Construction, Freedom Movement, Reconstruction, spinning wheel, Swadeshi, swaraj, Woman's Status.

1 INTRODUCTION

Sujata Patel’s essay “Construction and Reconstruction of Woman in Gandhi” is distinct as it locates Gandhi in a broader historical setting. She discusses Gandhi’s view on women within this setting. She closely and critically analysis Kishwar’s work “Gandhi on Women”. She brings into the discussion how Kishwar ignored what Gandhi inherited from 19th century views on women. The complexity of understanding, women as represented by this 19th century is lost, if Gandhi's views on women are understood in isolation. Understanding Gandhi’s view on women without bringing this historical background is the limitation in Kishwar. The major task of her work is to lay bare “the contours of the social frame.” in which Gandhi articulates his perspectives about women which were completely absent in early analysis. The essay discusses the construction and reconstruction of women in Gandhi during 1917 to 1948. She particularly lays emphasis on pointing out inherent contradictions in Gandhi.

2 METHOD

In this research paper an analytical method has been used. In this paper an attempt has been made to analyse Gandhi’s attitude towards woman by referring Sujata Patel and Modhu Kishwar article on Gandhi’s view on woman.

3 DISCUSSION

Before proceeding to the basic assumptions of Gandhian ideology and the subsequent analysis of historical development of Gandhi’s ideas on woman, Patel puts forward a brief critical analysis on Kishwar’s essay “Gandhi on Woman”. According to Patel, for Kishwar liberationist views coupled with the revolutionary ideas marks or characterize the ideology of Gandhi on women. Patel says; “His ideology, according to Kishwar, is both liberationist and revolutionary.” The liberationist aspects of Gandhian ideology strengthen or corroborate women “as self conscious subjects who could, if they choose become arbiters of their own destiny.” According to Patel, the entire lengthy, detailed examination of Gandhian ideology on women by Kishwar can be reduced to or viewed from two angles. One is the consideration of women as self-conscious subject and the consequent endorsement of women’s freedom in the society and their equality with men and the other is the acknowledgement of the existence of some inherent contradiction. Patel agrees with Kishwar who pointed out that, Gandhi failed to find out the real cause of women’s oppression. He considers oppression as an abstract moral condition. For, Kishwar it is actually the social and historical relation, related to production relation that caused women's oppression. The absence of historical production relation or the ‘economic content’ in the Gandhi’s conception of women’s emancipation, fails to create a situation to change women’s condition. Though he seeks to change the moral condition of women, his effort for the upliftment of women marked by the absence of economic content leaves room for back door dependency of women upon men. Kishwar says; “Gandhi tried changing women's position without either transforming the relation to the outer world of production or the inner world of family, sexuality and reproduction.” Patel endorsed this. However, Patel’s point of disagreement with Kishwar comes as Kishwar’s analysis lacks the enquiry into the historical and social roots of Gandhian ideology. Patel says, “If the ‘economic content’ is distilled in Gandhi, she does not ask why, and thus evaluate the social roots of this ‘absence’.” Kishwar’s failure in asking why Gandhi’s conception on women lack the economic content, does not push her, as Patel points out, “to understand the social basis of Gandhi’s ideology of women” Without making critical examination of the basis or the context of Gandhian ideology, Kishwar limits her analysis, only by putting it as a limitation or ‘at best a contradiction, within Gandhi.’ Although Kishwar’s analysis is a lengthy or detailed one, the absence of analysis of the social or historical basis in it leads to the limited perception of Gandhian ideology. Although Kishwar is able to identify the cause for women’s oppression as the production relation, she only identifies these and does not analyze the social roots that cause women’s oppression. Patel says that: “Kishwar admits that Gandhi failed to understand that, oppression is not an abstract moral condition but a social and historical relation, related to production relations. Yet, her analysis does not examine in any comprehensive manner the reasons for Gandhi’s failure to understand this oppression.” Patel points out in Kishwar’s analysis, “Though she accepts that there was a differential level of involvement of women of different classes into the movement, she fails to relate that to his construct of women.” According to Kishwar, there were different levels of involvement of women in the national movement depending upon deferent classes. The active participation was limited to some middle class women. The participation of rural women was limited to some phases of national movement. Kishwar says: “The participation of women in the freedom movement was limited, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Active and
