

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF
GENDER IN GANDHI AND AMBEDKAR'S THOUGHT**

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MADHAVI LAKSHMI KONDREDDY

**CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI – 110067
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JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067, INDIA

CENTRE FOR POLITICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

CERTIFICATE

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Certified that the dissertation entitled **A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IN GANDHI AND AMBEDKAR'S THOUGHT**, submitted by **Madhavi Lakshmi Kondreddy**, in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University. This is her original work.

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

Kiran Saxena

Prof. Kiran Saxena
(Supervisor)

Kiran Saxena

Prof. Kiran Saxena
(Chairperson)
CHAIRPERSON
Centre for Political Studies
School of Social Sciences-II
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi-110067

To
Amma and Nanna
for making me
think
independently

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Madhavi Lakshmi K
Madhavi Lakshmi K

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INTRODUCTION

To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the rail road tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. Across those tracks were paved streets, stores we could not enter, restaurants we could not eat in and people we could not look directly in the face. Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We could enter that world but we could not live there, we had always to return to the margin, to cross the tracks, to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town.¹

— bell hooks

Mainstream history has always marginalised the histories of suppressed sections. One of those oppressed categories is the category of women. Women, constituting half of humanity, are being marginalised all over. However, this does not imply that, the category of women is a homogenized one. In fact, it is important to recognize different suppressed sections like Blacks, Dalits, Adivasis, the working classes and the marginalisation of women within these sections too.

Along with the marginalisation of these suppressed categories, one can contextualise the marginalisation of their streams of thought from knowledge systems and particularly within the academic system. To take one example, the women's question, in most discourses, from the natural sciences to the social sciences has been marginalised from time immemorial. All knowledge systems are male oriented and male dominated. If at all women are being mentioned, it will be in the interest of the patriarchal system. And the male dominated systems

¹ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: from Margin to Center*, (South end Press, Boston MA, 1984), p. ix.

give different reasons (from biological to psychological) to justify the subordination of women. The result is the legitimization and sustenance of male domination and women's subordination.

In the same way, if one takes the example of political theory, all the thinkers that are being generally discussed, from Western to Indian, are men. Why is it that all political thinkers are men? Is it because women could not 'think'? Or is it because, women are not capable of being 'political thinkers'?

Traditional political theory not only marginalises women but also the thoughts and perceptions of the political thinkers on women. A student of political thought, who studies Aristotle might not know that according to Aristotle, who is 'the father of political science', "The male is by nature superior and the female inferior, the one rules and the other is ruled".² She/he might not know that Rousseau, who propounded the 'General will' and who is the 'champion of popular sovereignty' has denounced citizenship for women in the public sphere. He not only ignored women but also deliberately excluded them from his vision of public life. For Rousseau, "women can neither be seen nor heard".³ Thus, his famous words that "man is born free" literally means that 'man' is born free. Rousseau's *Social Contract* is addressed to men but not to women. According to Hegel, the 'Idealist philosopher', "the two sexes are of necessity different, the one

² Cited in Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, New Jersey, 1983), p. 36.

³ Cited in Eva Figs: *Patriarchal Attitudes*, (Fawcett Publications, Greenwich, 1970), p. 14.

active and the other passive and the female could be the passive one”.⁴ He also says “women’s deficiency in the “universal faculty” was such as to render women as different from men, as plants were different from animals”.⁵

It is this point of view of philosophers that political theory does not project, it is this aspect that political theory deliberately neglects, it is these thoughts that political theory consciously marginalises. In this connection Alison Jaggar points out that in contemporary times, political philosophers, such as John Rawls and Robert Nozick, have rarely discussed women in their writings. She argues that, the contemporary political philosophers, through their silence on women, have given the notion that, either that there are no differences between women and men that are relevant to political philosophy or that, women are not part of the subject matter of political philosophy at all.⁶

The pedagogy of political thought does not discuss Mary Wollstonecraft, who has written *A Vindication of Rights of Women*, Simon de Beauvoir who has written *The Second Sex* and Pandita Ramabai who has written *The High Caste Hindu Woman*. The discipline also prescribes J.S. Mill’s *On Liberty* but not his *Subjection of Women*. Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* but not Engels’ *Origin of Family, Private-property and the State*. Does this mean that neither women nor the conception of women by political thinkers figure in ‘mainstream political thought’?

⁴ Cited in Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Translated and Edited by H.M.Parshley, (Picador Classics, Pan Books, 1949), p. 41.

⁵ Cited in Alison M.Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, op.cit, p.36.

⁶ Ibid., p. 21.

In the same way, during an academic exercise in political thought, the perceptions of the thinkers on women will get least attention and if at all discussed, will be at the end. And this discussion on women will be undertaken under headings that a particular thinker is the 'emancipator', and the 'liberator' of women. Those who study Raja Rammohan Roy as 'the champion of women's rights', might not know that his personal relationships with women were far from ideal. His relationship with his wives (three) and mother raises doubts about his behaviour with them. Above all, one does not know the voices of his wives or his mother.⁷

At this juncture there is a need to analyze the political thinkers from a gender perspective, instead of merely eulogising them or looking at them from a sympathetic perspective. In this context, two Indian political thinkers viz. M.K Gandhi [1869-1948] and B.R Ambedkar [1891-1956] are chosen for this analysis. And the present study compares their ideas regarding gender. Gandhi and Ambedkar are those two political thinkers whose thoughts were much discussed and debated seriously in the national political milieu. Both the thinkers influenced different sections of people in different ways. One of the major objectives of the present study is to find out their reactions to the women's question. This becomes a fruitful exercise in the wake of the fact that; these two were contemporaries and have contributed much to the Indian political system in their own way. Since both of them came from different social backgrounds it is also interesting to see the impact of their respective social backgrounds on their thinking.

⁷ Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India: Women in Modern India*, (Cambridge University Press, U.K., 1996), p. 10-11.

Contextualising Gandhi and Ambedkar

Gandhi returned from South Africa to India in 1915 and started actively participating in the Nationalist Movement. He became the leader of the Non-cooperation Movement (1922), Civil-disobedience Movement (1930), and Quit India Movement (1942). Thus, the Gandhian approach of addressing the women's question can be rightly placed within the context of the 'nationalist movement'. The Gandhian concept of women is a major controversial issue in Indian academia. There are diverse theories developed about his ideas on women. Most of the works have given importance to his impact on women's participation in the movements and also have analyzed him from a Gandhian perspective. In effect, this work would try to look at his ideas regarding women from a gender perspective.

B. R. Ambedkar had entered into politics in 1920, claiming the heritage of a non-brahminical movement⁸, and his main concern was the Dalit Movement. He is famous for his leadership in the Mahad Movement of 1927. He severely opposed the brahminical domination and the oppression of Dalits within Hinduism. He founded the Independent Labour Party in 1936 and it became the biggest opposition party in Bombay legislative council. In 1947 he became the Law Minister in the central ministry of Independent India and also a member of the Constitution committee. It is within this context that Ambedkar has undertaken the women's question. Since 'mainstream academia' has not focussed on Ambedkar's ideas regarding gender there is a need to look at it from a gender

⁸ Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the construction of an Indian Identity*, (Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1995), p. 43.

perspective.

In this connection it is important to see whether Gandhi as a 'Nationalist leader' and Ambedkar as a 'Dalit leader' have addressed the gender issue seriously or not? And it is also important to see the differences as well as the similarities between their ideas, and to find out the reasons behind it. This work is a minor step towards this goal.

Gender perspective here means viewing 'gender' and 'sex' as socially constructed categories and not as natural divisions. The reason for the usage of the term 'gender' is not only because "in its simplest usage gender is a synonym for women" but also because gender has a more neutral and objective connotations than does women.⁹ It also means that when one talks about gender it is not only about women that one discusses but also about men. In this context this work is going to be a comparative study of the construction of gender in Gandhi and Ambedkar's thought.

This study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter discusses some of the theoretical perspectives on gender in general and then proceeds to discuss different perspectives on gender in the Indian context. This includes the Colonialist Vs Nationalist debate, caste, class and communal aspects of gender.

The second chapter deals with the Gandhian discourse on gender. This discusses the construction of 'femininity' as well as 'masculinity' in Gandhian

⁹ Joan W. Scott "Gender, A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" in *Gender and the Politics of History*, (Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 31-32.

thought. This chapter is basically based on his answers to the letters published in *Young India*, *Navajivan* and *Harijan* and his books *Hind Swaraj* and his autobiography *The Story of My Experiment's With Truth*. For clarity and convenience, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part deals with Gandhi's ideas on femininity and masculinity and also deals with his personal relationships with women. The second part comprises of the critical analysis regarding his ideas on gender.

The third chapter deals with the Ambedkarian discourse on gender. This is based on Ambedkar's seminar papers 'Castes in India', his article viz. The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman and his discussions regarding the Hindu Code Bill. This chapter also is divided into two parts. The first part deals with Ambedkar's ideas regarding gender and the second part consists of a critical analysis.

The fourth chapter deals with the comparative analysis of both of their ideas and tries to find out the similarities and dissimilarities in their thought. It also examines the relevance of their ideas to the present day. This chapter includes the conclusion.

One of the limitations of this work is that when the discussion regarding personal relationships comes, only Gandhi's has been discussed and not Ambedkar's. This is because of the comparative non-availability of information about Ambedkar's personal life. And another important thing to notice is keeping in mind the point that the views of the thinkers should be expressed clearly, the study extensively quotes from the original works of Ambedkar and Gandhi.

CHAPTER -I

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND THE INDIAN CONTEXT

The term 'gender' is a very complex one and hence, it needs a systematic examination. Generally terms like gender and sex are taken for granted as mere biological categories. In this connection Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell opine that while explaining the social construction of gender, the terms, sex-sex roles and gender-gender roles can become very confusing. They argue that for a long time these categories remain unexamined and even social scientists neglect these terms as if every one knows what they mean.¹

In order to understand gender, one has to go through some of the diverse perspectives on it. Joan W. Scott's definition of gender contains two parts. According to her, "gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power."² Gender is seen as one of the foundations of every existing social order. From the social construction perspective of gender, women and men are compared as gender categories (female-male, feminine-masculine, girls-boys, women-men) and this perspective analyzes how different social groups define them in every day life and in major institutions such as the family and economy.³ Gender denotes not only sexual-difference but also power and sexual hierarchy. Gender remains a

¹ Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell (ed.), *The Social Construction of Gender*, (Sage Publications, London, 1991), p.7

² Joan W. Scott "Gender, a Useful Category of Historical Analysis" in *Gender and the Politics of History*, (Columbia University Press, 1988), p.42.

³ Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell (ed.), op.cit. p.1

matter of dispute in literary studies too, Although consensus does exist on few points, there is a need to explore the distinction between sex and gender and between masculinity and femininity.⁴

By these definitions, it is evident that the social relations between the sexes determine gender. Gender is a socially constructed, internalized category by which the subordination and oppression of women (of different sections of society) is constructed and constantly reconstructed. As a major social status gender shapes the individual opportunity for education, work, family, sexuality, reproduction, authority and the chance to make an impact on the production of culture and knowledge.⁵ But the concepts of masculinity and femininity that emerge in the discourse of gender are not completely separate categories. While analyzing gender it is very essential to analyze the concepts of masculinity and femininity and the complexity regarding them. "Femininity and masculinity as abstract, non-biological concepts are very difficult to define, and moreover, being culturally and socially induced, they are subject to drastic change over time. Although it seems relatively safe to analyze and assess the construction and meaning of gender within earlier historical periods and within cultures other than our own, currently held notions of gender distinctions appear to be increasingly slippery and fragile."⁶

In the initial stages of theoretical expansion regarding gender, social scientists used to recognize women as the single largest oppressed group. But the emergence of post - structuralism abandoned the beliefs in grand theories

⁴ Elaine Showalter's cited in Irene Visser, "The prototypicality of gender, contemporary notions of masculine and feminine", *Women's Studies Journal*, vol.19, no. 6, Nov-Dec 1996, p. 589.

⁵ Lorber and Farrell (ed.), op.cit.p.2

⁶ Irene Visser, "The prototypicality of Gender, contemporary notions of masculine and feminine" op.cit p.589

of global oppression. Post structuralism deconstructed the universal theories and gave a scope to discuss different types of oppressions. Hence “it makes more sense to talk of genders instead of talking of simply gender, because being a woman and being a man change from one generation to the next and are different racial, ethnic and religious groups, as well as for the members of different social classes.”⁷

For example in the U.S White feminism has emerged as ‘the feminism’ and entered other countries and dominated other knowledges regarding women. The problem of White feminism Vs Black feminism, First world feminism Vs Third world feminism, Upper class feminism Vs Lower class feminism, Upper caste feminism Vs Dalit feminism lies in the domination of ‘one’ over the ‘other’. It is not just the oppression of women by men, but the oppression of lower classes by upper classes, oppression of Dalits by upper castes, oppression of the Third World by the First World, oppression of blacks by whites, oppression of homosexuals by heterosexuals and there is no end for it.

Analyzing the oppression of black women, bell hooks says that in the United States all men are oppressors and all whites are oppressors, white men oppress white women and men and women of colour, white women oppress men and women of colour, and men of colour oppress women of colour. Like this, in the daily actions and experiences, the systems of domination are constructed and reinforced.⁸ To quote bell hooks: as a group, black women are in an unusual position in this society, for not only are we collectively at the bottom of the occupational ladder, but our overall social status is lower than

⁷ Lorber and Farrell (ed.) p.1.

⁸ Lorber and Farrell (ed.), op.cit. p. 9.

that of any other group. Occupying such a position, we bear the brunt of sexist, racist, and classist oppression. At the same time, we are the group that has not been socialized to assume the role of exploiter/oppressor in that we are allowed no institutionalized "other" that we can exploit or oppress.... White women and black men have it both ways. They can act as oppressor or be oppressed, black men may be victimized by racism, but sexism allows them to act as exploiters and oppressors of women, white women may be victimized by sexism, but racism enables them to act as exploiters and oppressors of black people.⁹

Black women could not relate themselves with the issues of white women. According to bell hooks the white middle class and upper class women have dominated every women's movement in the U.S. She says that black feminists initially have approached the women's movement that was organized by white women. She stresses that they were disappointed and disillusioned when they discovered that white women in the movement had little knowledge about the problems of lower class and poor women and also about the particular problems of non-white women from all classes.¹⁰ This paved the way for the emergence of black feminism in order to counter the dominant white middle class feminism.

Asserting the specific economic, social and political contexts and countering the dominant notion that, the First World women's experiences are universal experiences, the Third World academists/activists started emphasizing the feminisms of the Third World. Most of the Third World countries have a common feature i.e., colonialism. The colonial and

⁹ bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: from margin to center*, op.cit. p. 14-15.

¹⁰ bell hooks, *Ain't I A woman, black women and feminism*, (South End Press, Boston MA, 1981), p. 188.

postcolonial dimensions of these countries have seriously targeted the gender question.

In order to counter the general myth that feminism was imposed on the Third World by the West, Third World feminists like Kumari Jayawardena focused on bringing out the hidden histories of women in the Third World countries. In her opinion feminism is not imposed on the Third World by the West but rather historical circumstances produced important material and ideological changes that affected women. At the same time she recognizes the impact of imperialism and western thought to be among the significant elements in these historical circumstances.¹¹ In this connection Bina Agarwal raises some serious questions about the First World feminists. She asks whether the First World feminists have embraced the Third World women's struggles as a part of their own history? She stresses on the need for First World feminists to recognize their privileged position within the international division of economic and intellectual labour and the sources of that privilege.¹²

The Third World feminists are very familiar with names like Simon de Beauvoir, Mary Wollstonecraft that were early feminists from the West. Their books viz. *The Second sex* and *A Vindication of Rights of women* are well known. But neither the Third World nor the First World is familiar with names like Rokeya Hossain, Pandita Ramabai, Raden Kartini, Qui j in, who have fought for the women's cause in the Third World in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This indicates the suppression of feminist knowledges of the Third World countries.

¹¹ Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, (ASR Publications, Lahore, 1986), p. 2.

¹² Bina Agarwal, "Positioning the Western Feminist Agenda: A comment" in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 1, No. 2, July-December, 1994, p. 250.

In spite of the differences between the First World and the Third World one should not either globalize or completely localize theories. According to Ania Loomba one should be careful not to homogenize either the First World or Third World women. She says that in each case consideration of class, colour, religion, location, sexuality and politics have divided the women's movements and their dominant concerns. She emphasizes the need to recognize the Third World women and the women of colour as the most exploited of the world workers today.¹³

Apart from the above complexities, one of the major problems that arises with the gender question is that of equality Vs difference. Very often the discussions regarding gender will be ending with two arguments on opposite sides. On one hand there is the argument that men and women are equal and on the other the argument that men and women are different and hence they have different goals to pursue. One tends to see these as binary oppositions. Joan W. Scott insists on the deconstruction of the binary oppositions of equality Vs difference. She opines that if equality and difference are paired dichotomously they structure an impossible choice. If one opts for equality, one is forced to accept the notion that difference is antithetical to it, if one opts for difference, one admits that equality is unattainable.¹⁴

According to Scott, by subsuming women into a general 'human' identity' we lose the specificity of female diversity and women's experiences. By doing this we will be back to the days when man's story was supposed to be everyone's story. When women were hidden from history, when the

¹³ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism Post Colonialism*, (Routledge, London and New York, 1998), p. 228.

¹⁴ Joan W. Scott, "Deconstructing of equality-versus-difference or the uses of post structuralist theory for feminism" in *Feminist studies* vol. 14, No. 1, 1988 (33.50), p. 43.

feminine served as a negative counterpart, for the 'other' employed in the construction of positive masculine identity. At the same time the idea of difference draws a line between the genders and invests it with biological explanations, and then treats each side of the opposition as a category (male/female) assumed to be the same, hence, differences within either category are suppressed.¹⁵ For these reasons it should be recognized that a debate on the question of equality Vs difference regarding gender is not going to be useful.

