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**“IF NON-VIOLENCE IS THE LAW OF OUR BEING, THE FUTURE  
IS WITH WOMEN” – M.K. GANDHI**

**Prof. (Dr.) K. R. Rajani**

Professor of Philosophy &

Director, Dr. D D CWS

Andhra University

Visakhapatnam

**Nookala Suryanarayana (Dhanam)**

Research Scholar

Dept. of Philosophy

Andhra University

Visakhapatnam

**Introduction:**

Born in 1869, M.K. Gandhi was initiated into religious and moral tradition. His mind was sufficiently open to the changing needs of time. His stay in South Africa, with experiences of racial discrimination changed his life. With passive resistance he determined to make efforts for the independence of India. The technique he adopted was satyagraha. The Bible, Gita and Ramayana kindled his religious insight. Tolstoy and Thoreau influenced Gandhi. Non-violence was used as a technique of solving problems.

Gandhi's views on the nature of Non-Violence have to be specifically understood particularly in the present World complexities. Democracies of nations have held together varying situations. In spite of best efforts, one still notices atrocities, wars and massacres. World leaders, in order to restore normalcy, in some areas resorted to interference to crush dictatorships.

**Where women stand: A Global View:**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has delivered dizzying progress for women in many countries. Life expectancy improved and women now live longer, healthier, better educated with more job opportunities. The countries and nations thrive when women thrive. The women in Europe slowly started gaining some rights and freedom began in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. By the 17<sup>th</sup> Century a few women started speaking out for women's rights, especially for educational opportunities, but it was not until the 18<sup>th</sup> Century that the seeds of modern feminism were sown.



The first major feminist work was Mary Wollstonecraft's 'A Vindication of the rights of woman' published in Britain, 1792. It argued for educational opportunities for women as political equality with men. In many countries women attained the right to vote only after years of difficult struggle. Despite efforts, by the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, only one country had granted its female citizens the right to vote. By 1970 women constituted 40% or more of the workforce.

The single most important International organization concerned with women's issues, committed to promoting equal rights, is the United Nations which in 1975 launched its decade for women programs and sponsored four major international women's conferences; these being Mexico city in 1975, Copenhagen 1980, Nairobi 1985 and Beijing 1995.

There are only a handful of women who serve as heads of state throughout the World and there is not a single country where women enjoy the same political status, access or influence as men do.

Discrimination in the work place is a major problem for women everywhere. It can take the form of job segregation, unequal pay, lack of training or advancement to opportunities.

Violence against women – For millions of women around the globe, life is shadowed by the threat of violence. Throughout history women have been perceived as the property of men who were thus free to discipline or punish them at will with physical force. Domestic violence is widespread throughout the World. The number of dowry deaths has continued to climb.

### **History of women in India:**

Women's groups in India started emerging in early 1900; at first focused on social reform, with issues such as sati, child marriage, access to education. The department of women and child development came in to existence in 1985 and National Commission for women in 1992.

Despite the country's deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes, Indira Gandhi became Prime Minister. The first woman elected to Parliament was in 1952.



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## **Education:**

Indian constitution calls for 8 yrs of compulsory education for girls and boys aged between 6 and 14. In higher education female students tend to study Psychology, Social Anthropology and Education.

### **Employment and Poverty:**

¾'s of India's poor live in extreme poverty. Raising a woman's income translates directly into better nutrition and health care for herself, her husband and children.

Percentage of working age women entering the labour force has been rising.

### **Domestic Violence:**

Is on the rise Government Agencies, NGO's and Women's Groups are demanding changes in legislation.

## **Non-Violence, the only panacea:**

The sudden and tragic exit of Mahatma Gandhi on January 30, 1948 shook the nation. Everyone realized the power of non-violence. Gandhi's spirit will penetrate and will create a sense of noble living for generations.

In the earlier few paragraphs, we reviewed the conditions of the past with specific reference to women. Gandhi while advocating to establish a society filled with humanistic values mentioned "I am preparing a message to women of India ..... not because men, out of vanity, regard them as weak but because they possess real courage in a greater proportion and an immeasurable sense of dedication".