consistent participation was confined to a small number of urban, middle class and women. Rural women joined protest activity during certain phases. Gandhi entrusted the leadership to urban women to guide the rural one in their participation in national movement. Kishwar says, "He laid particular stress on the duty of educated urban women to work with their rural sisters." In this way Kishwar shows that there is different level of participation of urban and rural women in the national movement. Patel also accepts this. But her question is why this phenomenon of different levels? According to Patel, Kishwar fails to relate the phenomenon of different levels of the involvement of women to Gandhi’s construct of women. Patel agrees with Kishwar who points out that Gandhi used traditional symbols constructively in order to inspire and integrate Indian women for the political involvement. However, she disagrees with Kishwar’s use probing further and asking, "Why only certain roles of certain historical and mythological heroines are highlighted by Gandhi and not other? Or that they are used to give meaning only to certain social contexts but not others?" That is, why does Gandhi does not use Jhansi Rani as a role model? And why does he only consider the characters like Sita and Draupadi. This eludes Kishwar. This failure in Kishwar, Patel attributed to the not taking context into this account. Patel brings contextual considerations of the social roots and tries to give answers to such kind of questions. According to her, Gandhi is unable to come out of the elements of the patriarchy which makes him not to consider the characters like Jhansi Rani as a role model whose nature was completely opposed to the social frame of Gandhi which was not free from patriarchy. Patel acknowledges how Veena Mazumdar, Geraldine Forbes, Karuna Ahmed, Devaki Jain and Madhu Kishwar acknowledged the influence of Gandhi’s entrance leading to the mass participation of women in the national movement. In Patel’s view the fact that, “Gandhi’s entry into the national arena did lead to mass participation of women in the national movement. As Mazumdar puts it, “Gandhi facilitated the acceptance of woman’s cause by the nationalist, particularly in the public life." This assumption that Gandhi’s entry facilitating the mass participation of women was the guidance for the interpretation and commentaries on Gandhian ideology on women for them. Interpreting Gandhi on the basis of this assumption results in an attempt to view the liberationist aspect which is inherent in his ideology. This has lead to the construction of one perception of Gandhian ideology in Patel’s view. This is what distinguishes Patel’s analysis about Gandhi on women from others. Interpreting Gandhi on the basis of the above mentioned assumption has the crucial problem that, “women appear as homogeneous category, undifferentiated in terms of class, cast, religion or region." This way of categorizing is devoid of examining the importance of other categories like class, cast, religion, or region for the integration of the individuals (in this context woman) into national movement. In addition to this entry Patel recognizes the importance of other factors that created ambience for women’s participation in national movement. She says: “Participation of any group of people in political activity cannot simply be understood in terms of the way in which a particular leader perceived this group and attempted to integrate them into the movement which also contained other groups." She maintains that other than the influence of Gandhian ideology, there are factors that lead women’s mass participation in the national movement and they are “cast associations, the family, the school, the college, the peer group and especially the mother.” These factors also determine the context in which women’s participation in national movement took place. She says; “Because Participation deals with actions, it is necessary to understand the context in which action is possible." The reasons for the political involvement of women cannot be just dependent upon or cannot be reduced to the influence of Gandhian ideology. If it is so then in Patel’s term it is “to de-historise a figure and trivialize the context." She says; “At best, an ideology can create a climate for action. The action itself is determined by other factors, not necessarily only ideology." Therefore, Gandhian ideology could act just as a condition that could create a climate for the political involvement of women. From the above explanation it follows that, while this historical fact becomes the basic assumption for the above mentioned contributors, for Patel the context which made possible Gandhi’s entry becomes the basis for the interpretation. Patel views Gandhi not only as a politician par excellence who could lay down an ideological and political perspective but also as a self-conscious individual who was aware of his internal contradictions and also who was aware of the necessity to resolve them which lead to the reconstruction activity of women. Exploration into the social roots of Gandhi’s perception is necessary for Patel for the analysis of and for the critical evaluation of Gandhi’s ideology. How much the idea of quest into the social roots of Gandhi’s perception was strong in Patel can be clearly understood from her critical remarks about the Madhu Kishwar’s emphasis on the use of traditional symbols by Gandhi. Patel says that Kishwar, “almost believes that these (traditional symbols) are universal symbols and does not perceive them also as ideologically rooted in the social context. There is a social frame in which Gandhi articulates his perception of women. Madhu Kishwar is not able to lay out the contours of this frame.” By making an analysis on Gandhian ideology about women as a set of ideas in which there is the assumption of the origin and the nature of gender differences, Patel tries to lay down the social frame. It is based on this