II

One tends to follow Alison Jaggar's *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* in order to understand different streams of Feminism. Alison Jaggar describes that there are four streams of Feminism viz. Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Socialist Feminism and Radical Feminism.¹⁶ This might give a broad idea about feminism, but it's focus remains western feminism. It does not help to understand feminist issues in the Third World context or in the Indian context. The question is how to locate the caste, class and colonial dimensions of gender in the Indian context?

In this connection there is a need to analyze and understand the different dimensions of gender like class, caste, religion and the colonial experience in the Indian context. An attempt towards this follows in the next few paragraphs.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁶ For details see Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, op.cit

The Colonialist discourse Vs the Nationalist discourse

In the period of colonialism, the colonialist masters and the nationalist natives in India seriously engaged with the question of gender. The constant construction and reconstruction of gender by colonialists as well as nationalists has got serious consequences. The result is that the assumed upside down realities, popular notions and general myths have become realities.

In this regard Uma Chakravarti asserts that “men and women in India, whether or not they have formally learnt history, carry with them a sense of the past which they have internalized through the transmission of popular beliefs, mythology, tales of heroism and folklore”. She says that, “often formal history also percolates down to a wider range of people through articles in popular journals, discussions and through what may be termed as the ‘dispersal effect’, so that elements of oral history may be overlaid by more serious historical conclusions forming a sort of medley of ideas.”¹⁷ At this juncture it is important to note that the ideas regarding the status of women in ancient India also are formed in the same way that she points out. The belief that there was equality in the Vedic period between men and women and the belief that women were ‘highly respected’ in the Vedic period gets legitimacy and this notion contributed heavily to the construction of ‘Indian woman’. But at the same time one has to recognize the importance of oral histories that have constantly countered the dominant discourses regarding women.

The colonialists tried to justify their rule by criticizing the ‘low status of women in India’ whereas the nationalists countered it with the concept of ‘Indian womanhood’ and its past glory. To seek psychological advantage

¹⁷ Uma Chakravarti “Whatever happened to vedic dasi”? in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History* (Kali for women, New Delhi, 1989), p. 27.

over the subjects the colonial ideology asserted moral superiority in many ways. One of these ways was by effectively involving in the area of gender relations. Colonialist scholars like Colebrooke, Mill, Max Muller, Speir, who represents the colonial discourse on women, have constantly tried to show the 'barbaric position' of the 'Indian women'. Precisely to counter this ideology nationalists like Bankimchandra, R. C. Dutt and Dayananda Saraswati have created a myth of Indian womanhood with a glorious past.¹⁸ In this whole discourse the upper caste Hindu woman represents the Indian woman. Neither colonial masters nor native nationalists were bothered about the other women. Uma Chakravarti, with critical insight, poses a question that what happened to the Vedic dasi? She points out that vast sections of women did not exist for the nineteenth century nationalists. She says that no one tried to read the ancient texts to see what rights the Vedic dasi and others like her had in the Vedic golden age and opines that recognizing the Vedic dasi's existence would have been an embarrassment to the nationalists. The twentieth century has continued to reproduce the same kind of womanhood that the nineteenth century had so carefully and so successfully constructed as an enduring legacy for us.¹⁹

The 'Nationalist Discourse' on women went further and created a 'new woman'²⁰ in order to reform the 'status of Indian women'. According to Partha Chatterjee, nationalism separated the domain of culture into two spheres viz. the material and the spiritual. The world is the external, the domain of the material, the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. He asserts that the world became the mere representation of a treacherous terrain

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 79.

²⁰ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its fragments: colonial and post colonial histories*, (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994), p. 127.

of the pursuit of material interest where practical considerations reign supreme and also it is typically the domain of the male. The home in essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world - and woman is its representation. And here, one gets an identification of social roles by gender to correspond with the separation of the social space into 'ghar' and 'bahir'.²¹ (home and outer world).

The new woman defined in this way was subjected to legitimate subordination by the 'new patriarchy' which is a hegemonic construct. Partha Chatterjee says that "the nationalist discourse has generalized itself among the new middle class, admittedly a widening class and large enough in absolute numbers to the self reproducing, but is situated at a great distance from the large mass of subordinate classes".²²

Thus the nationalist discourse has not only constructed the myth of 'Indian womanhood' but also created a 'new woman' who has the 'freedom' to go to the external world as long as it is not going to threaten her femininity. It has made clear-cut distinctions between man and woman, masculine and feminine, material and spiritual and the inner and outer worlds, thus constructing gender in itself. Their concern was with the upper caste Hindu women, but not with the different sections of the 'other' women. There is a conscious neglect of the histories of Dalit women, histories of lower class women, histories of women belonging to the minority religions. And thus, the upper caste Hindu woman became the 'Indian woman'.

In this connection Sharmila Rege correctly points out that homogenizing women as an analytical category does not hold ground in the

²¹ Ibid., p. 120.

²² Ibid., p. 134.

Indian context. "A feminist stand point of interlocking oppressions that would recognize the complex mediations between caste, class, ethnic and gender oppression would be more connected to the living and the concrete". She stresses on the need for feminist pedagogies to analyze caste from the standpoint of Dalit women, class from the standpoint of working class women, Hindutva from the standpoint of minorities and heterosexuality from the standpoint of lesbians.²³

Religion, caste, class and gender have merged together in such a way that it is impossible to delink one from the other and also to see them as watertight compartments. But generally for those people, whose interest is in gender issues, caste and class are the second priority and for Marxists, class struggle becomes the primary concern and caste and gender come later. In other words, first 'struggle with the state' and then 'struggle with the civil society'. (Probably after the withering away of the state). For Marxists the secondary concerns like gender and caste struggles will weaken the major class struggle. For Dalit leaders, the Dalit war is the primary struggle. And for upper/middle class and upper caste feminists, gender struggle is the primary one and that too women as a homogenized category. If this is the case, how is it that the lower class Dalit woman is going to fight against her suppression? Does this imply that she has to first fight against the class oppression and then the caste oppression and then the gender oppression?

In this connection it is important to note that, as Uma Chakravathy points out that a marked feature of Hindu society is its legal sanction for an extreme expression of social stratification in which women and the lower castes have been subjected to humiliating conditions of existence. Caste

²³ Sharmila Rege "Feminist pedagogy and sociology for emancipation in India", *Sociological Bulletin*, 44[2], September- 1995, p. 224-225.

hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organizing principles of the brahmanical social order and despite their close inter connections, neither scholars of the caste system nor feminist scholars have attempted to analyze the relationship between the two. Uma Chakravarti with a critical insight, asserts that “the purity of women has a centrality in brahmanical patriarchy because the purity of caste is contingent upon it.”²⁴

One has to recognize the fact that the Dalit movement and the women’s movement have neglected each other’s issues. The Dalit movement that has emerged in the 1970s asserted the rights of Dalits through its radical literature. But this could not open a serious debate on the Dalit women’s issue. P.G. Jogdand critically evaluates that in the social sciences the interconnection between caste and gender was not brought to the forefront and the category of Dalit women figured neither in women’s studies nor in caste studies.²⁵

The caste system restricted and suppressed female sexuality with the concept of endogamy. Women are regarded as ‘gate ways’ [literally points of entrance]²⁶ into the caste system. Thus, gender was and is crucial to the maintenance of reproduction of caste inequalities.²⁷

²⁴ Uma Chakravarti, “Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in early India. Gender caste, class and state” research in progress papers, *History and society*, (2nd series, Number LXVV, N.M.L., New Delhi, 1993), p. 2.

²⁵ P. G. Jogdand(ed.), *Dalit Women: Issues and Perspectives*, (Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1995), Preface.

²⁶ Veena Das, “Indian women, work, power and status” in B. R. Nanda (ed.) *Indian Women from Purdah to Modernity*, (Vikas, New Delhi, 1976), p. 135.

²⁷ Sharmila Rege, “Caste and Gender: The violence against women in India” in *Dalit Women: Issues and Perspectives*, op.cit., p19.

In spite of the serious linkages between caste and gender neither the Dalit movement nor the women's movement tried to deal with this particular issue. For example, the question of rape cannot be viewed merely in terms of class oppression or as a psychological problem or as an illustration of male sexual violence. One has to recognize the caste factor that targets dalit or tribal women in much more severe terms of intensity. In this connection, Gopal Guru stresses for the need of Dalit women to talk differently.²⁸ Gabriele Dietrich points out that the cause of Dalit women can only be strengthened if the autonomous women's movement also make an effort to reach out to Dalit movement.²⁹ Vidyut Bhagwat opines that the Dalit women's agential collectivity is a fundamental necessity to build up a feminist movement in the Indian context. She says that all women coming together will end in privileging and empowering high-caste Hindu women and degrading women from Dalit, Muslim and other minority communities.³⁰ These perspectives indicate the need to explore a theory regarding gender and caste and the interconnections between the two in the Indian context.

Apart from the caste factor, gender is seriously linked with the factor of class. As stated earlier that one cannot delink gender from the factors of caste, class, and religion: there is also a need to explore the interconnections among these factors. According to Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, "the relation between classes and patriarchies is complex and variable. Not only the patriarchal systems are class differentiated, open to constant and consistent

²⁸ Gopal Guru, "Dalit women talk differently" *Economic and Political Weekly*. (XXX (44/42) October (14-21) 1995) p. 2548.

²⁹ Gabriele Dietrich, *Reflections on the women's movement in India: Religion, Ecology, Development*, (Horizon India Books, New Delhi, 1992), p. 93.

³⁰ Vidyut Bhagwat, "Dalit Women: Issues and Perspectives, some critical reflections" in P. G. Jogdand's *Dalit Women* op. cit., p. 7.

reformulation, but defining gender seems to be crucial to the formulation of classes and dominant ideologies.”³¹

The major sources towards the class perspective on gender are Engel’s *The origin of the family, private property and the state*, and August Bebel’s *Women in the past, present and future*. The origin of the subordinate status of Women in the family and society is located by Engels and Bebel, in the historical transition from communal to private ownership of property, the development of class and the emergence of the state. Both saw women’s social demotion to be the result of an increase in production and the development of surplus and exchange, the concentration of wealth into individual male hands, and the rise of the patriarchal, monogamian individual family as the economic unit of society ³²

The Marxist approach believes that women’s oppression lies in their exclusion from the control over the means of production and their confinement to the family and society. Marxists criticize the nature of capitalism, which commodifies women as sex-objects. Hence for Marxists the solution for this is over throwing the modern bourgeois state and having control over the means of production on a community base. But is this going to create an equal society? How to apply Marxist approach to the Third World countries which are mostly post-colonial countries. According to Patricia Loveridge, the Marxist approach pays much attention to the larger structures which are



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³¹ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid op. cit., p. 5.

³² Patricia Loveridge “Approaches to change : The All India Democratic Women’s Association and a Marxist approach to the woman question in India” in *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, (vol. 1, No. 2, July-December 1994) p. 225.

responsible for women's subordination but does not discuss the oppression at a micro level.³³

Analyzing the problems with the Marxist approach Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid depict that patriarchy becomes an ahistorical category within an originating myth of male coercion. According to them, the weakness of the Marxist perspective lies in treating women as 'class' by themselves, which leads to a disregard of the fact that women of the exploited classes may indeed have closer group interest with men of their own classes than with women belonging to the dominant classes. They also say that the class struggle will enable a fight only against those structures of patriarchy which are directly related to the public productive sphere and to exploitation by the oppressor class through unequal wages, bonded labour, coerced sexual service, rape etc. They point out that it will not enable a struggle against those micro formations and ideologies, which are carried within the movement itself both by middle class activists and by the people engaged in struggle.³⁴

Patricia Loveridge also expresses a doubt, whether a class struggle will be enough to change power dynamics at the micro level and that of gender. She opines that the process of transition from feudalism to capitalism, occurring in India since colonial times, has resulted in women losing out under both systems. She says that since feudalism has not entirely been broken down in rural areas many Indian women remain subjected to oppressive feudal beliefs and practices and at the same time women in the urban centers have suffered from capitalistic development which has not only limited the opportunity

³³ Ibid., p. 226.

³⁴ Kumkum Sangari, and Sudesh Vaid, *op.cit*, p. 23.

available to them for employment, but has also given rise to a new mentality wherein human value is increasingly defined in monetary terms.³⁵

Analyzing the relationship between class and gender, Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid point out that gender in an encompassing sense has yet to become central to the understanding of social inequality for the organized left and replace women issues in the narrow sense: a revolutionary redefinition of public and private has yet to enter the agenda alongside class struggle.³⁶ It is very true that the class approach is not sufficient to analyze the gender oppression.

To discuss the impact of religion on gender the two issues in post colonial India viz. Shabano's case and the issue of Sati are considered here which show the gender oppression in communal forms. These two issues are the marks of Hindu and Muslim fundamentalism and support of the State to the communal patriarchies. In the first issue, a 75 years old Muslim woman Shahbano was deprived of her right to maintenance and Supreme Court has given a verdict for changes in Muslim personal law. Muslim fundamentalists have opposed changes in the Muslim personal law and a bill was introduced in the parliament, which took away the Muslim women's right to maintenance from their husbands. According to Radha Kumar, "for most of the autonomous women's groups this was a hard decision to accept because it appeared to lend legitimacy to the idea that the rights of women could be defined by the religious community they belonged to, instead of arguing that religion and rights were separate and distinct".³⁷

³⁵ Patricia Loveridge, op.cit, p. 234.

³⁶ Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, op.cit, p. 24.

³⁷ Radha Kumar, "Identity politics and the contemporary Indian feminist movement" in M. Valentine Moghadam's *Identity Politics of Women: Cultural Reassertions and Feminism in International Perspective*. (Westview Press, U.S.A 1994), p. 280.

The support of the state to the fundamentalists can be seen in the agitation regarding 'sati-daha' in 1987-88. Roop Kanwar's sati (Widow-immolation) in Deorala, Rajasthan and the aftermath incidents explicitly showed the patriarchal attitudes of the state as well as the civil society. The state could not stop the 'chunari mahotsav' (Veil festival) in spite of receiving instructions from the High Court to prevent it. The 'festival' was conducted by the 'sati dharma raksha samithi', an organization, which was formed to defend sati. According to Indu Agnihotri and Rajni Palriwala, the aftermath of the Deorala episode illustrated how fundamentalist forces had gathered enough strength to use one incident to rally a caste, a religious community, and women. They view that, "with dwindling popularity the ruling party at the state and central level again displayed its willingness to compromise with fundamentalist and communal politics. In their struggle, women once again found themselves confronting tradition and the state".³⁸

For the state, it was more of a question of vote-banks than a question of gender oppression. In both the issues the question of gender was seriously linked with religious sentiments. Fundamentalism not only rationalized the sexual oppression of women, but mobilized them in support of their own oppression. In both these issues considerable sections of women were mobilized in support of the communal-fundamental forces.³⁹ All religions not only legitimize the gender oppression but also construct gender and sexuality. Discussions regarding this in the academic level and in the so called 'political' level are not going to help much in deconstructing the gender.

³⁸ Indu Agnihotri and Rajni Palriwala, "Tradition, the family and the state politics of the contemporary women's movement" Research in progress papers, *History and Society*, (2nd series no. ixxxii, N.M.L, New Delhi, December 1993), p. 38.

³⁹ Radha Kumar, *Op.cit*, p. 289.

The debates regarding the recent reservation bill for women have opened many gender related questions and doubts. The major loophole in the Bill is considering women as a homogenized category. But is it because of this reason the members of Parliament have opposed the Bill? Again it's the question of vote banks for all the political parties. For some, it is through 'merit' that women should come up but not by the reservations. True, that there are many problems regarding this bill. But why is it that all problems come together when the gender issue comes? In this connection Vasantha Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran opine that if women manage to push the 81st amendment bill through the parliament it will topple all current assumptions about hierarchies of caste-class and gender. They say that it also creates the possibility for a woman to represent not only men of her own caste, but also upper caste men and women as well, if she is from a non-upper caste background.⁴⁰

The post-colonial situation could not deal with the gender question in the way it has to be dealt with. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid point out that the social and political developments of the past decades have shattered the post-colonial complacency about the improving status of women and with it has gone the legitimacy of nationalist models of reform and development. It is now apparent that far from enjoying the benefits of so-called development, the majority of women have infact been pushed to the margins of the production process. Alongside the invisible economic process, there is visible escalation of communal conflicts and an increasing politicization of religious identities.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Vasantha Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran, 'From social action to political action: women and the 81st amendment', *Economic and Political Weekly* (32 (5), 1-7 Feb 97), p. 196.

⁴¹ Kukum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, op.cit, p. 2.

From the Nationalist Discourse to the recent reservation bill gender has been the issue of target. This shows the complexity of the gender issue. In this context how is it that Gandhi and Ambedkar have addressed the gender question? Belonging to the 'Nationalist period' how did they construct the gender. Have they also equally shared the ideas of Nationalist Discourse on gender or do they have a different notion from that? What were their reactions to the different gender related issues? To deal with these questions one should go through the second and third chapters respectively.

CHAPTER - II

GANDHIAN DISCOURSE ON GENDER

An issue that has been the subject of much debate and controversy has been the Gandhian discourse on gender. It becomes a difficult task when a number of critics have already analysed Gandhi from different perspectives. For example Ashis Nandy opines that Gandhi has constructed femininity as superior to masculinity and countered the masculine colonialism with feminine Indianness.¹ Madhu Kishwar analyses the role of Gandhi in drawing women in to the mainstream freedom movement.² Bikhu Parekh's in-depth analysis reveals Gandhi's constant efforts to transform sex into energy.³ Sudhir Kakar analyses Gandhi from a psychoanalytic perspective⁴ Sujatha Patel argues that Gandhi represented an urban, middle class, upper caste and male oriented view regarding women.⁵ In this connection, analyzing Gandhi from a gender perspective becomes very challenging. Before coming to any conclusions, one has to deal with what Gandhi has said about women and men, and his views

¹ Ashis, Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983), p. 52-53.

² Madhu Kishwar, "Gandhi on Women" *Economic and Political Weekly* (October 12, 1985, vol. XX, no. 40), p. 1691.

³ Bikhu Parekh, *Colonialism Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhian Political Discourse* (Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1989), p. 194.

