



Mahatma Gandhi: Charaka and Women Liberation

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Abstract

This paper looks at the views of Mahatma Gandhi on women liberation through insistence on spinning with Charaka. Mahatma Gandhi started a movement for millions of people of India called Khadi. According to him, it symbolized self reliance, self control&self rule. It was a undemanding modus operandi to engage people especially women in employment all round the year. According to Mahatma Gandhi, the Khadi program if taken up seriously by women would serve as an answer to joblessness, a solution to economic upliftment, a control to draining away of Indian resources , an eventual formula to demand self rule& would help them to empower themselves. This paper analyses the Gandhian ideology about introduction of Khadi& it later becoming a tool in making innumerable vulnerable women self sufficient.

Key words: Charaka, freedom, empowerment, Khadi, liberation, women

"If I was born a woman, I would raise in rebellion against any pretension on the part of man that woman is born to be his plaything. I have mentally become a woman in order to steal into her heart. I could not steal into my wife's heart until I decided to treat her differently than I used to do, and so I restored to her all her rights by dispossessing myself of all my so-called rights as her husband. And you see her today as simple as myself"-Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi started a movement for millions of people of India called Khadi. According to him, it symbolized self reliance, self control&self rule. It was a undemanding modus operandi to engage people especially women in employment all round the year. According to Mahatma Gandhi, the Khadi program if taken up seriously by women would serve as an answer to joblessness, a solution to economic upliftment, a control to draining away of

Indian resources , an eventual formula to demand self rule& would help them to empower themselves. It would help them to become self reliant& economically stronger. He was of the opinion that all women should embrace spinning which was economical, inexpensive, low cost village industry which helped them to sustenance.

The Ideology of Khadi

The spinning & weaving of the Khadi yarn made popular by Mahatma Gandhi became an ideology. It soon became a



doctrine for self reliance & self rule. During the time of the Nagpur session (1920) that the Indian National Congress decided to encourage "Khadi". The first Khadi Production Centre was established at Katiawad, Gujarat. Mahatma Gandhi used to refer to Khadi as "The livery of freedom" because he insisted that all Indians should weave & wear Khadi so that the dependence in English factory made goods may be reduced. . It meant every village shall plant and harvest its own raw-materials for yarn, every woman and man shall engage in spinning and every village shall weave whatever is needed for its own use.

Mahatma Gandhi also felt that in a county where manual labor was looked down upon, it was an occupation to bring high and low, rich and poor together, to show them the dignity of hand-labor. Mahatma requested not only of those in needs, but of every person to do spinning at least about one hour per day as sacrifice to his county, as duty towards the poor. He hoped for a certain bond of unity between the classes and masses by bridging the gap with a common occupation, and he saw great social value in hand-spinning. It was for economic, cultural and social reasons and not merely political that Mahatma Gandhi recognized the Khadi Movement but he wanted to achieve 'Gramaswaraj' In villages thousands of poor helpless women lived on border of destitution, they could support their families through spinning & earn a means of livelihood.

In 1934-35 he expanded the idea from helping the poor individual of a village to

attaining self-reliance of whole village. In 1942-43 he had continuous debates with workers, farmer groups and village organizers to re-organize the whole programme on a larger country-wide scale. His idea of Gramaswaraj enthused women by empowerment & self earning. As spinning with Charkha needed patience, tolerance & toil only women who personify these ideals could achieve wonders with Charkha. Thus according to Mahatma Gandhi Khadi meant not merely a piece of cloth but a way of life.

Spinning as a hope of masses:

According to Mahatma Gandhi, the spinning wheel represented the hope of the masses. As the Charkha supplemented the agriculture of the villagers and gave it dignity. It was the friend and the solace of the widow. It kept the villagers from idleness. For the Charkha included all the anterior and posterior industries such as - ginning, carding, warping, sizing, dyeing and weaving. These in their turn kept the village carpenter and the blacksmith busy. The Charkha enabled the seven hundred thousand villages to become self contained. (Kumarappa .B. -Gandhiji's Autobiography, Pub. Navajan , Ahmadabad pp -34-45)

Spinning As a Symbol of Nation's Prosperity

According to Mahatma Gandhi Charkha was the symbol of the nation's prosperity and therefore its ultimate freedom. It was a symbol not of commercial war but of commercial peace. It bears not a message of ill-will towards the nations of the earth



but of goodwill and self-help. It will not need the protection of a navy threatening a world's peace and exploiting its resources, but it needs the religious determination of millions to spin their yarn in their own homes as today they cook their food in their own homes.

Mahatma Gandhi said "I may deserve the curse of posterity for many mistakes of omission and commission, but I am confident of earning its blessings for suggesting a revival of the Charkha. For every revolution of the wheel spins peace, goodwill and love. And with all that, inasmuch as the loss of it brought about India's slavery, its voluntary revival with all its implications must mean India's freedom" .(Young India,8-12-1921)

According to Mahatma Gandhi 'Khadi spirit' would surround people of India with simplicity in every walk of life. The 'Khadi spirit' means illimitable patience. For those who know anything about the production of Khadi know how patiently the spinners and the weavers have to toil at their trade, and even so must we have patience while we are spinning 'the thread of Swaraj'. The 'Khadi spirit' means also an equally illimitable faith. Even as the spinner toiling away at the yarn he spins by itself small enough, put in the aggregate, would be enough to clothe every human being in India, so illimitable faith in truth and non-violence ultimately conquering every obstacle in our way.(Kumarappa ,B. -Gandhiji's Autobiography, Pub. Navajan , Ahmadabad pp 1-34)

Mahatma Gandhi opined that the mission of Khadi was not merely to supply the

town people with fashionable Khadi that will vie with the Mill manufacturers & thus like the other industries supply a few artisans with employment but it is to become a supplementary industry to agriculture (Harijan dated 6-7-1935). Mahatma Gandhi warned that a country remains poor in wealth, both materially and intellectually, if it does not develop its handicrafts and its industries (Young India dated 20-8-1931)..

According to Mahatma Gandhi, grave reliance on British goods was harming the very foundations of Indian culture. India has been shaken by the onslaught of Mill made goods from England while England became rich through these exports; India was suffering from the unequal balance of payments. India was a country of villages hence it could not dare to import goods which could be manufactured easily without any capital investment. Mahatma Gandhi said India was weakened economically by its imports. , Economics that hurt the moral well-being of an individual or a nation are immoral and therefore sinful. Thus the economics that permit one country to prey upon another are immoral. It is sinful to buy and use articles made by sweated labour. (Young India, 13-10-1921).

Spinning As a Symbol of Moral Generation

According to Mahatma Gandhi hand-spinning and hand weaving will make the largest contribution to the economic and the moral regeneration of Indians. The millions will have a undemanding production to supplement agriculture.



Spinning was the cottage industry years ago, and if the millions are to be saved from starvation, they must be enabled to reintroduce spinning in their homes and every village must repossess its own weaver. (Young India dated 21-7-1920). It kept the morale of the individual especially women in a high as self earned bread always

Conclusion:

Hence Mahatma Gandhi insisted on Charaka weaving & Khadi wearing which could supplement vulnerable & underprivileged people especially women folk to gain a prestigious life. He was concerned with women of the villages who had no means of earning a respectable livelihood in villages to hold Charaka which served as their paramount support. He dreamt that these self contained Indian women could become great pillars of support in Indian freedom struggle.

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