assumption according to Patel, Gandhi constructs and reconstructs women’s role in the context of Indian national movement. Gandhi’s ideas on women was not a complete departure or does not ‘represent a crucial break’ from that of 19th century reformers as it was mentioned before. Gandhi extracts and reconstructs his construct on women from the received ideas of this 19th century reformers, by affirming some of them and by denying some of them. Within a given historical point of time his construct on contemporary womanhood takes place which is mediated by his class, cast and religion. Assumptions on women are rooted in the socially given set of received ideas on women. Gandhi’ ideas on women that are based on these assumptions developed over a time and these are conditioned to his involvement and role in the national movement. One of the important claims by Patel in this context is about the space from which Gandhi derives his construction about women that is "from a space inhabited by an urbanized middle-class upper caste Hindu male’s perception of what a woman should be.” Middle class upper caste Hindu male’s perception of women as having specific roles in the society and distinct qualities whose roots are biological legitimized the ideas of separate sphere and the essential complementary nature. Idea of separate sphere clearly distinguishes between public sphere and domestic space and women’s specific roles mostly confined within the domestic space. However, she has an important role in society and politics. Her significant role in society consists in the fight against social evils and also being
aware about her role in India. In the perception of middle class male, she also has an important role in politics in the sense she has right to vote “as a mother, she instills national consciousness in the children and participates in the programmes.” Middle class male’s consideration of purity as the most distinct and precious qualities of women lead to the absence of economic activity of women. In his entire political endeavor Gandhi does not come out of this particular way of looking at women. How a middle class upper cast Hindu male looked at women, is the way Gandhi too looked at them which was the case with other reformers too. She says again, “His image of woman is enclosed and confined within that articulated by the middle-class reformers.” This may be the reason for Patel to assert that even if Gandhi was successful in constructing a structure that could involve women in politics just by being at home; he could not bring any change in the way the middle class people were looking at them. Because, Gandhi himself faced the same problem. He revolutionized politics by extending it to the home and participating women but could notrevolutionize the middle class assumptions about women. Patel says; “he did not revolutionize the assumptions on which these middle-class reformers perceived woman. In Gandhi, politics was redefined to find its space in the home.” Let us briefly look into the context in which other reformers and Gandhi were developing their views about women. Patel very clearly places before us the context in which Gandhi was articulating his view about women. Mid 19th century reformists were facing a society which was witnessing a rapid social change. At the base colonization caused this rapid change. Patel mentions the nature of the change that: “On one hand colonization had led to the slow growth of an industrial working class and urbanism had become a sign and symbol of ‘modern progress’, on the other, the traditional system based on agriculture and structured hierarchical interrelationships was slowly disintegrating, tearing apart the rubric of family and kin relationships.” Disintegration of the traditional system is the most important factor here. There were more and more establishments of educational institutions which caused the upper cast Hindu male to get into the urban areas. As a result, they were confronted with received modern ideas of women in their roles as spiritual and moral repositories of the ‘home’...the 19th century ideas relating to ‘home’ were reintegrated into the Indian situation by the modern Indian. According to Patel, a woman as moral repositories is one of the form through which patriarchy got recreated. Gandhi accepts these assumptions and extends the role of women as a political figure. Away from mid 19th century reformers, Gandhi was encountering a society in which there was a sizable formation of the working class. Patel says; “By 1921, the census reports that, out of 33 per cent women workers, nearly 11 per cent were in industry.” When we consider 1921 census report, it is clear that there were women in society who were working in the industry out side the home. This is during this time Gandhi’s views on women begin to form. He was engaged in the construction of women in a society where there were already women workers who were visible outside the four walls of home. Patel mentions about Gandhi’s familiarity of women who involved in the work outside the home in rural areas. This was the context in which Gandhi articulated his perceptions about women. Gandhi’s formulation of basic postulates on the role of women take place from 1917 – 1922, the period during which his idea on women molded in coherent style. This period is marked by the spontaneous and organized participation of both men and women in the national struggle and also this period witness the emergence of Gandhi as the leader of this struggle. Here, it is worth noticing one of the claims of Patel. Because of the simultaneous events of