⁴ Sudhir Kakar, *Intimate Relations: Exploring Indian sexuality* (Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1989).

⁵ Sujatha Patel, "Construction and Reconstruction of woman in Gandhi" Occasional papers on history and society (Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi), p. 12-13.

and woman are fundamentally one and they are complement to each other.” In his opinion, “one cannot live without the other's active help.” He strongly believes that they are equal and same, but not identical. Hence, he says that “at some point there is a bifurcation” as Gandhi puts it... ‘whilst both are fundamentally one, it is also equally true that in the form there is a vital difference between the two. Hence, the vocations of the two must also be different. The duty of motherhood, which the vast majority of women will always undertake, requires qualities which man need not possess. She is passive, he is active, she is essentially mistress of the house. He is the breadwinner. She is the keeper and distributor of the bread. She is the caretaker in every sense of the term. The art of bringing up the infants of the race is her special and sole prerogative. Without her care, the race must become extinct.’⁶

Thus Gandhi believes that there is a natural division of work between men and women. He asserts that it is a division of labour. “The heaviest work is done by men, whereas women keep and manage the homes and hence man remains as the breadwinner.” Maintaining the family-Gandhi says-becomes an additional burden for women. The care of the children and the upkeep of the household are quite enough to fully engage all her energy. So, the maintenance of the family is predominantly man's work and household management is women's work. This is supplementing and complementing each other's labour, according to Gandhi. He doesn't see any invasion of women's right's or suppression of her freedom in this.⁷ He argues that there is

⁶ Harijan, 24-2-1940, Cited in *Women and Social Injustice* (Navajivan Publications House, Ahmedabad, 1942), p. 26.

⁷ Harijan 12-10-1934, Ibid., p. 17.

past glory of Indian women where Sita, Savitri, Draupadi and Damayanti lived. This position degenerated afterwards. As he says, "somehow or the other, man has dominated woman from ages past and so woman has developed an inferiority complex."⁸ So, in order to regenerate women, one has to produce women pure, firm and self controlled as Sita, Damayanti and Draupadi. And if the Indians will be able to produce such 'modern sisters' they will receive the same homage from Hindu society as their prototypes have received.⁹ According to Gandhi, Hinduism has given equal status to women. As he points out that the epithets used in our literature to describe a wife are *ardhangana*, the better half and *sahadharmini*, the helpmate. For him, the husband addressing the wife as *Devi* or goddess does not show any disparagement. But, Gandhi continues, unfortunately a time came when the woman was divested of many of her rights and privileges and was reduced to a status of inferiority.¹⁰ For Gandhi "a woman is the queen, not the slave of the household over which she presides."¹¹ "The wife is not a slave, but a comrade, better half and friend to man." "She is a co-sharer with the men of equal rights and equal duties."¹² A woman is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has the right to participate in the minutest detail of the activities of man and she

⁸ Harijan 24-3-1940, Ibid., p. 26.

⁹ Gandhi's speech delivered on February 20, 1918. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*, Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰ Harijan, 12-10-1934, Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹ Young India, 14-1-1932, Ibid., p. 19.

¹² Young India, 21-5-1931, Ibid., p. 128.

has the same right of freedom and liberty as he. She is entitled to a supreme place in her own sphere of activities as man is in his.¹³

Regarding women's education Gandhi says that education is very important for women in order to assert their natural rights. It is necessary for women as it is for men. But the education should not be identical for men and women. 'Man is supreme in the outward activities of a married couple, 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. Gandhi explains that it is 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 discriminating appreciation of these basic principles, the fullest life of man and woman cannot be developed.¹⁴ On the other hand Gandhi doesn't oppose from women working outside. He asserts that in the new order of his imagination all will work according to their capacity for an adequate return for their labour. Women in the new order will be part time workers, their primary function being, to look after the home¹⁵

The major role for women, according to Gandhi, is motherhood. Gandhi points out that "if married life is a religious duty, motherhood also is a religious duty." He says that being an ideal mother is not an easy task. She

¹³ Gandhi's speech delivered on February 20, 1918. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*, Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁴ Gandhi's speech delivered on February 20, 1918. Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁵ Harijan, 16-3-1940, Ibid., p. 29.

has to take the procreation of children with a full sense of responsibility. The mother should know her duty from the moment she conceives, till the child is born. He says that she who gives intelligent, healthy and well brought up children to the country is surely rendering a service.¹⁶

Gandhi views that women's contribution in the non-violent nationalist movement comes from her natural tendency of non-violent nature. He feels that woman's inherent qualities like suffering and silence make her to play an effective role in the non-violent war than man. Gandhi argues that "who can suffer more purely and nobly than women."¹⁷ He says that woman is more fitted than man to make explorations and take bolder action in *Ahimsa*. For the courage of self-sacrifice woman is any day superior to man, as man is to woman for the courage of the brute.¹⁸ He inspires women by saying that the economic and the moral salvation of India rests mainly with them.¹⁹ For Gandhi, *Ahimsa* (non-violence) means infinite love, which means infinite capacity for suffering also. "Who but woman" Gandhi says "the mother of man show this capacity in the largest measure." He asks women to transfer their love for children to humanity.²⁰

He tells woman that the future of India lies on their knees as they will nurture the future generation. They can bring up the children of India to

¹⁶ Harijan, 23-3-1942, Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁷ Harijan, 14-1-1932, Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁸ Harijan, 15-11-1938, Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁹ Young India 11-8-1921, Pushpa Joshi, *Gandhi on Women* (compiled) (Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1988). p. 79.

²⁰ Harijan, 24-2-1940, Ibid., p. 314-316.

become simple, God-fearing and brave men and women or he points out they can coddle them to be weaklings unfit to brave the storms of life and used to foreign fineries, which they would find it difficult in after life to discard.²¹ Gandhi deeply feels that women should have as much share in winning Swaraj as men. Infact he thinks that probably women can outdistance men in the peaceful struggle of non-violence. He also says that “woman is any day superior to man in her religious devotion, and silent and dignified suffering is the badge of her sex.”²² For Gandhi, “woman is sacrifice personified.” He also asserts that if a woman does a thing in the right spirit, she moves mountains. He claims that he has the confidence that the women of India will finish the work left by men and that they will do it far more gracefully than men.²³ So he feels that women's contribution in a non-violent warfare should be much greater than men's. As he puts it, to call women the weaker sex is a libel, it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant brute strength, then indeed is woman less brute than man, if by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior. Has she not greater intuition, is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not greater powers of endurance, has she not greater courage? Without her, man could not be. If non-violence is the law of our being, the future is with woman.²⁴ Gandhi urges women by saying that the completion of swadeshi programme is possible only if they give the largest

²¹ Young India, 11-8-1921, Ibid., p. 80.

²² Young India, 15-12-1921, *The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi* (XXII, 1921, March 1922. The Publications Division, Government of India, Navajivan Press, Ahmedabad, 1966), p. 20-24.

²³ Young India, 22-12-1921. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*, op.cit, p. 155-156.

²⁴ Young India, 10-4-1930. Cited in *To the women* edited and published by Anand T Hingorani, (Law Journal Press, Karachi, 1942), p. 36.

share. Gandhi firmly believes that boycott becomes impossible unless women surrenders foreign cloths.²⁵

He asks women to donate their ornaments for the sake of the country. He says that the purpose behind wearing jewelry is to attract man. He tells women to refuse to deck themselves for pleasing men. As he says "refuse to be the slaves of your own whims and fancies and the slaves of men. Refuse to decorate yourself, don't go in for scents and lavender waters".²⁶ He feels that in a country like India where eighty percent of the people are semi-starved and suffer from insufficient nutrition, the wearing of jewelry is an offense to the eye. Gandhi strongly opines that a woman in India has rarely any cash, which she can call her own. But the jewelry she wears belong to her, in spite of the reason that without the consent of her 'master' she can not give it away.²⁷

Gandhi's extensive discussion about marriage and *Brahmacharya* reveals the construction of male and female sexualities. In fact his concepts of marriage and *Brahmacharya* goes side by side. According to Gandhi, the meaning of *Brahmacharya* is search for *Brahman*. *Brahman* pervades in every being and can therefore be searched by living into and realizing the inner self. For Gandhi, this realization is impossible without complete control of the senses. Hence, *Brahmacharya*, according to Gandhi means control in thought, word and action of all the senses at all times and in all places.²⁸ He emphasizes

²⁵ Young India, 11-8-1921. Cited in *Gandhi on Women* (comp) op.cit, p. 79.

²⁶ Young India, 8-12-1927. *Women and Social Injustice*, op.cit, p. 91.

²⁷ Harijan, 22-12-1933. Cited in *To the women*, op.cit, p. 193.

²⁸ Young India, 15-6-1924. Cited in *Truth is God* compiled by R.K. Prabhu, (Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1955), p. 112.

that the purpose behind marriage is progeny and if there is no desire for progeny, there is no need of marriage. Gandhi advocates that after the desire for progeny is satisfied, the sexual relationship between husband and wife should be stopped.²⁹ He quotes Manu who describes the first child as *dharmaja* (born out of a sense of duty) and children born after the first child as 'kamaja' (carnally born). In his opinion, this quotation of Manu gives the law of sexual relations in a nutshell.³⁰

Gandhi advocates *Brahmacharya* (celibacy) to the wife and husband and asks them to be like brothers and sisters. To put it in his own words, if the married couple can think of each other as brother and sister, they are freed for universal service. The very thought that all women in the world are one's sisters, mothers or daughters will at once ennoble a man snap his chains. The husband and wife do not lose anything here, but only add to their resources and even to their family. Their love becomes free from the impurity of lust and so grows stronger. With the disappearance of this impurity, they can serve each other better, and the occasions for quarrel become fewer. There are more occasions for quarrel, where the love is selfish and bounded.³¹

Gandhi feels that the purpose behind marriage is spiritual development. And spiritual development, ought to be given the first place in the choice for marriage, service should come next, family considerations and the interest of the social order should have the third place, with mutual attraction or love in

²⁹ Harijan, 14-4-1946. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. Ibid., p. 80.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 81.

³¹ R.K. Prabhu (Comp.), *Truth is God*, op.cit, p. 113-114.

the fourth place. He says that he has a high opinion of the marriage tie.³² In his opinion, the husband and wife merge in each other by the marriage tie. They are one in two or two in one³³. He often repeats the terms like *Madhu Parka*³⁴ and *Saptapadi*,³⁵ the customs that can be seen in Hindu Brahmin marriages. He values Sanskrit mantras and says that the usage of Sanskrit texts is good because the Sanskrit word has a power, under the influence of which one would love to come.³⁶

According to Gandhi marriage for the satisfaction of sexual appetite is not a marriage. "It is *vyabhichara*-concupiscence." The ceremony of marriage means that the sexual act is permitted only when there is a clear desire by both, for a child. He explains that the whole conception of marriage is sacred. His advice to the youth is "to unlearn the lesson that they have learnt about marriage, that the marriage is for the satisfaction of animal appetite." According to Gandhi, it is a superstition. He explains that the whole ceremony

³² Harijan, 5-6-1937. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. op.cit, p. 74.

³³ Harijan, 9-3-1940, Ibid., p. 89.

³⁴ Gandhi describes that Madhu is sweet nectar or honey and he says if only people partake of it after the rest of the world has taken its share of it. It means enjoyment by renunciation. In common usage, however Madhu Parka refers to the clothes adorned on any auspicious occasion especially marriage.

³⁵ *Saptapadi* as described in Gandhi's autobiography refers to the seven steps that a Hindu bride and bridegroom walk together, making at the same time promises of mutual fidelity and devotion, after which the marriage becomes irrevocable. Gandhi uses this term several times whenever the discussion comes regarding marriage. For ex. Young India 3-1-1929. See also in M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography, The story of my experiments with truth*, when he describes his marriage (Navajivan Publishing House, 1927), p. 9.

³⁶ Harijan, 14-4-1946. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. op.cit., p. 82.

is performed in the presence of the sacred fire. He tells the youth "Let the fire make ashes of all the lust in you." He further says that restraint does not ruin one's health, but outward suppression does. He strongly believes that "a really self - restrained person grows every day from strength to strength and from peace to more peace." He compares marriage with the sacred thread ceremony as he says "marriage is a consecration, a new birth, even as the sacred thread ceremony is a consecration and a new birth."³⁷

Gandhi's ideal wife and husband are Sita and Rama. As he describes, "my ideal of a wife is Sita and of a husband, Rama. But, Sita was no slave of Rama or each was slave to the other. Rama is ever considerate to Sita." At times he criticizes Hinduism for some of its practical aspects in his times. He criticizes the role of the husband and says that the husband does not consider himself under any obligation to consult his partner's wishes. The husband regards his wife as his property. The wife generally suppresses herself and believes in the husband's claim. "There is a way out for this" he stresses "a way which Mira Bai has shown." According to Gandhi the wife has a perfect right to take her own course and meekly brave the consequences when she knows herself to be in the right and when resistance is for a nobler purpose.³⁸ At the same time, he deeply believes that Hinduism regards husband and wife as absolute equals to each other. He thinks that a practice has grown up where the wife became inferior and no one knows since when this has happened. He states, "I do know that Hinduism leaves the individual absolutely free to do

³⁷ Harijan, 14-4-1946, Ibid. p. 79-83.

³⁸ Young India 21.10.1926. Cited in *To the women*. op.cit., p. 5-6.

what he or she likes for the sake of self realization for which and which alone he or she is born.”³⁹

Gandhi has a deep faith in *Varnashramadharma*. His answer for a question regarding the custom of a woman changing her *varna* after marriage, is that in the resuscitated *varna* dharma, a girl before her marriage will belong to the *varna* of her father, just like her brother. Inter-marriages between different *varnas* will be rare. A girl will therefore, retain her *varna* unimpaired even after her marriage. But if the husband belong to a different *varna*, then on marriage, she would naturally adopt his *varna* and relinquish that of her parents. Nor need such a change of *varna* be understood to imply a slur against anybody's susceptibilities since the institution of *varna* in the age of resuscitation would imply absolute social equality of all the four *varnas*.⁴⁰ At another point, referring to Brahminism, he says that “Brahminism I adore, I have defended *varnashramadharma*, but *Brahminism* that can tolerate untouchability, virgin widowhood and spoliation of virgins, stinks in my nostrils. It is a parody of Brahminism.”⁴¹

When one young man criticized Hinduism in *Young India* by describing his sister's difficulties with her husband, Gandhi writes in reply that, the person's condemnation of Hinduism is pardonable because, it is under intense irritation based on a hysterical generalization from an isolated instance. He explains that millions of Hindu wives live in perfect peace and are queens in

³⁹ Young India 21.10.1926. Cited in *To the women*. Ibid. p. 6.

⁴⁰ Harijan, 12-10-1934, op.cit., p.17.

⁴¹ Young India 15-9-1929. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. op.cit., p. 119.

their own homes. They exercise an authority over their husbands, which any woman would envy. He believes that it is an authority which love gives. The illustration given by the young man is not of the evil in Hinduism, but of the evil in human nature.

Gandhi feels that the facility of divorce is of no use. Hence, his advice to the young man's sister is to live apart from her husband's roof without breaking the legal tie and feel as if she is not married. For Gandhi, the legal remedies like punishment of husband for common assault and asking for husband's support for the wife are, worse than useless. In Gandhi's opinion it never brings any comfort to a virtuous woman and makes the question of the husband's reform more difficult, if not impossible, which should be the aim of the society and every wife. Then Gandhi himself raises the question about the satisfaction of the sexual appetite on the part of young women. In his view "a woman whose marriage proves unhappy doesn't want to be remarried."⁴² He criticizes wife beating and says that there are husbands who regard their wives as their property like their cattle or household furniture and therefore think that they have the right to beat them as they could their cattle.⁴³

By condemning the system of child marriage, he says that it is not religion but irreligion.⁴⁴ He advises young men to form organizations to prevent child marriages. He asks them to promote widow remarriages for child widows. He says that *satyagraha* is the solution for preventing child marriages and advises them not to be violent in preventing them. In his view it will cause

⁴² Young India 3-10-1929. Cited in *To the Women*. op.cit., p. 1-3.

⁴³ Harijan, 3.10.1936. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. op.cit., p. 89.

⁴⁴ Young India 26-8-1926. Ibid., p. 33.

revulsion against them and frustrate the very object that they have in view.⁴⁵ He seriously feels that "one should save the innocent girls of tender age from man's lust."⁴⁶ According to Gandhi Sanskrit texts of doubtful authority cannot be invoked to sanctify a practice which is in itself, immoral. He also says that the child marriages lead to enforced widowhood. For social transformation, he gives preference to public opinion rather than to legal acts.⁴⁷ He explains that, the custom of child marriage is both a moral as well as a physical evil. For it undermines our morals and induces physical degeneration. "By countenancing such customs"- he says- "we recede from god as well as Swaraj."⁴⁸ In his opinion preventing child marriages is pre-eminently women's work. And when a man turns into a beast, he is not likely to listen to reason. So, it is the mothers who have to be educated to understand their privilege and duty of refusals⁴⁹

Another issue that Gandhi seriously addresses is the question of the Hindu widowhood. He opines that remarriage of widows is necessary to a certain extent.⁵⁰ He says that voluntary widowhood is a priceless boon, and enforced widowhood is a curse.⁵¹ He describes the Hindu widow as a human cow and questions "we cry out for cow protection in the name of religion but

⁴⁵ Young India 1-9-1927. Ibid., p. 54-55.

⁴⁶ Young India 8-8-1929. Ibid., p. 58.

⁴⁷ Young India 27-8-1925. Ibid., p. 31.

⁴⁸ Young India 26-8-1926. Ibid., p. 33.

⁴⁹ Harijan, 16-11-1935. Cited in *To the Women*. op.cit., p. 130-131.

⁵⁰ Young India 4-2-1926. Ibid., p. 142.