### **Gandhi reinforces his belief:**

The above words of Gandhi represent his belief on the real instinct and mental potential of women. Yes! He has rightly ascertained that men out of their vanity regard women as weak but in reality they possess greater courage and immeasurable sense of dedication. Perhaps all men experience these qualities of women in their mothers, wives and sisters, daughters and other women folk of their family but they deny the fact out of their prefixed patriarchal arrogance, at the most if they agree, they agree that their mothers and daughters are worthy and wise but men in general never accept the courage, goodness and dedication of the other women around them whether they



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are their neighbours, their colleagues or distant women folk.

### **Non – Violence:**

Gandhi's theory and practice of non-violence has helped India to gain independence, and his experiments with non-violence, continue in today's context too. Ahimsa and truth are intertwined and it is not possible to separate them. Ahimsa is the means and truth is the end. Ahimsa signifies non killing and there are other examples such as non injury. When we cause pain to others out of anger with a selfish purpose it amounts to himsa. Jainism recommends the practice of Ahimsa in thought, speech and action. Gandhi's negative requirements of Ahimsa are not as rigid since he opined that himsa is unavoidable in certain instances.

### **Gandhi's beliefs:**

Being a man of non-violence, Gandhi believed in the brother hood. There was no division between nations in general. The good and bad aspects appearing between allied nations and the countries who were causing violence were distinguished. His life has been a struggle against the forces of violence and he was determined to fight injustice.

When superior forces were causing problems prior to the Second World War, Gandhi with conviction reasserted his faith in non-violence. When Czechoslovakia was asked to submit themselves in 1938, Gandhi suggested to them "There is no bravery greater than a resolute of refusal".

Nothing lasting can be set-up on violence. If we turn our attention to history and world wars, we notice that brutal force had to be applied to dislodge the greedy and dishonest. But in a quick turn of events, the same sincere and honest motives become target of the dishonest persons. Evolution shows that man's true nature consists of spiritual aspects. When the spiritual side is awakened the non-violent nature becomes prominent.

### **Gandhi worked for the emancipation of women:**

Gandhi played a vital role in improving the condition of women in India. In his attitude towards women, Gandhi was well ahead of his time in India. He worked for the emancipation of women and for their occupation of their rightful place in the society. His successful call to women to join the nationalist movement served as a



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catalyst for the wider participation of women in public affairs.

Gandhi's weapon in the national struggle was love and non-violence. He had more faith in his women soldiers than his men soldiers, because he really considered women to be superior to men, particularly when the weapons in the struggle were love and non-violence. He believed women to be stronger because their hearts contained mother's qualities of peace and love. No other public leader has ever put such positive confidence in the women of the country.

### **Empowerment of women – Gandhi views:**

Let us turn our attention to the views Gandhi expressed at different periods of time. "Man is born of woman he is flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone" (Gandhi M.K., *Young India*, 8-12-1927, P-406).

The dominant psycho-social realities of woman's life can be condensed into three stages: First she is a daughter to her parents. Secondly she is a wife to her husband and daughter in law to her parents in law. Thirdly she is a mother to her sons and daughters.

Gandhi remarked in *Harijan* that: "..... that woman is the incarnation of ahimsa"..... "Let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity..... It is given to her to teach the art of peace to the warring World thirsting for that nectar".

Women need more power to control their lives, to meet their practical and strategic needs, and to shape the world in which they live in ways that are not themselves oppressive. Power can be thought of as a social relationship between groups that determine access to, use of, and control over the basic material and ideological resources in society.

"Certain ideas lead to experience and these experiences will lead to self confidence, and this self confidence can generate more courage for women to venture into previously foreign arenas where they can exert pressure or challenge social situations that create difficulties for them".

"Women alone can emancipate themselves not men. If women will, they can help in the fulfillment of ahimsa. Through the charkka, they can serve the cause of their poor sisters. By wearing Khaddar, they can bring help homes of the poor. They can bring about Hindu – Muslim unity. They can abolish the purdah and drive away



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the ghost of untouchability.

If women will, they can help in the fulfillment of ahimsa. Ahimsa is the means of life to Gandhi. Gandhi realized that to operate Ahimsa the will power of women is inevitable.