women’s spontaneous participation and Gandhi’s emergence as the national struggle leader, Patel claim that, “it is difficult to separate analytically which precede first: women’s participation or Gandhi’s advocacy of this.” Here the problem can be highlighted with a different question; which precedes or which comes first? Is it Gandhi’s advocacy of the participation of women or the participation of women itself? However, Patel points out that; “Gandhi did not show any displeasure at this participation of women.” Instead he had the captivation for the powerfulness and effectiveness which can be created by women’s participation in the national struggle. In this first phase Gandhi is engaged with the questions regarding existing Hindu practices which cause the limited participation of women in national movement and questions regarding their distinct role in national movement. Patel says; “Gandhi addressing himself more and more to the question of women in India, first, by questioning existing Hindu practices that limit the involvement of women in the national awakening, like Purdah, and later by affirming and establishing for himself the distinct role that women can play in the national movement.” There is a slow and gradual growth in the process through which Gandhi develops his ideas that make the necessary mediation between women and national movement through the means of the spinning wheel. However, his belief in complementarity and the ‘separate sphere’ of two sexes legitimized by the biological difference strongly persists in his effort of addressing their questions and consequently in the gradual development of his ideas on women and their role in the national movement. According to Patel, Gandhi’s denunciation is unveiled not only to contemporary commentators whose interpretations legitimized the practices like child marriage, forced widowhood and sati but also was directed towards men who perceived women as “play things or beautiful dolls to be adored as many goddesses and decorate them with ornaments.” In order to show the intensity of men commentators’ towards women that degraded their image and the status Patel cites Tulsidas famous couplet here; “The drum, the foo1, the sudra, the animal and the women—all these need beating.” According to Gandhi the practices like child marriage, forced widowhood and sati were introduced later which were completely absent in older smritis. Although Gandhi did not depart from 19th century reformers, he makes a significant difference from them “by inverting the equation that they had posed between education and the upliftment of the status of women.” Patel cites Gandhi where he speaks how a reformer needs to approach the upliftment of women; “The way to women’s freedom is not through education but through the change of attitude on the part of men and corresponding action.” He continues “we dare not wait for literary education to restore our womanhood to its proper state. Even without literary education our women are cultured as any.” By keeping aside education as the means of women’s development Gandhi could identify differently from the early nationalist thinkers that women are already endowed with strength which would enable them to involve and to take part in the contemporary issues. Gandhi’s particular realization that they are already endowed with the strength or his confidence in them makes him to ask the upper-class women’s organization not only to work on spreading the nationalist message but also to link the social evils of contemporary society to the national problem. Creation of the consciousness
of nationalism among the ignorant was the first task put forward by Gandhi for women. Patel points out that: “At this stage, he makes the first crucial connection between the macro problems affecting the country and women when he asks the women’s organizations to involve widows in spinning as a start of the process to counter the trend that has led to the destruction of the handcrafts.” Introduction of the spinning wheel in the Indian national movement is considered by Patel as a “shrewd intervention” because it effectively increased the involvement of women in national movement and also it did not violate the assumption of “different sphere”. “Without shifting the terrain of the movement from house hold” Gandhi made it possible for women’s mass participation in national movement. The success of swadeshi is dependent upon the manifestation of women’s national consciousness and also dependent upon the decision of wearing Indian cloths. Patel points out that, “If the women could now show their national consciousness and their strength by taking decision on wearing Indian clothes, they could make swadeshi a success.” There is a gradual process of development or evolution on thought starting from the point “that they have a place in the family as a creative subject to the point “his belief in their definite role in the national movement.” Patel says that; “a significant part of the movement of non-cooperation, specially its symbolic and spiritual sustenance now lay vested in the hands of women.” Gandhi’s acumen in the national movement lies in the fact that, he could picture or depict the fight for swadeshi as something that affects one’s moral life. Thus, converting this fight to the ideal position towards which one is to be directed. Patel says; “the fight for swadeshi now became the ideal for women.” She quotes Gandhi: “If you wish a prosperous future for your children you should leave them as legacy the idea that is a dharma to obtain our needs by imports.” Gandhi places women as the