⁵¹ Harijan, 22-06-1935, Ibid., p. 132.

refuse protection to the human cow in the shape of the girl widow”? In his opinion, voluntary widowhood consciously adopted by a woman who has felt the affection of a partner, adds grace and dignity to life, sanctifies the home and uplifts religion. He further says that widowhood imposed by religion or custom is an unbearable yoke and deflex the home by secret vice and degrades religion.⁵² Describing widowhood, Gandhi asserts that the widow has a sacred place in Hinduism,⁵³ and a real Hindu widow is a treasure and one of the gifts of Hinduism to humanity.⁵⁴ He thinks that the ancient Hindu widow was never in the wretched condition in which we find the Hindu widow of today⁵⁵

Criticizing enforced widowhood Gandhi says that reform can come first by the force of enlightened public opinion among the Hindus, secondly by parents recognizing the duty of marrying off their girl widows. The girls should be educated and learn the correctness of widow remarriages.⁵⁶ But Gandhi does not advocate widow remarriages on the whole. As he says, “If I were called upon to state, what the rule should be, I should say that the same rule should apply to women as to men. If a fifty-year-old man remarries with impunity, it should be open to the widow of that age to do likewise. That, in my opinion both will be sinning by remarriage is quite another matter. I should any day subscribe to a reform in the Hindu law, making sinful the

⁵² Young India 5-8-1926. Cited in *Gandhi on Women* (Comp.) Pushpa Joshi. op.cit, p. 133.

⁵³ Young India 18-8-1927. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. op.cit., p. 110.

⁵⁴ Young India 19-8-1926. Ibid., p. 105.

⁵⁵ Young India 18-8-1927. Ibid., p. 116.

⁵⁶ Harijan, 20-3-1937. Cited in *To the Women*. op.cit., p. 135.

remarriage of a widow or a widower who voluntarily married after maturity.”⁵⁷

In another letter Gandhi justifies this statement by saying that he used the word sinful but not criminal and says that sinful means “God alone can punish.”⁵⁸

Speaking about a sati case (widow immolation) he opines that self-immolation on the death of the husband is a sign of ignorance but not of enlightenment. The custom of widow immolation has its origin in superstitious ignorance and the blind egoism of man—he continues -a sati would regard marriage not as a means of satisfying the animal appetite but as a means of realizing the ideal of selfless and self effacing service by completely merging her individuality in her husband’s. She would prove her satihood not by mounting the funeral pyre at her husband’s death, but she would prove it with every breath that she breathes from the moment that she plighted her troth to him at the *saptapadi* ceremony by her renunciation, sacrifice, self abnegation and dedication to the service of her husband, his family and the country. She would shun creature comforts and delights of the senses. She would refuse to be enslaved by the narrow domestic cares and interests of the family, but would utilize every opportunity to add to her stock of knowledge and increase her capacity for service by more and more cultivating renunciation and self-discipline and by completely identifying herself with her husband, learn to identify herself with the whole world. He further asserts that all that he is saying about the wife applies to the husband also. He reiterates that satihood is the acme of purity and according to him, this purity cannot be achieved or

⁵⁷ Young India 14-10-1926. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. op.cit., p. 107.

⁵⁸ Young India 18-11-1926. Ibid., p. 108.

realized by dying. It can be attained only through constant striving, constant immolation of the spirit from day to day.⁵⁹

Gandhi advocates widows to spin tirelessly for the sake of the nation and says that the spinning wheel should be a widow's lovable companion.⁶⁰ He thinks that women have a natural advantage over men in spinning. Since the beginning of the times -he says- there has been a division of labour between men and women. Adam Wove and Eve Span. So the act of spinning will remain women's speciality. The reason behind this is 'Spinning is essentially a slow and comparatively a silent process. Woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and therefore non-violence. Her occupations must therefore be, as they are, more conducive to peace than war.'⁶¹ At the same time he asks men also to spin. When a man argues with Gandhi that spinning is not a man's work, he replies that it is contrary to experience to say that any vocation is exclusively reserved for one sex only. Cooking is predominantly the occupation of women. But a soldier who cannot cook his own food would be worthless. The whole of the cooking in camps is necessarily and naturally done by men. Moreover, whilst women naturally cook for the household, organized cooking on a large scale is universally done by men throughout the world. Fighting is predominantly men's occupation, but Arab women fought like heroines side by side with their husbands in the early struggles of Islam. The Rani of Jhansi distinguished herself for her bravery as very few men did

⁵⁹ Young India 21-5-1931. Cited in *To the Women*. op.cit., p. 136-139.

⁶⁰ Young India 11-8-1921. Cited in *Gandhi on Women*, (Comp) Pushpa Joshi, op.cit., p. 80.

⁶¹ Harijan, 2-12-1939, Ibid., p. 312.

during the Sepoy revolt.⁶² But at another place, speaking about bravery, Gandhi says that bravery is not the monopoly of men, and Indian women should not feel helpless-he continues-women of course don't generally carry swords, though the Rani of Jhansi did and outdid all her contemporaries in the valour of the sword. Still all cannot become Ranis of Jhansi. But all women can emulate the example of Sita whom even the mighty Ravana dared not to touch. Ranis of Jhansi could be subdued.⁶³

Regarding the purdah system Gandhi opines that the purdah in India is a recent institution and was adopted during the period of Hindu decline. He explains by saying that "in the age when proud Draupadi and spotless Sita lived, there could be no purdah."⁶⁴ Opposing the purdah system Gandhi says that chastity is not a hot house growth. It cannot be superimposed. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of purdah. It must grow from within, and to be worth anything it must be capable of withstanding every unsought temptation. It must be as defiant as Sita's. It must be a very poor thing that cannot stand the gaze of men. Men, to be men, must be able to trust their women folk even as the latter are compelled to trust them.⁶⁵

In order to assure the people who view purdah system as an anglicized movement, Gandhi explains that it is an indigenous conservative effort made by leaders who are conservative by nature and are yet alive to all the evils that

⁶² Young India, 11-6-1925. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*, op.cit, p. 165.

⁶³ Harijan, 27-10-1946. "From the weekly letter by Pyarelal" cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. Ibid., p. 194.

⁶⁴ Young India, 24-3-1927. Ibid., p. 96.

⁶⁵ Harijan, 3-2-1927, Ibid., p. 95-96.

have crept into Hindu society. He asks people not to fear about the movement by thinking that the movement is going to be disruptive of all that is most precious in Indian culture and especially in feminine grace, modesty which is peculiar to India's womanhood.⁶⁶ Gandhi does not prefer to postpone the social reform till the attainment of Swaraj.⁶⁷ Gandhi compares the position of women and position of 'untouchables' and says that 'what we are doing to our women and what we are doing to the untouchables recoils upon our heads with a force thousand times multiply. It partly accounts for our own weakness, indecision, narrowness and helplessness. Let us then tear down the purdah with one mighty effort.'⁶⁸

Gandhi criticizes dowry system and says that marriage must cease to be an arrangement made by parents for money. He feels that the dowry system is intimately connected with the caste system and advises the people to break the bonds of caste. In his opinion, the age for marrying should be increased and the girls should be ready to remain as spinsters if they do not get a suitable match.⁶⁹ He criticizes young men by saying that, any young man who makes dowry a condition of marriage discredits his education and his country and dishonours womanhood.⁷⁰ His advice to a schoolmaster who is unable to get his daughters married because of the dowry system is to refuse to treat marriage as a marketable transaction instead of a status or a sacrament.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Young India, 26-7-1928. Cited in *To the Women*. op.cit., p. 220.

⁶⁷ Young India, 28-6-1928. Ibid., p. 217.

⁶⁸ Young India, 3-2-1927. Ibid., p. 215.

⁶⁹ Harijan, 23-5-1936. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. op.cit., p. 59.

⁷⁰ Young India, 21-6-1928. Ibid., p. 59.

⁷¹ Harijan, 25-7-1936, Ibid., p. 62.

Gandhi is conscious of the reason that the custom is confined to the middle class people. As he says whenever we talk of evil customs, we usually think of the middle class. The millions living in the villages have their customs and woes of which we have yet but little knowledge.⁷²

Another two important issues that Gandhi discusses extensively are the question of prostitution and the protection of women's honour. The name that Gandhi has given to the prostitutes is Fallen Sisters. He calls prostitution as a moral plague and says "of all the evils for which man has made himself responsible, none is so degrading, so shocking or so brutal as his abuse of the better half of humanity, to me female sex, not the weaker sex."⁷³ He asks men to control their passions and advocates youth to follow a disciplined life. He tells them to visualize god and seek god's aid in keeping them away from temptation. He gives importance to public opinion and says that what is wanted is an intelligent, sane, healthy and pure public opinion.⁷⁴ He asks prostitutes to find out an honourable living. As he says "these sisters, the vast majority of them, need not think of marriage. They agreed that they could not. They must, therefore, become the true *sanyasinis* of India. Having no cares of life, but of service, they can spin and weave to their heart's content." He believes that the people who live in villages, which are purely agricultural, are not touched by the vice.⁷⁵ He strongly asserts that this system became very

⁷² Harijan, 23-5-1936, Ibid., p. 60.

⁷³ Young India, 15-9-1921. Cited in *Gandhi on Women*, (Comp.) Pushpa Joshi, op.cit., p. 87.

⁷⁴ Young India, 9-7-1925. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. op.cit., p. 137.

⁷⁵ Young India, 15-9-1921. Cited in *Gandhi on Women*, (Comp.) Pushpa Joshi, op.cit., p. 88.

rampant only after the British rule. According to Gandhi, before the British rule, it was confined to the few upper ten.⁷⁶

He compares cow protection with the protection of women's chastity and says that "to me the meaning of cow-protection includes the protection of chastity of our women. We will not have a regenerate India, unless we learn to respect our women as we respect our mothers, sisters and daughters. Let us cleanse ourselves of the sins that kill the man in us and make us brute."⁷⁷ He criticizes the male attitude of going to the 'prostitutes'. In his opinion, married men who go to 'prostitutes' are committing double sin, one against their wives and one against these sisters, whose purity they are bound to guard with as much jealousy as that of their own blood sisters.⁷⁸ Same opinion is expressed against Devadasi system by Gandhi, as he says by calling them devadasis we insult god himself in the name of religion and we commit a double crime, in that we use these sisters of ours to serve our lust and take in the same breath, the name of god.⁷⁹ According to Gandhi, these sisters cannot be true office bearers of the Congress committee if they do not give up their sinfulness. As he says "none could officiate at the altar of Swaraj who did not approach it with pure hands and a pure heart."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Young India, 9-7-1923. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. op.cit., p. 136-137.

⁷⁷ Young India, 13-4-1921. Ibid., p. 123.

⁷⁸ Young India, 16-4-1925. Ibid., p. 140.

⁷⁹ Young India, 29-2-1927. Ibid., p.141.

⁸⁰ Young India, 15-9-1921. Cited in *Gandhi on Women*, (Comp.) Pushpa Joshi, op.cit., p. 88.

When some 'prostitutes' formed an organization at Barisal (a place in Madhya Pradesh), aiming at joining the Congress and participating the *satyagraha*, Gandhi out rightly rejected the idea. For him, it was not a healthy course, and its appearance decidedly was ugly. He severely criticizes the aims and objectives of the organization and says, "it is putting the cart before the horse." He says that the enrollment of their names as the Congress members and their being elected as delegates is an obscene manifesto. According to him, the whole development is disgraceful. As he says "I appreciate spinning, but it must not be used as a passport to vice. I like everybody to subscribe to *satyagraha*, but I would prevent by all the power at my command, an unrepentant professional murderer from signing the creed. My whole heart is with these sisters. But, I am unable to identify myself with the methods adopted at Barisal. These sisters have acquired a status which for the sake of moral well being of society, they must not have. We will not incorporate an association of known thieves for the purpose for which these women have formed their association. There is less warrant for this association, for these are more dangerous than thieves. The latter steal material possessions, the former steal virtue. Whilst man is primarily responsible for the existence of these unfortunate members of society, it must not be forgotten that they have acquired tremendously dangerous powers for mischief." Gandhi's opinion is that as long as they continue a life of shame it is wrong to accept donations or services from them or to elect them as delegates or to encourage them to become the members of the Congress. He asserts that even if there is no legal bar against their entry into the Congress he has hoped that public opinion would keep them out of the Congress. He urges them to withdraw their names from the Congress and asks them to forget that they ever had an association

and to give up their immoral trade. According to him, till they give up their immoral trade they should not take up spinning as a discipline and weaving or any other remunerative and clean occupation for a living.⁸¹

One of the other important issues regarding which Gandhi has constantly expressed and reiterated the same opinion is the question of 'protecting' women's 'honour'. He intensely feels that a woman should die if she is unable to protect her honour. He deals the question of how to protect woman's honour in two ways. Firstly, how is a woman to protect her own honour and secondly, how are her male relatives to protect it. Regarding the first way, he stresses where there is a non-violent atmosphere, where there is the constant teaching of *Ahimsa*, woman will not regard herself as dependent, weak or helpless. She is not really helpless when she is really pure. Her purity makes her conscious of her strength. I have always held that it is physically impossible to violate a woman against her will. The outrage takes place only when she gives way to fear or does not realize her moral strength. If she cannot meet the assailant's physical might, her purity will give her the strength to die before he succeeds in violating her. Take the case of Sita- Gandhi says- physically she was a weakling before Ravana, but her purity was more than a match even for his giant might. He tried to win her with all kinds of allurements, but could not carnally touch her without her consent. On the other hand, if a woman depends on her own physical strength or upon a weapon she possesses, she is sure to be discomfited whenever her strength is exhausted.

⁸¹ Young India, 25-6-1925. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. op.cit., p. 132-133.

For the idea of how others should protect the woman's honour Gandhi opines that her brother, father or friend will stand and lay down their lives in their duty. When a woman poses a doubt to Gandhi by asking whether it is possible for a woman to lay down her life, he gives an example of a girl of twenty years old who burnt herself to death. This girl was apparently being persecuted for refusing to go in for ordinary studies. Gandhi narrates "and she perished with such cool courage and determination. She ignited her sari with an ordinary oil light and did not so much as raise a cry, so that the people in the neighbouring room were unaware of the happening until all was over. I don't give these details to commend her example, but to show how easily a woman can throw away her life. I, at any rate, am incapable of this courage. But, agree that it is not the external light but the Inner Light that is needed."⁸² For Gandhi, a woman is worthy of condemnation only when she is a willing party to her dishonour. He says, in no case are adultery and criminal assault synonymous terms.

He advises women to leave the cities and migrate to the villages where there is comparatively little risk of their being assaulted and where a wide field of service awaits them. He asks women to be fearless and according to him a fearless woman who knows that her purity is her best shield can never be dishonoured. "However beastly the man, he will bow in shame before the flame of her dazzling purity", is his firm view. He asks women to be courageous. When a woman is assaulted - he says - she may not stop to think in terms of *himsa* or *Ahimsa*. Her primary duty is self-protection. She is at liberty to employ every method or means that comes to her mind in order to

⁸² Harijan, 1-9-1940. Cited in *To the Women*. op.cit., p. 112.

defend her honour. God has given her nails and teeth. She must use them with all her strength and if need be, die in the effort.

As earlier stated, he asks men who are eyewitnesses to such crimes to lay down their lives in order to protect women. He says "if old, decrepit and toothless, as I am, I were to plead non-violence and be a helpless witness of assault on the honour of a sister, my so called Mahatmaship would be ridiculed, dishonoured and lost. If I or those like me were to intervene and lay down our lives whether violently or non-violently, we would surely save the prey and at any rate we would not remain living witnesses to her dishonour."⁸³ His advice to women is to die by choking or by biting the tongue. After that he revises this suggestion since his followers found it difficult. They discussed the possibility of a woman to carry poison and this also seems to be impossible. Then Gandhi tells them that he heard from those given to yogic practices that it was possible by some practice to end life and he would enquire about it. He outrightly rejects women carrying daggers or arms for self-protection because arms are the symbol of one's helplessness.⁸⁴ His constant advice to women is to die rather than surrender, because surrendering has no room in his plan of life. But he was not able to find out the way to take one's life. He says, "I promptly said it was not for me to prescribe the means and behind the approval of suicide under such circumstances was and is the belief that one whose mind is prepared for even suicide will have the requisite courage for such mental resistance and such internal purity that her assailant

⁸³ Harijan, 1-3-1942. Cited in *Gandhi on Women*, (Comp.) Pushpa Joshi, op.cit., p. 325-326.

⁸⁴ Harijan, 27-10-1946. "From the weekly letters by Pyarelal" cited in *Women and Social Injustice*, op.cit., p. 195.

will be disarmed. I could not carry the argument any further because it does not admit of further development. It requires positive proof which, I own, is lacking.”⁸⁵

In one of his discussions about eve-teasing, Gandhi hopes that Indian girls would not get the modern girl spirit. In his view; the modern girl loves to be Juliet to half a dozen Romeos. He feels that the modern girl dresses not to protect herself from wind, rain and sun, but to attract attention. She improves upon nature by painting herself and looking extraordinary. Because of this reason, he opines that the non-violent war is not for such girls.⁸⁶ When some girls point out his concept of modern girl Gandhi says that the modern girl has a special meaning and all the girls who receive English education are not modern girls. He says that he knows many girls, who are not at all touched by the modern girl sin. So he wanted the Indian girl students against copying the modern girl.⁸⁷

Some other important women's issues that Gandhi has dealt with are, the law of inheritance, economic independence for women and reservations for women. Regarding the law of inheritance, Gandhi says that he considers it as the least issue among the women's rights list. According to him the Sarada Bill deals with an evil far greater than the one which the law of inheritance connotes. “But” - he says – “I am uncompromising in the matter of woman's rights. In my opinion, she should labour under no legal disability not suffered by man. I should treat the daughters and sons on a footing of perfect equality.

⁸⁵ Harijan, 9-2-1947, Ibid., p. 198.

⁸⁶ Harijan, 31-2-1938. Cited in *To the Women*. op.cit., p. 106.

⁸⁷ Harijan, 4-2-1939, Ibid., p. 109.