### **Spirit of freedom necessary in women education:**

Man has regarded woman as his tool and she has learnt to be his tool and in the end found it easy and pleasurable to be such, because when one drags another in his fall the descent is easy “As for woman’s education I am not sure whether it should be different from men’s and when it should begin. But I am strongly of the opinion that woman should have the same facilities as men have where necessary.

The spirit of freedom is necessary in education. “In these experiments we have achieved the largest measure of success with the women, who have imbibed the spirit of freedom and self confidence as no other class of women have done to my knowledge. This success is due to the Ashram atmosphere”.

### **Spinning wheel Symbol of liberation of Indian women hood:**

Gandhi said “spinning wheel as even a symbol of the liberation of Indian woman hood.” “I claim for the charka the honor of being able to solve the problem of economic distress in the most natural, simple, inexpressive and businesslike manner. It is a symbol not of commercial war but of commercial peace.

### **Service of woman in the constructive programme:**

In India the multidimensional national movement under the leadership of Gandhi acted as a catalyst for participation of women in politics –

“I have included service of women in the constructive program, for though satyagraha has automatically brought India’s women of their darkness as nothing else could have in such incredibly short space of time, congress men have not felt the call, to see that women became equal partners in the fight for swaraj. They have not realized that women must be the true helpmate of man in the mission of service.

### **Women suppressed under custom and Law:**

“Women have been suppressed under custom and law, for which man was responsible and in shaping of which she had no hand. In a plan of life based on non-

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violence, woman has as much right to shape her own destiny as man has to shape his”.

It may be true that “Women are born with intelligence, some men achieve it, most men have it thrust upon them”. Will Durant proposed “women are born with intelligence” probably his answer follows that”, Woman wins her victories not through fighting nor through training, but through persistence and tenacity.

### **Gandhi says “Truth and non-violence as old as the hills:**

Gandhi always said that life’s problems provided him all the lessons. He said “I do not want to leave any sect after me”. People who believe in simple truths can transmit by setting an example. Politics are important and the importance of ethics is stressed. Mahatma Gandhi quoted from the Gita “The sages say the renunciation means foregoing an action which springs from desire and relinquishing means the surrender of its fruit.

Gandhi’s goal was the removal of poverty and human misery. Hundreds and thousands of people without food and shelter cannot appreciate political freedom. Gandhi’s spirit and vision continue to be a source of strength in the current times too; where in we face eventful happenings. The World at large believes in his ideal that love is greater than brute force.

### **Changing trends – Political situation:**

Political situation is passing through changes and manipulation becomes necessary. Double standards bring in devalued democratic values which tend to create quarrels and divisions. Absence of moral values and unprincipled approach disturb the very functioning.

Gandhi stressed the importance of making use of the established gains from science and technology.

### **Conclusions:**

Leaders of today are to influence in such a way to reduce the crisis. Spiritual and social aspects should move together for perfection. Gandhi’s life and message should awaken the spirits to enhance the credibility of our wanting to stay close to his ideals. Hours of time spent in long speeches and celebrations done with no attendant improvements is not contributory. With a firm resolve, we have to honor his advice

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and continue to illumine the path he projected.

Gandhi's programme of satyagraha was a success. We earned our country's independence non-violently. Women's contribution should be much greater than men's with specific reference to non-violent warfare.

Much of the general philosophy of Non-violence has active or activist elements, in that they accept the need of struggle to achieve political and social change. In a World seemingly dominated by violence and hatred, Mahatma Gandhi reincarnated the ancient idea of Ahimsa, non-violence, as the only way of living in peace. His rejection of violence stemmed from choice, not from necessity.

Nehru, Patel and others had to take up the task of organizing the administration of Independent India. They did not question the principle of non-violence. But the fact remains that they had to deal with practical politics. Vinoba Bhave, who kept out of politics and government, spoke Gandhi's language and took to reforms.

Subsequently series of crises in Korea, the Congo, the vietnam, the Middle east and South Africa with incalculable hazards viz threat of nuclear war disturbed the equilibrium. The hope of mankind lies in the values, spiritual force and the spread of love and non-violence that Mahatma gave us.

October 2<sup>nd</sup> the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi is observed as International day of Non-violence. With this brief interpretation we can include that, to spread the information about non-violence and to practice it can be done very fruitfully successfully by women than men.

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