repository of the dharma of the country. Here Patel brings into light two dimensions of Gandhi’s consideration of the swadeshi movement as the ideal for women. One is his extension of politics into the four walls of household and the other is the redefining of the political participation by involving women in national movement through swadeshi. Participation of women in the national movement means spinning at home. In this way Gandhi for women opens up the ways to the political world. Because of the acceptance and the strong feeling for “separate sphere”, Gandhi has a clear idea of the characteristic that define public and private space. The private space is the domestic sphere towards which Gandhi extended the politics. The idea that working outside the household affects women’s purity, honor and chastity which Gandhi inherits from middle class patriarchal attitudes because of which he supports and affirms the need for women to remain at home and thereby, fight for swadeshi. Patel says; “The vow of swadeshi is thus transformed from its political roots into religious and moral ones.” Patel continues to say; “To practice swadeshi now means to protect Indian womanhood. The protection of this honor becomes in turn Ishwarbhatki.” So Gandhi used swadeshi movement as a fine platform to give Indian woman a new role and status within the domestic periphery. He was able to bring the politics within household, thus, would enable the women to feel more powerful. Gandhi extensively asked Indian women to make swadeshi movement a success as women has greater role to play. Women were trusted a job of spinning wheel. So Gandhi redefined the role of women in the political participation from the household itself. However, when Gandhi confronted the problems of woman’s purity, honor, chastity, he eventually tried to assure that women should “fight” from the house and thereby restoring their purity. The religious scripture describe Sita as a symbol of “purity” and Gandhi intelligently brought those attributes into politics. Swadeshi movement was now given a religious and more importantly a moral fight. It is apparent, when Gandhi said: “the spinning wheel is the symbol of the chastity of womanhood of India. In the absence of the spinning wheel, I give you my testimony, that thousands of our poor sisters are giving themselves to a life of shame and degradation” Thus Gandhi left no stone unturned to give Indian womanhood a new dimension within the household activities. But, question arises, why only these attributes? Why not more aggressive role for women? As Patel finds: “These attributes he extracts from his own reading or the role that historical and mythological heroines have played, and these are then interwoven and reframed into the prescriptions for the role that contemporary women involved in the national struggle, have to play from within their domestic space”. So we can understand why Gandhi did not take Rani of Jhansi as an ideal woman. Women should remain within household to restore purity and thereby learn to develop “suffering”- as it is a superior quality. He knew that traditional patriarchal social system inherited these aspects of suffering for women and so he converted it from a negative aspect into positive women. While first phase is characterized by the formulation of basic postulates and the extension of politics into home or to the domestic space without violating the assumption of separate sphere, the second phase is characterized by thorough going examination of women’s role in her domestic space. Through the elevation of spinning wheel together with the protection of the honor of women as the symbol of swaraj, Gandhi was able to bring politics inside the household. Patel emphasizes that it is this extension of politics into home or domestic sphere where women has the superiority over men make Gandhi to re-examine and re-evaluate their role in swaraj and in home. Patel says, “extension of politics to the household made possible a radical review of women’s role in her domestic space and gave her a new status and legitimacy in this space.” Extension of politics not only results in review of women’s role but also gives her a renewed status in the society. In this period Gandhi simultaneously opposes the contemporary social practices stating the need for the assessment of the “reappraisal of the role of women in the contest of swaraj.” Patel points out that; “In this period, Gandhi is actively involved in confronting and redefining the contours of Hinduism.” When he advocates and promotes the entry of Harijan into temples, he was engaged in a rigorous attack on the contemporary Hindu custom and the interpretations on it. Such kind of attempt on the part of Gandhi makes him to redefine the Hindu religion. If he is to redefine the Hindu religion then he cannot do it without redefining the conscience keeper of religion that is the Hindu women. The conviction that Gandhi had during this phase is that, “a moral and physical evil makes us recede from the fight for swaraj.” Here redefining religion through redefining the woman is very much necessary for the achievement of a kind of swaraj which Gandhi dreamt of. Achievement of swaraj cannot go hand in hand with the practices like child marriage, dowry, purdha system, custom of sati, discriminatory practices that legitimize male widower’s remarriage and so on which were legitimized by Hinduism itself. The lives of women were governed by such kind of practices which lead to the oppression of and the degradation of the status of women. Here, according to Patel, “Gandhi attacks the conservative and orthodox elements that