As women begin to realize their strength, as they must in proportion to the education they receive, they will naturally resent the glaring inequalities to which they are subjected.” According to Gandhi, the route of evil lies in mans’ greed for power, fame and lust. He argues that man has always desired power and ownership of property gives this power. So he asks women to deal with the root cause. He says, woman is the embodiment of sacrifice and suffering and her advent to public life should, therefore, result in purifying it in restraining unbridled ambition and accumulation of property.⁸⁸ When a person asks for Gandhi’s opinion about the statement that “the economic independence of women would lead to the spread of immorality among women and disruption of domestic life”, he answers by asking a question that, has not independence of man and his holding property led to the spread of immorality among men? He continues If your answer is yes, then let it be so also with women and when women have rights of ownership and the rest like men, it will be found that the enjoyment of such rights is not responsible for their vices or their virtues. Morality, which depends upon the helplessness of a man or woman, has not much to recommend it. Morality is rooted in the purity of our hearts.⁸⁹

Regarding the question of reservations for women Gandhi argues that merit should be the only test. He says that it would be a dangerous thing to insist on membership on the ground merely of sex. He advocates that women or any group should disdain patronage. They should seek justice, never favours.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Harijan, 17-10-1929. Ibid., p. 13.

⁸⁹ Harijan, 8-6-1940. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*, p. 184.

⁹⁰ Harijan, 7-4-1946, Ibid., p. 184-185.

Hind Swaraj - Construction of gender

In his book *Hind Swaraj* discussing about the government of England, Gandhi compares the English Government to a sterile woman and to a prostitute. He explains that even if these are harsh terms they fit the case to describe. According to him British Parliament has not done a single good thing, so it is like a sterile woman. And the natural condition of that parliament is such that without outside pressure it can do nothing. It is like a prostitute because, it is under the control of ministers who change from time to time and it does not have a real master. He says, under the Prime Minister its movement is not steady but it is buffeted about like a prostitute.⁹¹

In an another discussion about civilization, discussing the civilization in Europe, Gandhi criticizes it and says that there is no happiness in that civilization. According to him, women in Europe, wander in the streets or they slave away in factories, who should be the queens of households.⁹²

Regarding the chastity of men, Gandhi says chastity is one of the greatest disciplines without which the mind cannot attain requisite firmness. A man who is unchaste loses stamina, becomes emasculated and cowardly. He whose mind is given over to animal passions is not capable of any great effort. This can be proved by innumerable instances. What then is a married person to do is the question that arises naturally and yet it need not. When a husband and wife gratify the passions, it is no less an animal indulgence on that

⁹¹ M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1938), p. 28-29.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 33-34.

account. Such an indulgence, except for perpetuating the race is strictly prohibited. But a passive resister has to avoid even that very limited indulgence because he can have no desire for progeny. A married man, therefore, can observe perfect chastity. This subject is not capable of being treated at greater length. Several questions arise, how is one to carry ones wife with one, what are her rights and other similar questions, yet, those who wish to have part in a great work are bound to solve these puzzles.⁹³

Personal Relationships and women

To have a better understanding of the Gandhian construction of gender, one has to understand his personal relationships with women and their impact on him as well as his impact on them. Gandhi was deeply influenced by his mother, Putli Bai. As Gandhi says, The outstanding impression, my mother has left on my memory is that of saintliness. She was deeply religious. She would not think of taking the meals without her daily prayers. In his autobiography Gandhi explains how she used to keep two or three consecutive fasts.⁹⁴ Another woman is his wife Kasturba with whom Gandhi exercised the power of a husband. He confesses that he has never forgiven himself for the violence of which he is guilty in often paining his wife by acting on his friend's information. Gandhi says, perhaps only a Hindu wife could tolerate these hardships, and that is why I have regarded women as an incarnation of tolerance.⁹⁵ Gandhi's hatred towards sex and sexuality developed from his

⁹³ Ibid., p. 75.

⁹⁴ M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, op.cit., p. 4.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

experience at the time of his father's death. As Gandhi explained it was the shame of his carnal desire even at the critical hour of his father's death. Gandhi feels it as a double sin, because by that time his wife was also pregnant and when she gave birth to the baby it died within three or four days. Gandhi says, nothing else could be expected. Let all those who are married be warned by my example.⁹⁶ Gandhi started practicing *Brahmacharya* (celibacy) from 1901 and took a vow of abstinence in 1906. He says that he has not shared his feelings with his wife before 1906. In 1906 at the time of taking the vow, Gandhi consulted her for which he says she had no objection. Explaining about himself and Kasturba, Gandhi says "so long as I was the slave of lust, my faithfulness was worth nothing. To be fair to my wife I must say that she was never the temptress. It was therefore the easiest thing for me to take the vow of *Brahmacharya* if only I willed it. It was my weak will or lustful attachment that was the obstacle." He also says that the main objective was to escape having more children.⁹⁷

Gandhi has never believed in contraceptives or any other birth controlling methods except the method of self-control. He constantly argues about the importance of self-control with Mrs. Margaret Sanger who is a leader of the birth control movement in America. Gandhi argues with her, by saying that people should be taught that it is immoral to have more than three to four children and after that they should sleep separately.⁹⁸ He says if they are taught this, it would harden into custom. According to him, if social reformers

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 175.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 172.

are unable to impress the people by this idea, there should be a law regarding this.⁹⁹ In his opinion, the function of the 'organs of generation' is 'to generate progeny'.¹⁰⁰ He says that birth control by contraceptives does a moral harm to the individual and to society. For those people, who are using birth control methods apart from the self-control, marriage ceases to be a sacrament. "My argument"- Gandhi asserts- "is only addressed to those who regard marriage as a sacrament, and a woman not an instrument of animal pleasure, but a mother of man and trustee of the virtue of her progeny." In his view physical union except for the purpose of progeny is a criminal waste of the vital fluid and criminal waste of precious energy. As Gandhi says, it is now easy to understand why the scientists of old have put such great value upon the vital fluid, and they have insisted upon its strong transmutation into the highest form of energy for the benefit of society. They boldly declare that one, who has acquired a perfect control over his or her sexual energy, strengthens the whole being physical, mental and spiritual, and attains powers unattainable by any other means.¹⁰¹

All these feelings of Gandhi lead to his experiments with women to check his "ideal of truth and purity".¹⁰² In order to do this, Gandhi decided to sleep naked with his female colleagues. As Bikhu Parekh puts it "his reference (Gandhi's) to women or girls who have been naked with me in his letter to Birla in April 1945 indicates that several women were involved." Apparently

⁹⁹ Anand T Hingorani, *To the Women* (ed.), op.cit, p. 61.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 71.

¹⁰² Bikhu Parekh, *Colonialism Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhian Political Discourse*, 1989, op.cit, p. 194.

women like Susheela Narayan, Prabhavati Narayan, Abha Gandhi and Manu Gandhi were part of the experiment.¹⁰³ In 1946 Gandhi has done the experiment again with Manu Gandhi, a nineteen-year-old grand niece to him. His experiment with her began on 20th December, 1946. Gandhi writes in his diary that he got up at 12.30 a.m and woke up Manu at 12.45 am. He made her understand about her dharma and asked her to talk to her father. According to Gandhi, she could still change her mind, "but" he says, "once having taken the plunge, she would have to run the risk. She remained steadfast."¹⁰⁴

Many people have shown their dissent towards Gandhi's experiments. Sardar Patel, Vinoba Bhave, Jawaharlal Nehru and some of Gandhi's followers reacted in different ways.¹⁰⁵ But Gandhi felt that, he should not leave what he professed to be the truth. Gandhi writes to Manu Gandhi "I have successfully practiced the eleven vows undertaken by me. This is the culmination of my striving for the last sixty years. In this *yagna* it got a glimpse of the ideal of truth and purity for which I have been striving."¹⁰⁶ There are also certain instances where he felt that it is because of some sort of impurity in him, his concept of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) has failed in practice. This could be one of the reasons for his experiments according to Bikhu Parekh.¹⁰⁷

The above description of Gandhi's ideas regarding masculinity and femininity reveals the impact of personal life over the political life and the

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 190-191.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 192.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 195.

impact of political life over the personal life too. The analysis following tries to trace out the ideology behind Gandhi's ideas and also opens up a discussion from the gender perspective.

II

Understanding the construction of gender in Gandhian thought needs an in-depth analysis. Any superficial argument leads to a simplistic conclusion. Whether it is about 'Gandhi drawing women into the public' or it is about, 'Gandhi experimenting with women'. In fact analyzing Gandhi from a gender perspective becomes a very complex task. From Madhu Kishwar's sympathetic justifying perspective to Sudhir Kakar's psychoanalytic perspective, many critics have analysed the Gandhian concept of women. From peace studies to eco-feminist studies Gandhi is made to be a seminal personality.

As earlier stated most of the time, the academicians have forgotten the Gandhian construction of masculinity. Gandhi, parallel to the construction of femininity, constructs masculinity too. But the reflecting ideology behind his concepts of masculinity and femininity comes from his deep-rooted Hindu religious ideas. Whether, it is Gandhi's repeated examples of mythical heroines or it his constant illustrations of chastity, purity and virginity or it is his concept of *Brahmacharya* the ideology behind them is Hinduism.

For Madhu Kishwar, Sita, Damayanti and Draupadi were the ideals of Indian womanhood that Gandhi repeatedly invoked as inspirations for the downtrodden women of India. She also argues that Sita or Draupadi of Gandhi

was not the commonly accepted lifeless stereotypes of subservience.¹⁰⁸ However, she fails to understand the underlying ideology behind his ideal of womanhood. If one clearly observes Gandhi's ideas on women, one can easily understand that a woman is a 'better half', helpmate' 'caretaker', 'mother of man', 'queen of the house', 'sister', 'daughter', and etc. The qualities of this 'mother of man' are 'silent suffering', 'nonviolence', 'spirituality', 'reforming tendency' and 'public service' (if she is a widow or a prostitute). In entire Gandhi's ideology a woman is never an individual human being. If she is an individual human being, it is under the spirituality, she can reject the family or husband as Mira Bai has rejected for the sake of spirituality, as she claimed 'God alone is my husband'. Gandhi asks woman to be like Sita, who is a virtuous mythical heroin, who followed her husband silently and who went on to the pyre to 'prove her chastity'. Yet, Gandhi claims that 'Sita was not a slave of Rama' because of her virtue, Ravana could not dare to touch her.

Gandhi also takes off from a myth of 'superior Indian womanhood' of the ancient Indian and Vedic periods. Hence he talks of 'regeneration' of Indian womanhood to reach their 'prototypes' like Sita, Savitri, Daraupadi that were 'pure' and 'firm'. Infact the entire nationalist discourse on woman is based on this 'regeneration' of 'Indian womanhood'. As earlier discussed, in the first chapter the nationalist discourse and colonial discourse on women have dealt the question of 'upper caste Hindu woman' as the Indian woman and women in India as a homogenized category. A Gandhian conception of woman is definitely an uppercaste, Hindu, middle class woman. This reveals that Gandhi has not actually departed from 19th century social reformers

¹⁰⁸

Madhu Kishwar, "Gandhi on Women", op.cit, pp. 1691.

whereas, Madhu Kishwar argues that Gandhi's ideas about women and their role in public life was a departure from those of the 19th century reformers.¹⁰⁹

The concept of 'chastity', 'purity', 'virginity' for women are based on the hegemonic discourse on women from ancient societies to contemporary societies. Perhaps this ideology leads to the most dangerous form of suppression, where women themselves control their sexualities. According to Uma Chakravarti the concepts of *stridharma* and *pativrata dhrama* places women's sexuality at the ideological level. She argues that pativrata dhrama is the masterstroke of Hindu Aryan genius. As she says it is one of the most successful ideologies constructed by any patriarchal system in which women themselves controlled their own sexuality.¹¹⁰ The reflection of brahminical patriarchy can be seen in Gandhi's ideal of womanhood. Gandhi not only idealizes Hindu woman, but also essentialises and naturalizes her. In his opinion, all those qualities which are attributed to women are very natural, inherent qualities. For Gandhi, women are naturally 'non-violent', naturally 'self-sacrificing' and naturally 'suppress themselves'. He also naturalizes women as mothers, daughters, sisters and better halves. One cannot deny Gandhi's impact on particular sections of women in the nationalist movement, but this should not be a justification for his ideology.

Gandhi clearly draws a line between man and woman, between 'active' and 'passive', between 'outward' and 'inward activities' and if a woman is

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 1691.

¹¹⁰ Uma Chakravarti, "Conceptualising Brahminical Patriarchy, in early India: Gender, Caste, Class and State", Research in Progress Papers (History and Society, 2nd series Number. XXX, N.M.C, New Delhi, 1993), p. 27.

becoming the leader in the 'non-violent movement', it is because of her naturally non-violent, passive, spiritually superior nature. He also asserts that the different spheres of work between men and women is because of the division of labour. And for this reason, their educational spheres also should be different. From a gender perspective, one can argue that all this attributed qualities of women and the division of labour, is not natural, but socially constructed and imposed on women, where they will be denied their freedom of choice. Some might argue that Gandhi is talking about differences between men and women. As there is a growing importance for the concept of differences in the contemporary society, one should be cautious in attributing this contemporary discourse on differences, which discusses the differences between individuals and differences between different social structures like class, caste, community, race gender etc., in order to create the equal opportunities, but definitely not to naturalize and essentialise the inequalities. But the Gandhian argument of differences naturalizes and also homogenizes the differences where certain sections are denied equality of opportunities. This is not to say that Gandhi was unaware of the fact that men have dominated the 'organized sector' doing the same, so called women's works, like cooking tailoring etc. In Gandhi's opinion this is equality of sexes, but one has to recognize the fact that wherever paid labour is there, men have dominated and for the same labour women will be unpaid or less paid.

As earlier stated, Gandhi has the myth of women's superiority in the Vedic period and ancient period and he feels that it was degenerated afterwards as he uses the phrases like 'somehow or the other women became inferior' and 'nobody knows since when'. As discussed in the first chapter, a 'Vedic woman'

means 'an upper caste Hindu woman' but not the 'Vedic dasi'.¹¹¹ And even if it is the question of 'uppercaste Hindu woman', it is a discussion about her 'status' whether it is high or low but not about the gender relations and the nature and basis of the subordination of women. In this context, one has to realize the fact that the subordination of women is a common feature of almost all stages of history.¹¹² The books that Gandhi has used to convey his message to women are brahmanical texts like *Bhagavad Gita*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. One has to recognize the fact that the construction of women by brahmanical texts is to suppress her either by coercive measures or by ideological domination. As Uma Chakravarti argues, it is important to note that in brahminical texts, the upper caste Hindu woman is the object of moral panic. This does not mean to conclude that Gandhi has represented brahminical patriarchy as it is. Gandhi definitely is a 'reformer' in his own way. Gandhi opposes the domination of man over women by coercive measures, but his underlying ideology directly leads to the ideological subordination of women. It is very simplistic to argue that 'Gandhi has made women as superior to man, not even as an equal.' The duality of Hinduism either tried to show woman as superior or inferior to man but never as an equal individual. Here, she is superior in her 'virtue', superior in her 'purity', superior in self-sacrificing' 'superior in spiritual activities', but superior not beyond these qualities Gandhi himself claims that he is a *Sanatani Hindu*. As he says "I call myself a Sanatani Hindu. I am a reformer through and through, but the zeal never takes me to the rejection of

¹¹¹ Uma Chakravarti, "Whatever happened to Vedic dasi"? In Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (ed.), *Recasting Women: essays in colonial History* (Kali for women, New Delhi, 1989), p. 27.

¹¹² Uma Chakravarti, "Conceptualising Brahminical Patriarchy" op.cit, p. 1.

any of the essential things of Hinduism.”¹¹³ These words of Gandhi in fact give the essence of his construction of masculinity as well as femininity.

It is important to notice the similarities and dissimilarities in Gandhi's ideas while he is criticizing different systems like child marriage, widowhood, purdah system and prostitution. If it is the question of child marriage, Gandhi's ideas are to certain extent radical. As Gandhi himself was married at the age of thirteen and suffered because of the custom of child marriage, he severely attacks the system. In his opinion the *Sarada Act* should increase the age for marriage from 14 to 18. But most of the times, he does not give importance to legal acts. According to him, 'public opinion' should be developed against certain oppressive systems and customs and that is the only solution. One has to realize the importance of this argument that the steps towards transformation should come from the civil society and only legal acts are not sufficient. But, as long as the state exists, it has to provide certain legal protection to particular oppressed sections where the 'public opinion' might just turn against the suppressed sections. As earlier stated, while criticizing child marriage, Gandhi also criticizes Sanskrit texts by saying that the 'Sanskrit texts of doubtful authority cannot be involved to sanctify a practice which is in itself immoral'.¹¹⁴ Gandhi advises parents not to get their children married when they are very young and to give importance to the individual choice of men and women. He also advocates young men to refuse parents' wish if it is a child marriage. This advice of Gandhi shows that he is very radical in

¹¹³ Young India 6-10-1921, "Why I am a Hindu" Cited in *Truth is god*. [comp] R.K. Prabhū, op.cit, pp. 69-71.

¹¹⁴ Young India, 27-8-1925. Cited in *Women and Social Injustice*. op.cit., p. 32.

condemning child marriages. Gandhi's opinions regarding Hindu widowhood and the purdah system have got similarities between them. While arguing against enforced widowhood and the purdah system Gandhi is parallelly constructing an ideal, chaste woman who voluntarily becomes widow and who rejects the purdah but cultivates 'chastity' on her own. As he says 'voluntary widowhood is a priceless boon', 'voluntary widowhood adds grace and dignity to life', 'widowhood has a sacred place in Hinduism', 'a real Hindu widow is a treasure' etc. reveals the ideological 'enforced widowhood' by Gandhi. A very common understanding of Hinduism also reveals the suppression of Hindu widow to a maximum extent, where she cannot hold her individuality, where seeing her itself is considered inauspicious, and she literally becomes a slave at home. Any understanding of Hinduism does not say that 'she is a priceless boon' or 'she has a sacred place'. He also has the same myth about ancient India as he says 'the ancient Hindu widow was never in the wretched condition'. This, however, needs further exploration. This sentence of Gandhi anyway reveals that he was aware of the condition of the Hindu widow. Then from where does the idealization of Hindu widow come? True, that Gandhi advocates widow remarriage 'to a certain extent'. But the purpose behind this is that 'imposed widowhood' 'destabilises the home by secret vice'. Gandhi argues that when a 50 year old man can remarry with 'impunity' why not a widow of the same age. Gandhi's argument goes on to make clear that in his opinion, 'both will be sinning by remarriage'. A simplistic argument in this matter can hold that Gandhi placed on par man and woman's impurity. This does not in any way legitimize his concept of purity for women. One has to understand the meaning and purpose behind the entire concept of purity, especially for women. Women were always valued in terms of purity and

impurity, in terms of 'virginity' and 'spoilt women'. In fact, as earlier stated, the extreme form of suppression of women comes from this angle.