constrict Hindu women in society as well as inhibit them in their political work”. Redefining the women implies the abandoning of such kind of activities. In the second phase too as it was in the first stage, some of the problems regarding the reconstruction of women by Gandhi continue as unsolved problems. For example, although Gandhi is critical of the some of the aspects of Hindu customs, in this phase of his political career, his stand on the issue of women’s role continues to persist, that is, their role is confined only within the home. It means his position on the assumption of “separate sphere” remain same. Precisely this is the reason still ambiguities or tensions regarding, their active participation out side the house hold is not yet been solved. As long as the assumption of “separate sphere” is upheld, active participation in national movement outside the house would be a problem. Women working outside the structure of home according to Gandhi affected their purity. Patel says; “Out side the household the problem of retaining her purity and honor remains a thorn in Gandhi. Gandhi has not yet been able to solve this issue...“Gandhi was critical towards the unjust and unfair legitimization of male widower’s remarriage while disregarding women to remarry. Gandhi is not convinced of the argument that early marriage makes possible the retention of purity in women and their adjustment into the new family. But in respect to marriage he holds that shastras that advocated and legitimized the early marriage of girls does not constitute essential nature of Hinduism and he identifies them as just interpolations or addition. The sinful and the illegal marriage of young girl according to Gandhi resulted in high proportion of child widows. The high proportion of child widow which is bane for the country needs to be eliminated by their remarriage. He therefore advocates their remarriage by their parents and also advises young men to marry such widows. In this context Patel indicates that, although Gandhi promoted remarriage of child widows ‘he was not that enthusiastic of the remarriage of adult widow’. In this context Patel cites Gandhi: “The definition of widow can have no reference to child marriage. A widow means a woman who, at the proper age, married a person of her choice or was married to him with her consent, who had relations with her husband and who has now lost her husband. A wife who has not known consummation of marriage or a girl of tender aged, sacrificed by her parents cannot and must not be included in this definition.” By calling Purdah system a barbarous custom he urges the women to “Tear down the purdah”. When Gandhi’s attack on the child marriage was based on the charge against shastras, his attack on Purdah is based on “contemporary denotation of chastity.” Condemning sati Gandhi critically question; “how can society, demand allegiance and devotion from the wife when it cannot do so from the husband?” Gandhi places the rational foundations for the argument against the child marriage, discriminatory widow remarriage and for sati, on his views and definition of marriage. His conception of marriage cannot allow such kind of activities and customs. Considering marriage as a sacrament Gandhi asserts that there is not only union of bodies but also of souls. In marriage man and woman become one in soul. Gandhi’s argument against child marriage can be put in this form: child bride lacks such kind of understanding of the marriage. If they lack such kind of understanding then they are not to be married at that age. If they are married and widowed then they are to be remarried. His reluctance for the remarriage of adult widow is also derived from his conception of marriage. A grown up widow has the understanding of the marriage and therefore according to Gandhi they should restrain themselves from getting married. Gandhi says; “It is only when a widow ‘cannot restrain herself’, that she should have the freedom to remarry for it is better ‘to marry openly than to live in sin’. His argument against sati also is derived from his understanding of marriage. As he holds the idea that in marriage not only two bodies are united but also the souls are united. He argues against sati that the marriage does not get destroyed by the mere break in physical relationship. It means although the bodily existence is destroyed, through the union in soul man and woman are related each other. Therefore, for Gandhi sati means; the realization of purity through renunciation, sacrifice, self-discipline and dedication to the service of her husband. Patel says; “if Gandhi does not want the woman to mount the funeral pyre on her husband’s death, he wants her to strive to make her husband’s ideals and virtues live again in her actions in the world.” It follows from the above explanation, Gandhi’s critical approach to child marriage, forced widowhood and sati that his attempt is pointed towards those aspects of Hinduism that restricted women’s freedom within his definition of marriage and the domestic space. Elimination of such practices and customs are necessary because it affects the freedom of women in the domestic space. This domestic space plays a crucial role in the achievement of swaraj through swadeshi. Because this domestic space is the space in which the repositor of morality resides who has an important role in swadeshi, therefore in swaraj. At this juncture, Patel points out that; “Gandhi, while making a partial critique of contemporary Hindu customs, is emphasizing once again the woman’s crucial role only in the household." Gandhi is critical of such kind of practices and customs without the violation of the assumption of “separate-sphere”. Although Gandhi accepts the conception of marriage as sacrament where there is the union of souls that affirms equality of partners, Patel points out that “he is not changing the basic precepts under which, in his perception, the institution of marriage is based; that is complementarity of these two sexes.” His critical approach to the contemporary Hindu practices was partial in the sense he does not disregard all the practices of Hinduism. Gandhi who is partially critical of Hindu practices condemns the inter-community and inter-Varna marriage. He supports the basis of marriage as caste which means the marriage should take place within the Varna. From this it can be said that; he does not make any change in the way, how he perceived women which is based on the way how a upper caste middle class perceived women. He does not make any changes in the basic assumptions on the construct of women. Due to his staunch feeling for the assumption of separate sphere that asserts and legitimizes the specific domestic space of women, Patel says; “outside the household the problem of retaining her purity and honor remains a thorn in Gandhi.” Again women in large participated in satyagraha outside the domestic sphere since Gandhi could not free himself from the traditional patriarchal bias, he could not easily grant it his mind was obsessed with “female purity”, “charity”. So it is apparent that women can participate in higher social activities only by renouncing all her desire and thereby restoring purity. Gandhi himself tries to liberate women, and again, due to an inherent gender bias, obstruct it with a new reconstruction. Thus Gandhi did not allow women from active participation for a greater social cause as perhaps, he himself knew that it would not be an easy task for general women to
live like an ideal “Hindu widow” and thereby, he tried to restore female purity and chastity. It clearly represents his inherent contradiction with ideology and action. Gandhi was unable to break from his middle class understanding of women. As Patel remarks, “The strong feeling of middle class sexual exclusiveness that directs the legitimation of women’s role within the household continues to remain within Gandhi’s ideology and it reflects itself at the time of civil disobedience movement.” When Kasturba led a party in a Satyagraha, Gandhi could not be happy. He immediately asked them not to join civil disobedience as according to him “they will be lost in the crowd” so purity, honour again comes into play. As Patel points out, Gandhi could not come out of this periphery as he could not understand and social or historical roots of sexuality. According to Patel in the last phase of Gandhi’s political career that is from 1932 to 1948, he was reconstructing an image of women that was “constricting and all-enveloping.” Here, Gandhi pictures women as renunciator. During this period Gandhi extends his perception of women through the exploration of different dimensions and aspects of their life which results in effective and coherent understanding of their role and status. In this period Gandhi shapes his own thoughts and makes structured analyses of the problem of women. Patel says; “What we see in his writings at this stage is a well articulated understanding of woman, her physical needs, emotions, attributes, role in marriage and outside marriage, her weakness and her strengths and her place in the emerging nation.” At this point or moment Patel also remarks of the fact that; “Gandhi is unable to break out from his middle class understanding of women.” It means that even in this last phase Gandhi does not make any change regarding the basic assumption of woman. His encounter with social criticism and personal experience moulds his ideas and views on women in this last phase. Patel says; “Now he extends his own perceptions regarding sexuality and prescriptions relating to it in the construction of the ideology on women.”

4 CONCLUSION

Although Gandhi was not completely successful in the application of his views about women or although there were some contradictory factors in it, no doubt he has brought remarkable changes in the oppressed situations of women. The need for the contextual analysis of Gandhian ideology on women was to point out where did Gandhi fail and why did he fail in the enumeration and application of his perspective on women. Failures are made visible through such analysis and it would enable to widen the application of Gandhian views to present day situations. The extension of the application of his views to the present day context cannot be done without the due knowledge of the context in which Gandhi was developing and articulating it. Apart from the idea of extension of the application of his views, the construction and the reconstruction activity in Gandhi on women in a particular context itself can be a role model for a fine or superior theoretical activity. His construction and with the consideration of the social criticism his reconstruction, show how intensely he was engaged in the theoretical activity. Such kind of theoretical activity itself is good modal for the theoretical purposes. However, Gandhi could essentially bring women cases into the mainstream thought and no one can deny that he was the mass leader, and gave Indian women a new dimension in her house. Her status and role were redefined. Women become at least aware of their lower position in society.

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