Similar to the argument against widowhood, Gandhi argues against the purdah system also. In his opinion, chastity cannot be superimposed and should grow from within. So, purdah system should not exist. He also gives the examples to counter the purdah system by saying that in the age when the 'proud Draupadi' and 'spotless Sita' lived, there could be no purdah. This myth of the golden age was created by 19th century social reformers and was carried forward through Gandhi. As earlier stated, when Gandhi is criticizing particular oppressive systems, he is equally constructing different ideological oppressive systems.

Another important issue that Gandhi has widely discussed is prostitution. Gandhi's highly moralistic as well as male dominated view can be seen here. The very name, that he has given them is a value loaded one, i.e. 'Fallen sisters'. Gandhi out rightly rejected their joining the Congress. The reason for this is that, they are 'impure', 'they are more dangerous than thieves', 'they steal the virtue', hence, they cannot become the 'true office bearers of the Congress'. Their manifesto is an 'obscene manifesto' for Gandhi. It is important to recognize that, whenever Gandhi criticizes particular oppressive systems, he did talk about the male domination, he did criticize the suppression of woman by man. But his advices will be targeting women through the dominant ideological discourse. Here, the already marginalised sections will be pushed towards extreme marginalization. In almost all his discussions, one can also recognize that Gandhi has the myth of 'ideal villages' in mind. As he discusses about the prostitution, he says that 'the people who live in villages,

which are purely agricultural, were not touched by the 'vice'. He also believes that this profession became 'rampant' after the British rule. Before it was 'confined' to the 'few upper ten'. This reveals that Gandhi is addressing the gender issues from colonial context and the immediate aim is to attack 'colonialism' and to show the East as unproblematic.

Another important issue that Gandhi has constantly discussed and reiterated the same opinion on, the issue of 'how to 'protect' women's 'honour'. His constant reply for the question that what should a woman do if somebody is attacking her sexually is that she should fight with 'God Gifted' 'nails' and 'teeth', should not use any arms and should be ready to die in order to protect her 'virtue'. Gandhi gives the example of Sita and feels that it is impossible to 'violate' a woman against her will. He goes to the extent to find out ways of how she should die. Initially, it was 'by choking' or by 'biting the tongue', after that it was by 'taking poison', and then it was by 'finding out certain yogic practices for ending life'. Analyzing Gandhi at this particular juncture becomes a very complex task. Is it just an 'age old patriarchal bias' as Madhu Kishwar says?¹¹⁵ A keen observation of Gandhian ideology regarding women reveals the fact that his concept of non-violence and his concept of 'women's virtue' merged together. Analyzing this issue from the Gandhian perspective becomes very easy. Gandhi advocates non-violence, he values 'purity' and hence he asks a woman to die instead of surrendering. But, if one analyses from the gender perspective, one has to see the effect of this advice on women. The practical aspect of this advice can become extremely dangerous to women, where a woman is 'valued' in terms of her 'chastity', 'purity' and 'virginity' as

¹¹⁵ Madhu Kishwar, "Gandhi on Women", *Economic and Political Weekly*, op.cit, pp. 1691.

earlier discussed. Gandhi also has the opinion that it is very easy for a woman to die. It is important to understand Gandhi's deep rooted patriarchal, male oriented argument here. This is not even marginalising women. This is suppression of women to the core. Another important factor to be noticed here is that in spite of his applying the purity concept to both men and women, he never advises a man to die.

The Gandhian understanding of Hindu marriage reveals that Gandhi idealizes and legitimizes the Hindu marriage system. A close examination of the Hindu marriage rituals reveals the unequal state of man and woman. Practices like *Kanyadan*, *Saptapadi*, circumambulation of fire, showing polar star are some of the examples for this. For example, the significance behind showing the star of *Arundhati* (Polar star) is to tell the bride that she should be steadfast like a stone and the polar star, not deviating from the right path and be calm and ready to suffer in silence.¹¹⁶ Discussing the ritual of *Kanyadan*, Sushila Mehta argues that the very concept of *Kanyadan* relegates the status of the women to chattel. She points out that after the *Kanyadan* the bride's future role, as homemaker is associated with great prestige. The bride is the one who will give her husband a progeny to continue the line to free himself of the debt to ancestors and to support him in old age.¹¹⁷ A close observation of Gandhi's ideas on marriage reveals the fact that he glorifies and sanctifies Hindu rituals. Gandhi also romanticizes the relationship of wife and husband in Hinduism. His ideal wife and husband are Sita and Rama. He stresses that Hinduism regards husband and wife as absolute equals to each other. When a young man

¹¹⁶ Dr. Sushila Mehta, *Revolution and Status of Women in India*, (Metropolitan, New Delhi, 1982), p. 39.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

criticizes Hinduism for making the women subordinate, ... argument by saying that it is a 'hysterical generalization' and says that millions of Hindu wives live in perfect peace and are queens in their own homes. According to Gandhi, the facility of divorce is of no use and other legal remedies are even worse because they make the reform of the husband very difficult. This understanding of Gandhi legitimizes the existing inequalities and the subordination of women. It is a woman's right to have the rights like divorce and right to maintenance, in a male dominated society.

Gandhi's path-breaking analysis comes from his understanding of male domination and criticism of the male attitude towards women. He constantly argues that in Hindu society the husband does not consider himself under any obligation to consult his partner's wishes and the husband regards his wife as his property. He often argues that women are not the property or cattle of men. He also severely criticizes the male attitude that considers women as sex objects. Gandhi does not use the word sex object. But his constant advice to men is not to see women as the objects of lust. This is one major aspect that the contemporary feminists often emphasize. Whether it is the question of child marriage or of widowhood or of prostitution, every time, Gandhi emphasizes this particular aspect. The 'objectification' of women is a major suppression by the male dominated society that was often correctly pointed out by Gandhi. But the only problem is that he asks men to consider women as their mothers, sisters and daughters. This is quite problematic because these stereotypical roles for women do not allow to look at them as individuals and independent human beings, where she always is recognized in relation to man. But Gandhi's constant emphasis on the transformation of men and analysis of the violence, which constitutes male sexual desire and his criticism regarding

this, becomes very important from the contemporary feminist perspective.¹¹⁸ But this does not in anyway justify Gandhi's legitimization of the Hindu marriage system, which is very oppressive for women. His legitimization of the brahmanical marriage system and idealization of Sanskrit texts reveal the underlying brahmanical patriarchy in his thought. The Gandhian construction of femininity thus can be seen from his social, political and economic ideas about women. On the other hand Gandhi equally constructs masculinity too, with his concept of celibacy (*Brahmacharya*). He opines that sex is only for progeny and married people should practice *Brahmacharya* after procreation. He views 'physical union' except for the purpose of progeny is a 'criminal waste of vital fluid' and 'criminal waste of precious energy'. The concept of *Brahmacharya* is anyway deep rooted in Hinduism but usually advocated as a phase in the life cycle. His ideas of 'fluid' (Semen) being converted to energy, sex as mere work of procreation, have their bases in Hinduism. The Gandhian construction of masculinity also equally controls male sexuality. He was not the first person to talk about celibacy. Vivekananda's major discourse also was on celibacy. But as Janaki Nair and Mary E. John argue, Gandhian politics gave celibacy a new charge. They say that male celibacy has been valorized as an indisputable (upper caste) ideal in Gandhian politics.¹¹⁹ If one observes the Gandhian construction of male and female sexualities one can realize that Gandhi has discussed sexuality from the male point of view. As Bikhu Parekh argues Gandhi was convinced that female sexuality was not as intense and powerful as male, that women were generally able to cope with it better and

¹¹⁸ Mary E. John and Janaki Nair (ed.), *A Question of Silence: the Sexual Economies of Modern India* (Kali for Women, New Delhi 1998), p. 16.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

that in all sexual encounters whether in marriage or outside it, the male was the aggressor.¹²⁰ Infact a deep observation of Gandhi's ideas on women reveals that the ideal woman as portrayed by Gandhi is a de-sexualised woman. Sudhir Kakar analyses this from a psychoanalytical point of view and says that consciously Gandhi associates male sexuality with unheeding, lustful violence and female sexuality with a passive, suffering acceptance of the male onslaught. He points out that unconsciously Gandhi's perception of masculine violence and feminine passivity seems to be reversed. This is evident in Gandhi's description of his few erotic encounters with women. After understanding Gandhian construction of male and female sexualities, it is important to notice that, as Sudhir Kakar argues, according to Gandhi, the solution to the root problem between the sexes is a thoroughgoing desexualization of the male-female relationship.¹²¹

Coming to Gandhi's experiments with women to check his purity, one does not know the personal feelings and opinions of the female participants of the experiments. N. K. Bose, who is Gandhi's interpreter-secretary, criticized Gandhi, because he had not taken any account either of its deleterious effects on Manu or of the jealousy and hysteria it aroused in the other women around him, who all felt possessive about him and feared rejection.¹²² Gandhi's relationships with Prema Kankak and Mira Behn reveals this point. Analyzing the letters between them, Sudhir Kakar says that by the letters, one can recognize Gandhi's effort simultaneously to increase the intimacy with the

¹²⁰ Bikhu Parekh, *Colonialism Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhian Political Discourse*, op.cit, p. 182.

¹²¹ Sudhir Kakar, *Intimate Relations*, p. 125.

¹²² Bikhu Parekh, *Colonialism Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhian Political Discourse*, op.cit, p. 192.

correspondent and to withdraw if the woman wished for a nearness that crossed the invisible line he had drawn for both of them.¹²³ The important point that one has to realize is the need to open a serious debate in the academia regarding Gandhi's personal relationships with women from a gender perspective. The general attitude of academia on this point is their embarrassment to discuss about all his ideas and experiments with women. This is not to take a judgmental position about Gandhian experiments, which needs an in-depth analysis especially from the women's side. What are their feelings and what is the effect of these experiments on them? It was 'checking the purity' for Gandhi, what was it for women, is the question now.

The fact that Gandhi inspired women should not be taken as the justification either for his ideas on women or for his experiments. Before concluding this chapter, one has to see the impact of Gandhi on women's participation in political movements, which is an undeniable fact. As stated earlier, the historical context behind the ideas of Gandhi is the colonial context. His basic idea behind his preaching to women is aimed at throwing the British Rule out. Almost in all his ideas one can see that Gandhi has constructed an alternative to counter the British Rule, to counter the West by 'constructing Hindu womanhood' or by 'constructing the East as 'good'. But, ultimately it targeted women, legitimized gender - discrimination and naturalized their roles. Women in this discourse of colonialism Vs nationalism became victims. Here, nobody knows about women's voices and what they wanted and even if they have spoken, it was suppressed. The best example for this is Pandita Ramabai who was ignored by the academia, she can be called one of the early feminists of India, and has written about the suppression of Hindu women, in

¹²³ Sudhir Kakar, *Intimate Relations*, op.cit, p. 109.

her book called *The High Caste Hindu Woman*. Gandhi's construction of 'Hindu womanhood' in order to counter the West cannot become the justification for his male dominated, uppercaste Hindu orientation.¹²⁴ One can see this particular ideology throughout his ideas. Yet, there was a change in his ideas to the extent that women got [made] a space to join the nationalist movement. After his return from South Africa in 1915, Gandhi entered the nationalist movement. And most of his ideas on women were expressed between 1915 to 1947. Women did participate in the non-cooperative movement, civil disobedience movement and Quit India movement. There are hundreds of women who were fascinated by Gandhi, inspired by Gandhian charisma. But, this fact does not lead to the simplistic argument that 'Gandhi brought women into the public'. There was a past history where women already started protesting for their rights, before the nationalist movement started. If one observes women's history, one can know that nationalist movement came in the middle, but not as the starting point for women's assertion of rights. In this connection, Geraldine Forbes points out that nationalist historians have concluded that Gandhi brought women into public life and gave them the tools to solve their problems.¹²⁵ She counters this argument by saying that women were already there and Gandhi gave them a blueprint for action. She asserts that it is equally important to notice that Gandhi assured their husbands and fathers that these politically active women would not rebel against the family. In her opinion, feminist demands for equality with men were never fully integrated into the nationalist programme,

¹²⁴ Sujatha Patel, "Construction and reconstruction of woman in Gandhi" op.cit, pp. 12-13.

¹²⁵ Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India: Women in Modern India*, op.cit., p. 2.

even though nationalism was feminized.¹²⁶ In this connection, it is important to note that Gandhi refused to support the 'votes for women' campaign in the 'nationalist period'. He asked the women to take their proper place by the side of men and specified that he would not support the campaign on 'votes for women'.¹²⁷

There are problems with arguments like, those of Ashis Nandy's, that Gandhi countered the masculine colonialism with feminine nationalism¹²⁸ and that Gandhi made women superior to men. Since this leads to the naturalization of femininity as well as masculinity. Here, both masculinity and femininity become mere "representational phenomena." As Uma Chakravarty points out, this projection of gender ignores gender as a "material and ideological arrangement."¹²⁹ One has to recognize that woman as superior or inferior is always kept under control and both superiority and inferiority suppressed women, in different manners. An in-depth study of the nationalist movement reveals that women's history became a 'contributory history'. According to Kiran Saxena, Gandhi's ideal society is based on humanitarian values which envisages exploitation-free life and socio-political and economic equality.¹³⁰ She opines that politics and social life have always been associated with masculinity and it was Gandhi who associated politics with femininity.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 100.

¹²⁸ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, op.cit, pp. 52-53.

¹²⁹ Uma Chakravarty, *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai* (Kali for women, New Delhi, 1998), p. X.

¹³⁰ Kiran Saxena, "Gandhi's Feminist Politics, Gender Equity and Patriarchal Values", in *Journal of Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti* (Volume 2, Number 6, 108, New Delhi, October 1997), p. 60.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 58.

It is very true that Gandhi had a vision of ideal society where all human beings are essentially good, where everyone co-operates with the other, and where truth and non-violence will be the basic principles. But this ideal society neither problematizes the structural domination nor deconstructs the systematic exploitations. In his ideal society, *Varnashrama Dharma* prevails, femininity is naturalized and glorified and the ideological subordination of women reaches its core, and still how is it that this ideal society is going to be exploitation - free? If it is the question of 'feminization of politics' one cannot really essentialize the hegemonic construct of 'femininity' in the name of 'feminization of politics', which is equally problematic. The very purpose of speaking about gender as a socially constructed category is to say that it is not natural. And if one is speaking about the deconstruction of 'masculinity' one is also speaking about the deconstruction of femininity too.

However, a discussion on Gandhian construction of gender reveals the complexities in analyzing and theorizing it. This needs much more exploration and still deeper analysis. Any judgmental position on Gandhi, either about his 'success' or about his 'failure' traps the critic immediately and leads to simplistic conclusions. One has to recognize the importance, problems and above all, complexities of the Gandhian construction of gender, before arriving at any conclusions.

After analyzing Gandhi, one could analyze Ambedkar's concept of gender, as he is Gandhi's contemporary as a political thinker but differed with Gandhi in many aspects.

CHAPTER III

AMBEDKARIAN DISCOURSE ON GENDER

The mainstream academic debates have never focused on Ambedkar's discourse on gender. Unfortunately neither feminist scholars nor Dalit scholars seem to be very interested in Ambedkar's discourse in this regard. In a recent article Pratima Pardeshi¹ tries to analyse and open up a serious debate regarding this. She locates Ambedkar in the non-brahminical path of women's liberation. Eleanor Zelliott² and P. G. Jogdand³ try to show the Dalit women's participation in Ambedkarian movement. Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar literally explored the participation of Dalit women in Ambedkarian movement and the impact of Ambedkar on Dalit women by saying that "we made history too".⁴ But interestingly enough, none of these scholars have opened an extensive discussion on Ambedkar's views on the Hindu Code Bill expressed in the Parliament sessions between 1947 and 1951.

As stated in the second chapter one should know the thinkers' views as they are, in order to analyse and also criticise from a gender perspective. It is

¹ Pratima Pardeshi, "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and the question of women's liberation in India" (Trans.), (Women's Studies Centre, University of Pune, Pune 1998).

² Eleanor Zelliott, "Dr. Ambedkar And the Empowerment of Women" Seminar paper presented in *Ambedkar in Retrospect* (a national seminar conducted in J.N.U., New Delhi, August 27-29, 1998).

³ P.G.Jogdand, "Dr. Ambedkar's Views on women's question" Seminar paper presented in *Ambedkar in Retrospect* (a national seminar conducted in J.N.U., New Delhi, August 27-29, 1998).

⁴ Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar, "We made history too: Women in the early untouchable liberation", in *South Asia Bulletin* (9:2, 1989), p. 68-71.

through his articles *Castes in India* which was presented in New York in 1916⁵ and *The Rise and fall of the Hindu woman*⁶ and 'The woman and the counter revolution'⁷ and especially his discussions on Hindu Code Bill⁸, introduced by him as the Law Minister, one will be able to know his vision on the women's question in India. In the following section, Ambedkar's views in this area are first described and later analysed.

Ambedkar's Analysis of Endogamy: -

In his seminar paper on *castes in India* Ambedkar tries to explore the relationship between endogamy and the oppressive customs like sati, enforced widowhood and girl marriage. Analysing the concept of endogamy he opines that castes in India prevented their fusing into one another through the custom of endogamy. "Endogamy"- he asserts -"is the only characteristic that is peculiar to caste." He explains that the genesis and mechanism of caste has its base in endogamy.⁹

⁵ B.R. Ambedkar, *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* (Bheem patrika publications, Jalandhar 1977). A paper presented by Ambedkar in Anthropology Seminar of Dr. A.A. Goldenweizer at Columbia University, New York on 9th May, 1916.

⁶ Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, *The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman* (Blumoon Books, New Delhi, 1999). Published in *Maha Bodhi Journal*, May-June 1952.

⁷ Vasant Moon(comp), "The woman and the counter revolution" in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (Writings and Speeches) vol.3* (Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1987).

⁸ Vasant Moon (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (Writings and Speeches) vol. 14* Part one (sections I to III), Part Two (section IV), (Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1995).

⁹ D.R. Ambedkar, *Castes in India*, op.cit, p. 8.

To explain this he gives an example of one imagined community where equal number of sexes exist. As he says “the problems of caste ultimately resolves itself into one of repairing the disparity between the marriageable units of the two sexes.”¹⁰ He explains that the communities try to maintain the equal number of men and women in order to restore the endogamy. In these circumstances, in a couple if the man dies his wife will be the surplus woman (widow) and if the woman dies her husband will become the surplus man (widower). For the problem of surplus woman if the community is not able to dispose her off she might violate the endogamy through inter marriage. To prevent this the first way of disposing her off is burning her on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband and getting rid of her. But it seems to be impracticable sometimes and even if it is an easy solution, it can be a hard realization.¹¹ So Ambedkar explains that if she is not disposed off she remains in the group and in her very existence lies a double danger. She either may marry outside the caste and violate endogamy or she may marry within the caste and reduce the chance of potential brides within the caste. So to prevent the problems the second way of remedy is to enforce widowhood on her for the rest of her life. But this also might lead to immoral conduct. To prevent this she can be degraded to a condition in which she is no longer a source of allurements.¹²

For the problem of a surplus man (widower) the community’s treatment is different from its’ treatment of surplus women, this because of man’s traditional superiority. To put it in Ambedkar’s words, “from time

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹² Ibid., p. 12-13.

immemorial man as compared with woman has had the upper hand. He is a dominant figure in every group and of the two sexes has greater prestige. With this traditional superiority of man over woman his wishes have always been consulted. Woman, on the other hand, has been an easy prey to all kinds of inequitable injunctions, religious, social or economic. But man as a maker of injunctions, is most often above them all.” Hence, the community does not burn him with his deceased wife. Ambedkar gives two reasons for this: - (i) simply because he is a man, (ii) by that a sturdy soul is lost to the caste.¹³ It can force him to remain as a widower, but given human nature, this solution is a difficult one to be expected.¹⁴ Now if he remains in the group it will be a danger to the morals of the group. In order to prevent this, the community should provide a wife from within the caste. This is also difficult because of the equal number of sexes and in this community there always exist enough marriageable women for the marriageable men. So in these circumstances the community will provide a wife for him by bringing a bride who is not yet marriageable from a group which is socially lower than this group. Ambedkar explains that this is the best possible solution for the problem of surplus man. He says that by doing this the man is kept within the caste and the numerical depletion through constant outflow is guarded against, and also endogamy and morals are preserved.¹⁵

In this connection Ambedkar asserts that any superficial observer can notice three singular uxorial customs in Hindu society viz. (i) sati or the burning of the widow on the funeral pyre of her deceased husband (ii) enforced

¹³ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 15.

widowhood by which a widow is not allowed to remarry (iii) girl marriage.¹⁶ He compares compulsory widowhood with a milder form of burning.¹⁷ In his opinion there is no scientific explanation for the origin of these customs. The ideology which honours these customs does not tell the reason for practicing them.¹⁸ Ambedkar interprets that these customs were honoured because they were practiced and the eulogisation is needed to create the structure of caste. All these customs existed to solve the problem of surplus woman and surplus man in a caste and to maintain its endogamy. He argues that "strict endogamy could not be preserved without these customs, while caste without endogamy is a fake."¹⁹

Gender Question - Hinduism Vs Buddhism

In his article *The rise and fall of the Hindu woman* Ambedkar tries to explore the position of woman in Hinduism and Buddhism and supports Buddhism for its treatment of men and women as equals. He also tries to emphasize the position of women in pre-Manuvian days and posits Manu as responsible for degrading women. Ambedkar writes this article basically to support Lama Govinda's article viz. "The position of women in Hinduism and Buddhism" which was a rejoinder to an article published in *Eve's weekly*, which says that Buddha was responsible for the downfall of women in India.

Buddha was attacked for his statement which appears in a Buddhist text called *Mahaparinibbana sutta*. Buddha's answer to his disciple Ananda's

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.17.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

question “how are we (men) to conduct ourselves, with regard to womankind” is, “As not seeing them, Ananda.” The second question follows, “But if we should see them, what are we to do?” Buddha replies “Not talking, Ananda.” Ananda again asks “But if they should speak to us, Lord, what are we to do?” Buddha stresses “Keep wide awake Ananda.”²⁰ Analysing this charge against Buddha, Ambedkar argues that this statement could be a later interpolation by *Bhikkhus*. He explains that since it is important to preserve their rule of celibacy, monks must have attributed this statement to Buddha.²¹ In his opinion an observation of Buddha’s and Ananda’s conduct reveals that this statement is very contrary to their general behaviour towards women.²² He constantly gives illustrations in support of Buddha and tries to substantiate his argument. Some of the arguments run as follows: “Buddha did advise the *Bhikkhus* not to make it a habit to visit families of lay disciples for fear of human weakness yielding to frequent contacts with women. But he did not forbid such visits nor did he express any disdain about women as such”²³ and “it is also true that the Buddha was dreadfully keen in maintaining celibacy. He was painfully aware of the fact that, to use his own words, “Women doth stain life of celibacy”. But what did he advice? Did he advise the *Bhikkhus* to shun all contact with women? Not at all. He never put any such interdict. Far from doing any such thing what he did was to tell the *Bhikkhus* that whenever they met any woman, do ye call up the mother-mind, the sister-mind or the

²⁰ Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, *The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman*, op.cit, p. 1.

²¹ Ibid., p. 2.

²² Ibid., p. 3.

²³ Ibid., p. 5.

daughter-mind as the case may be i.e., regard a woman as you would your own mother, sister and daughter.²⁴

For the argument that Buddha separated *Bhikkhuni Sangha* from *Bhikkhu Sangha* and he made *Bhikkhuni Sangha* to subordinate to *Bhikkhu Sangha*, Ambedkar gives two reasons. First, he says that because Buddha knows the force of the sexual instinct he separated both Sanghas in order to preserve his rule of celibacy. And secondly, Ambedkar opines that in order to educate the 'raw women' who joined the Sangha, about their doctrine and to train them in Buddhist discipline, he made this arrangement. He explains that it was a teacher-student relationship and in any such kind of relationship some authority might exist. He compares it with Christian nunneries subordinating the monasteries and asserts that nobody can say because of this reason that Christianity treats women as inferior to men.²⁵

According to Ambedkar Buddha did not degrade women. Instead, "Buddha tried to ennoble women and to elevate them." Emphasizing this point he gives certain examples such as; Buddha tells king Prasenjit, who feels bad for his daughter's birth, is that he should not feel sorry for it, because she might prove herself as a better person than a man by growing up wise and virtuous and the boy that she bears might become a great ruler. At some other point Buddha explains to the monks that exercising authority over a woman or a man is immoral. Ambedkar also refers to Buddha, who says that woman is the commodity supreme because she is of indispensable utility or because through her *Bodhisattvas* and world rulers take birth.²⁶ Further Ambedkar

²⁴ Ibid., p. 5-6.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 7-8.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

explains that brahmanic theory denied the right to acquire knowledge and right to take *Sannyas*. It is Buddha who allowed women to take *Parivraja* (monkhood). He argues that those who criticise Buddha do not realise how revolutionary this step was.²⁷ He confirms that Buddha did not discriminate women in the name of class, caste or virginity. Married or unmarried, widow or a prostitute could join Buddhism and acquire merit.²⁸

Ambedkar extensively analyses Manu and says that it was Manu who is responsible for degrading women and not Buddha. He gives examples from Manusmriti which deny women's right to read Vedas. He quotes Manu,

IX 18 women have no right to study the Vedas. That is why their Sanskaras (rites) are performed without Veda Mantras. Women have no knowledge of religion because they have no right to know the Vedas. The uttering of the Veda Mantras is useful for removing sin. As women cannot utter the Veda mantras they are as untruth is.²⁹

According to Ambedkar women occupied a high position in ancient India in pre-Manu period. In Vedic period women were entitled to *Upanayana* and they could read Vedas. Panini's *Ashtadhyai* and Patanjali's *Maha Bhashya* give the examples of women students. Ambedkar says that the stories of public disputation between Janaka and Sulabha, between Yajnavalkya and Gargi, between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi and between Sankaracharya and Vidyadhari show that Indian women in pre-Manu times could rise to the highest pinnacle of learning and education. He confirms that women did not

²⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 12. Ambedkar quotes Mrs. Rhys David's words from preface of Therigatha.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

play any role in state-craft but they occupied a high position in the intellectual and social life of the country.³⁰

As a student of history Ambedkar extensively deals with Manu. He compares the suppression of women and sudras and says that “Manu can hardly be said to be more tender to women than he was to the Sudras.”³¹ In the following, some of Manu’s rules are given as quoted by Ambedkar

11.213. It is the nature of women to seduce man in this (world). For that reason the wise are never unguarded in (the) company of females.

11.214. For women are able to lead astray in (this) world not only a fool, but even a learned man, and (to make) him a slave of desire and anger.

11.215. One should not sit in lonely place with one’s mother, sister or daughter: for the senses are powerful, and master even a learned man.

IX . 14. Women do not care for beauty, nor is their attention fixed on age (thinking), (it’s enough that) he is a man, they give themselves to the handsome and to the ugly.

IX . 15. Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness,, they become disloyal towards their husbands, however carefully they may be guarded in this (world).

³⁰ Ibid., p. 12-13:

³¹ Vasant Moon (comp), “The Woman and the Counter Revolution”, in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (Writings and Speeches)*, op.cit, p. 429.

IX .16. Knowing their disposition which the lord of creatures laid in them at the creation to be such, (every) man should most strenuously exert himself to guard them.

IX .17. (when creating them) Manu allotted to women (a love of their seat and (of) ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice, and bad conduct. ³²

Ambedkar says that all these sayings of Manu show how low women were in his opinion. He further explains that according to Manu women should not be free under any circumstances. He quotes Manu as in the following:

IX . 2. Day and night women must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their families, and if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control.

IX .3. Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never for independence.

IX .5. Women must particularly be guarded against evil inclinations however trifling they may appear; if they are not guarded, they will bring sorrow on two families.

IX .6. Considering that the highest duty of all castes, even weak husbands (must) strive to guard their wives.

V .147. By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house.³³

³² Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, *The Rise and Fall of the Hindu Woman*, op.cit, p. 13-14.

³³ Ibid., p. 14.

Manu does not give the right to divorce to a wife

IX.45. The husband is declared to be one with wife, which means that there could be no separation once a woman is married.

In this connection Ambedkar explains that generally Hindus think that Manu regarded marriage as sacrament and therefore did not allow divorce. But this law regarding divorce has altogether a different motive. The aim of this law was not to tie up a man to a woman but to tie up woman to a man and to leave the man free. As Manu says “neither by sale nor by repudiation is a wife released from her husband.” Ambedkar criticizes Manu by saying that this is a monstrous thing and Manu did not consider justice or injustice when he was framing the law regarding women. In Manu’s framework a woman does not have liberty and she is just a slave and a matter of property for a man. He quotes Manu:

IX.416. A wife, a son and a slave, these three are declared to have no property; the wealth which they earn is (acquired) for him to whom they belong.³⁴

Ambedkar describes that even if Manu allows maintenance for a widow he does not allow her to have any domination over property. Manu also gives the right to punish the wife to the husband. As Ambedkar quotes,

VII.209, A wife, a son, a slave, a pupil, and a younger brother of the full blood, who have committed faults, may be beaten with a rope or a split bamboo.

³⁴ Ibid. p. 15

Ambedkar stresses that brahmanism regards offering sacrifices as the soul of religion and Manu denies women the right to perform sacrifices prescribed by the Vedas. According to Manu if a woman performs sacrifices she will go to hell. It is also inauspicious and God will not accept it. A Brahman should not eat food given at a sacrifice performed by a woman.³⁵

Regarding the ideal Hindu woman Ambedkar quotes Manu as saying:

V.115. Him to whom her father may give her, or her brother with the father's permission, she shall obey as long as he lives and when he is dead, she must not insult his memory.

V.115. Though destitute of virtue, or seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a God by a faithful wife.

V.155. No sacrifice, no vow, no fast must be performed by women, apart from their husbands: if a wife obeys her husband, she will for that reason alone be exalted in heaven.

V.153. The husband who wedded her with sacred mantras is always a source of happiness to his wife, both in season and out of season, in this world and in the next.

V.150. She must always be cheerful, clever in the management of her household affairs, careful in cleansing her utensils and economical in expenditure.³⁶

Ambedkar explains that all these ideals of Manu are regarded as ideals for a Hindu woman in India. Another important thing to notice is that Manu regards killing women, sudras, vaishyas, kshatriyas, and atheists as a minor

³⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 16-17.

offence, and killing a brahmin as a major offence. Ambedkar explains that Manu equated both sudras and women and stood for suppressing them. He analyses that all these views existed before Manu also but as a social theory and as the views of brahmins. What Manu did was to convert the social theory into a legal theory. Another important reason for suppression of sudras and women by Manu, is to stop them from joining Buddhism. Because Buddhism treats all human beings as equals, these two sections were the main sections to join Buddhism by undermining the foundations of brahmanic religion.³⁷ To confirm this Ambedkar quotes from Manu-smriti as in the following.

V.88. Funeral rites and obsequies which are performed on the death of a person shall be withdrawn (i.e shall not be performed) from those who are born out of intermixture, from those who are addicted to asceticism and from those who have ended their lives by committing suicide.

V.89. They shall also be withdrawn from women who have joined a heretic sect, who behave too freely, who have injured a child in their womb or their husband and those who drink wine.

Ambedkar points out that asceticism here refers to *parivraja*. He says that being an opponent of Buddhism Manu wanted to stop these two sections from joining Buddhism. He argues that Manu must be knowing that to protect the home against the invasion of Buddhism it is the woman who must be put under restraint. By giving all these examples he points out that after knowing about Manu and Buddha any unprejudiced and the impartial will realize that it

³⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

was not Buddha who can be held responsible for the downfall of women but Manu.³⁸

Ambedkar also compares the position of woman in Manu's period with Kautilya's period and says that the position of woman in Kautilya's period was better than Manu's period. He explains that in the days of Kautilya, marriages were post puberty marriages. Kautilya's ideal was monogamy which was not for Manu; as Ambedkar says that in Kautilya's period man can marry more than one wife only under certain conditions. Women also could claim divorce on the grounds of mutual enmity and hatred and there was no ban on woman or a widow remarrying in Kautilya's times. He emphasizes that Kautilya took every precaution to guarantee economic independence of a married woman and he also created provisions for the wife's endowment and maintenance. It is also evident from Kautilya's *Artha-shastra* that a wife could bring an action in a court of law against her husband for assault and defamation.³⁹ By giving all these examples Ambedkar comes to the conclusion that in pre-Manu days a woman was free and equal partner of man.⁴⁰

Another important issue that Ambedkar has extensively discussed on gender question is the issue of the Hindu Code Bill. Being the Law minister in Nehru's cabinet he introduced the Bill on 11th April 1947. The draft code was made by B.N.Rau committee which submitted the final report on the Bill in March 1947. This Bill was referred to the select committee again in 1948. In 1951 the parliament has decided to discuss the Bill clause by clause due to

³⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁹ Vasant Moon (ed.), "The Woman and the counter Revolution" in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (Writings and Speeches)*, p. 423-437.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 437.

severe criticisms. After the prolonged debates, only four clauses of it were cleared and the Bill was dropped by the parliament. Ambedkar expresses his dissent by resigning from the cabinet in October 1951. In the following paragraphs the important provisions of the Bill as narrated and discussed by Ambedkar in the parliament sessions is described.

In his introductory message to the Hindu Code Bill Ambedkar explains the aim of the Bill and describes the important issues that it ought to address. As he says “the aim of the Bill is to codify the rules of Hindu law which are scattered in innumerable decisions of the high courts and of the privy council which form a bewildering muddle to the common man and give rise to constant litigation, seeks to codify the law relating to the rights of property of a deceased Hindu who has died intestate without making a will, both female and male. Secondly it prescribes a somewhat altered form of the order of succession among the different heirs to the property of a deceased dying intestate. The next topic it deals with is the law of maintenance, marriage, divorce, adoption, minority and guardianship.”⁴¹

1. Law of inheritance

Ambedkar explains that regarding the law of inheritance the bill has introduced four changes which are related to women. First change is that the widow, the daughter, the widow of a pre-deceased son, all are given the same rank as the son in the matter of inheritance. The daughter also is given a share in her father's property and her share is prescribed as half of that of the son. The second change is that the number of female heirs recognised by this bill is

⁴¹ Vasant Moon (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (Writings and Speeches) vol. 14, Part One (Section I to IV)* (Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1995), p. 5.

much larger than under the *Mitakshara* or the *Dayabhaga*.⁴² Ambedkar emphasizes that under the old law, whether it is the *Mitakshara* or the *Dayabhaga*, a discrimination was made among female heirs. By the third change the discrimination regarding the female heirs is abolished. According to this Bill a woman who has a right to inherit gets it by reason of the fact that she is declared to be a heir irrespective of any other considerations. The last change is related to the rule of inheritance in the *Dayabhaga*. Under the *Dayabhaga* the father succeeds before in preference to the mother, under this bill the position is altered so that the mother comes before the father.

Explaining the property held by a Hindu woman, Ambedkar narrates that it falls into two categories. One is called her *stridhan*, and the other is called as “woman’s property”. If it is the question of *stridhan*, it falls into several categories. One change it makes is that it consolidates the different categories of *stridhan* into one single category of property and lays down a uniform rule of succession. By the second change the son also is given a right to inherit the *stridhan* and he is given half the share which the daughter takes. He opines that it is provided that while the daughter is getting half of the share in the mother’s property in a certain sense the Bill seeks to maintain an equality of position between the son and the daughter.

Regarding the question of “woman’s estate” he explains that under the Hindu law if a woman inherits property, she gets only “a life estate”. That

⁴² Ambedkar explains that the law of inheritance is concerned with two different systems of law. one system is known as *Mitakshara* and the other is known as *Dayabhaga*. The difference between them is according to *Mitakshara* the property of a Hindu is not his individual property. It is a property, which belongs to a coparcenary which consists of father, son, grandson, and great grandson. According to *Dayabhaga* the property is held by the heir as his personal property with an absolute right to dispose it of either by gift or by will or any other manner he chooses.

means she can enjoy the income of property but she cannot deal with the corpus of the property except for legal necessity. It must pass after the death of the woman to the reversioners of her husband. This Bill makes two changes in this regard. One is that it converts the limited estate into an absolute estate. And the other is it abolishes the right of reversioners to claim the property after the widow.

Referring to the provision related to dowry, he says- "All members of the House know what a scandalous affair this dowry is; how, for instance, girls, who bring enormous lot of property from their parents either by way of dowry or *stridhan* or gift are treated, nonetheless, with utter contempt, tyranny and oppression".⁴³ In order to avoid such kind of problems the Hindu Code Bill makes a provision that the dowry shall be treated as a trust property, and the girl to whom it has given is entitled to claim the property when she reaches the age of eighteen. By this neither her husband nor the relatives of her husband will have any interest in that property. They will not have any opportunity to waste it or to make her helpless to the rest of her life.⁴⁴

2. Right to maintenance

This Bill makes a provision that the dependents of a deceased shall be entitled to claim maintenance from those who inherit his property either under the rules of intestate succession or under his will. Different kinds of dependents are recognised by this Bill. Referring to the point of including the 'concubine' in the dependent's category, Ambedkar says "it is an unfortunate

⁴³ Vasant Moon (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (Writings and Speeches)*, vol. 14, part one (sections I to IV), op.cit, p. 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6-8.

thing that even a 'concubine' is included in the category of dependents but there it is, it is a matter for consideration."⁴⁵

This Bill also deals with the right to maintenance of a wife who lives separate from her husband. He explains that under the Hindu Law a wife is not entitled to claim maintenance from her husband if she does not live with him in his house. The Bill recognises that there are, undoubtedly, circumstances where a wife lives separately. It must be for causes beyond her control and it would be wrong not to recognise the causes and not to give her separate maintenance. Hence this bill provides the right to maintenance for a wife under the reasons viz. (i) Suffering from a loathsome disease (ii) If he keeps a 'concubine' (iii) If he is guilty of cruelty (iv) If he has abandoned her for two years (v) If he has converted to another religion and (vi) Any other cause justifying her living separately.⁴⁶

3. Marriage

This Bill recognises two forms of marriage viz. sacramental marriage and civil marriage. Ambedkar asserts that this is a departure from the existing laws (in 1947), as they recognized only sacramental marriage and did not recognize the civil marriage. They also require identity of caste and sub-caste for a valid sacramental marriage. The Hindu Code Bill provides that marriage will be valid irrespective of the caste or sub-caste. This Bill prescribes monogamy where as the old law permits polygamy. According to the old Hindu Law sacramental marriage was indissoluble and there could be no divorce. This Bill makes a new departure by introducing the provision for the

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 8-9.

dissolution of marriage. It provides three remedies to get out of the contract of marriage. One is to have the marriage declared null and void, secondly to have the marriage declared invalid and thirdly to have it dissolved. It provides that a suit for the invalidation of marriage must be filed within three years from the date of the marriage, otherwise the suit will be barred and the marriage will continue as though there was no ground for invalidity. It also provides that even the marriage is declared invalid, it will not affect the legitimacy of the children born and they would continue to be legitimate just the same.⁴⁷

4. Divorce

Ambedkar explains that this Bill provides seven grounds on which divorce could be obtained (i) desertion (ii) conversion to another religion (iii) keeping a concubine or becoming a concubine (iv) incurably unsound mind (v) virulent and incurable form of leprosy (vi) venereal diseases in communicable form (vii) cruelty.⁴⁸

5. Adoption

Referring to the question of adoption Ambedkar explains that there are two new provisions that are introduced by this law. This Bill confirms that it will be necessary for the husband, if he wants to make an adoption, to obtain the consent of his wife and if there is more than one, at least the consent of one of them. Secondly it also lays down that if the widow wants to adopt, she can only do so if there are positive instructions left by the husband authorising her to adopt and in order to prevent litigation, as to whether the husband has left

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 9-10.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

instructions to his wife. The evidence of such instructions shall be either by registered deed or by a provision in the will. No oral evidence shall be admissible. The Code says that registration of the adoption should be done by a Hindu. Ambedkar explains that adoption is one of the most fruitful sources of litigation and all sorts of oral evidence is manufactured, concocted, witnesses are suborned and widows are fooled in the name of adoption. In order to prevent these problems registration is made as compulsory.⁴⁹

6. Minority and Guardianship

Regarding the question of minority and guardianship the Bill follows the previous Codes and no specific changes are made.⁵⁰

After Ambedkar has explained the major changes that the Bill brings, Naziruddin Ahmad criticises that this bill is confined to the property other than agricultural land. Answering this, Ambedkar says that there are two explanations for the non-inclusion of agricultural property. He describes that if any body refers to the schedules of the Government of India Act, where the subject matter of legislation for center and the province have been set out, will find that land is put in the “provincial list”. As a result of the judicial interpretation given by the Federal court it was held that the word “land” or item “land” which is included in the ‘provincial list’ not merely covered tenancy land but also covered succession to land, and consequently any provision with regard to the succession to land made by the central legislature should be ultravires. In order to that –Ambedkar says- this may not happened, the committee very deliberately exempted agricultural land from the provisions

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 10-11.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

of this Bill. He also says that it is an advantage, instead of a flaw or a fault, because he believes that there is no necessity that a uniform law of inheritance should apply to all sorts of property. He further explains that property varies in its nature and varies in its importance in the social life and consequently it may be a matter of no mean advantage for society to have one set of law of inheritance for agricultural property and another set of law for non-agricultural property. Ambedkar opines that it may be that on a better consideration of the situation, Indian or Hindu society may come to the conclusion that land which is the foundation of its economic life had better be governed by the law of primogeniture so that neither the junior sons nor females take part in the inheritance. He says that the question having been left open, it is to the advantage of the society that it may consider the matter *denovo* and afresh.⁵¹

Dealing with the question that the Hindu Code Bill is a communal piece of legislation, Ambedkar describes that it refers to the Hindu society, which is one of the many communities inhabiting this country. He says that in a logical sense it might well be called a communal piece of legislation. He asks "But what is the alternative?" "If the opinion is towards a common civil code, applying to all sections and all communities and all citizens without discrimination as to religion, creed or caste" -he says-"I am certainly with the opinion."⁵² He continues by saying that if the opinion is that the future society here stated would be secular had no right to legislate for a secular community, that would be a most disastrous conclusion. He explains that since this country is inhabited by many communities each one has its special laws. Because the state is desired to assume a secular character, if the opinion is that it should

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 38-39.

⁵² Ibid., p. 39.

withdraw itself from regulating the lives of the various communities, it would be undoubtedly resulting in chaos and anarchy Ambedkar confirms that he will not subscribe to this sort of proposition.⁵³

Referring to the criticism posed by Hansa Mehta that she is not satisfied with some of the provisions relating to women's rights, he explains that the Hindu society is an inert society, and it has always believed that law making is the function either of God or the 'Smriti' and it has no right to change the law. This is the reason for Hindu society remaining as it was. Hindu society has never accepted its own power and its own responsibility in moulding its social, economic and legal life. It is for the first time a big step has been taken to change it. As he says "I have not the slightest doubt in my mind that a society which has bucked up courage enough to tolerate the large step that we are asking it to take by reason of this Bill, will not hesitate to march to the goal that she (Hansa Mehta) has in mind."

Referring to the public opinion which was opposing the Bill, Ambedkar explains that this is not a question which one can decide in accordance with the opinion of the majority. Ambedkar says, when society is in a transitory stage, leaving the past, going to the future, there are bound to be opposing considerations, one pulling towards the past and one pulling towards the future and the test that we can apply is no other than the test of one's conscience. He continues "I have not the slightest doubt in my mind that the provisions of this Bill are in perfect consonance with the conscience of the community, and I have therefore, no hesitation in putting forth this measure although it may be as a matter of fact that a large majority of our countrymen do not accept it."⁵⁴

⁵³ Ibid., p. 39-40.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 46.

After the above stated discussions the Bill was referred to the select committee for changes. After the return of the Bill from the select committee, discussions went on from 11th February 1949 to 14th December 1950. In the following few pages the discussions regarding the changes made by the select committee and Ambedkar's opinions regarding them have been discussed.

Regarding the question of marriage and divorce, Ambedkar explains that, the select committee has added clauses, one relating to the restitution of conjugal rights; the other with relation to judicial separation. With regard to the right to adoption it introduced some changes. If the father changes his religion and ceased to be a Hindu, the mother has the right to give the boy to adoption. A widow also can give her son to adoption. A disability has been introduced regarding widows, that if a widow is ceased to be a Hindu she does not have the right to give her son to adoption. One of the major changes in this area is that the adopted son shall not deprive the adopting mother completely of her right of property as a result of adoption. It provides that only one half of the property of the widow will go to the adopted son. Ambedkar explains that generally as the result of the adoption, the adopted boy completely divests the widowed mother. He generally, continues the relationship with his natural family and runs away with the property instead of giving security to the mother.⁵⁵

With respect to the right to inheritance of the widows, this Bill adds a disqualification, which says that a widow on remarriage shall lose her right to inheritance. Regarding the daughter's share the original bill says that the

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 260—261.

daughters shall get a share equal to half the share of the son and the select committee changed it from one half to one full share, equal to that of the son.⁵⁶

Speaking about the major controversies that are raised in the parliament, Ambedkar explains that with regard to marriage there is no imposition from the Code and people have every right to follow their individual choice either to marry within the caste or outside the caste. Referring to another criticism that this Bill is curtailing the right of the Hindu man in having more than one wife and not curtailing the right of the Muslim man to have four wives, he gives illustrations from previous Hindu Laws and explains that many Hindu Laws prescribed monogamy and so this is not a radical or revolutionary measure.⁵⁷

Regarding the controversy of right to divorce, Ambedkar explains that sudra communities have customary divorce. Since they constitute 90% of the Hindu society, the general law should be the law of 90%. He further explains that even Smritis have given the right to divorce to women. As he says “somehow, unfortunately, unnoticed, unconsciously custom has been allowed to trample upon the text of the shastras which were all in favour of the right sort of marital relations.” He continues by saying that whatever the new principles have been introduced in the law of marriage or divorce is just and reasonable and supported by precedence not only of our shastras but the experience of the world as a whole.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 264.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 267-269.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 270

Referring to the controversy regarding the adoption rights Ambedkar asks “why there should be adoption at all?” He urges the members of the parliament – “my submission is this, that if you do want to cherish your old notions with regard to adoption at any rate make this provision that the adopted boy does not altogether deprive the mother of the property which is her mainstay.”⁵⁹

Another important analysis of Ambedkar regarding the women’s question comes from his discussion regarding women’s property. He explains the complexities of this subject. To put it in his words, so far as I have been able to study this subject, I do not think that there is any subject in the Hindu law which is so complicated, so intricate as the women’s property. “As the woman herself.”⁶⁰ If you ask the question what is *stridhan*, before answering the question, you have to ask another question and find an answer for it. You must first of all ask ‘is she a maiden’ or ‘is she a married woman’. Because what property is *stridhan* and what property is not *stridhan* depends upon the status of the woman. Certain property is *stridhan* if she has obtained it while she is a maiden, certain property is not *stridhan* if she has obtained it after marriage. Consequently, if you ask the question what is the line of inheritance to the *stridhan*, you have again to ask the question whether the *stridhan* belongs to a maiden or the *stridhan* belongs to a married woman. Because the line of succession to the *stridhan* belonging to a married woman’s property, you have again to ask the question, does she belong to the Bengal school or does she belong to the *Mitakshara* school. If you ask the question whether she

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 271-272.

⁶⁰ At this point as soon as Ambedkar says that women’s property is so complicated one of the members of the parliament says “as the woman herself” Ambedkar continues by repeating the same sentence, Ibid., p.277.

belong to the *Mitakshara* school, you will never be able to find a definite answer unless you probe further and ask whether she belongs to the *Mithila* school or the *Benares* school or some other school. This is a most complicated subject.⁶¹ He further explains that there are two categories of women's property viz. *stridhan* and widow's property. The widow's property is the property which she inherits from a male member of her family and according to the laws she can own that property only during her life time and after that it will be possessed by the reversioners of the male heir. Ambedkar states that because of all these problems the committee has decided to provide uniformity and that uniformity should recognise that the woman has the absolute property.

Countering the criticism that women will not be able to keep the property safely because they are subjects to the influence of all sorts of people and it would be dangerous to leave them with absolute property right, he argues that even Smritis were prepared to invest woman with absolute property like *stridhan* property. And in this matter she can dispose it of in any way she likes and no body raised an argument against this. The committee has made the provision of absolute property thinking that when in certain matters women are competent and intelligent to sell and dispose of their property, they must be held to be competent in respect of the disposal of other property also.⁶²

Regarding the controversy of the daughter's share he explains that even Smritis like Manusmriti and Yagnavalkya smriti have given one-fourth share to the daughter. It is because the privy council has said that the custom will override the law no change has been made in this area. Ambedkar believes that

⁶¹ Ibid., p.277.

⁶² Ibid., p.278.

otherwise women would have been enjoying at least one-fourth of the share.⁶³ He denied the argument that giving of the share to the daughter means disruption of the family by giving one example. He says, if a man has 12 sons and one daughter, and the 12 sons on the day of the death of the father immediately decide on partition and obtain a twelfth of the total property of the father, is the partition going to be much more worse, if there was a daughter the thirteenth, who also demanded a share. Then twelve shares or twelve fragments is not a better situation than thirteen fragments. He continues, "if you want to prevent fragmentation we shall have to do something else, not by the law of inheritance but by some other law, whereby property shall not be fragmented so as to become less useful from a national point of view for purposes of national production."⁶⁴ Concluding this discussion Ambedkar says that the Hindu Code Bill is not a radical measure. He asserts the need to repair Hindu society. As he says, "so far as I am concerned I am a very conservative person. Although some people may not accept that fact, I am indeed very conservative. All I say is that I am a progressive conservative" He refers to Edmund Burke's words "those who want to conserve must be ready to repair" and continues, "if you want to maintain the Hindu system, the Hindu culture, the Hindu society, do not hesitate to repair where repair is necessary. This bill asks for nothing more than repairing those parts of the Hindu system which are almost become dilapidated."⁶⁵

After the continued debates with opposition, he refers to Article 15 of the constitution which says that, "the state shall not discriminate against any

⁶³ Ibid., p. 280.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 282

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 283

citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.” He points out that those who studied Hindu law carefully will admit that apart from many defects, there are certain principles in Hindu Law which discriminate between the *savarna* castes and the sudras and between a male Hindu and a female Hindu.⁶⁶

After this the Bill was referred for clause by clause discussions. There also some of the members severely opposed it in the name that this bill is attacking the Hindu structures, and since Hindu society is an ancient society which has survived for so long, it must be good and there should be no change at all. Ambedkar counters these criticisms by asking whether survival only is enough or is it necessary to consider that the plane on which it survived is also important? He explains that when he examined the history of India, it is evident that it has survived but with the people who have been from time to time subjugated, vanquished and enslaved. He confirms that even if it adopts any thing from other religions it will never give up its social structures resulting in the enslavement of the sudras and the enslavement of women. Because of this reason the law must come to their rescue in order to move the society. Referring to the point that Hindu society has been changing, he expresses a doubt whether this change is in the direction of progress or is it a change in the other direction? Speaking about the Aryan society he says that even if there was varna system there was no caste system and it never came in the way of inter-marriages. There was also equal share of property for women in Aryan society. So whatever change has taken place in India was towards

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 771

deterioration instead of progress.⁶⁷ He confirms it by saying that “unless law makes society move, this society will not move.”⁶⁸

Speaking about the sacramental marriages he points out that it does not satisfy the basic principles of the Constitution which are liberty, equality and fraternity. He opines that one should see that all the social institutions should satisfy these principles. To put it in his own words, now, so far as your sacramental marriage is concerned, forgive me, I am quite convinced, in my own mind, that no man who examines that institution in a fair, honest and liberal spirit can come to the conclusion that our sacramental marriage satisfies either the ideal of liberty or of equality. What is the sacramental ideal of marriage? Sacramental ideal of marriage described in as few words as possible, is polygamy for the man and perpetual slavery for the woman. That is so because under no circumstances can a woman get her liberty from her husband, however bad he may be, however undesirable a person he may be. I want to put one question to the House. Are we for slavery or are we for free labour?⁶⁹ He explains that free labour means the ability and the capacity to break the contract when the necessity for breaking the contract arises. He supports the right to divorce for women and says that our ancient ideals are most archaic and impossible for anybody to practice.⁷⁰

Ultimately after the endless arguments and discussions the Hindu Code Bill was dropped by the Parliament after four clauses of it were passed. After

⁶⁷ Vasant Moon (ed.), *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (Writings and Speeches) vol. 14 Part two (Section IV)*, opcit, p. 1159-60.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1160.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1161-1162.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1162.

all his efforts to pass the Bill failed Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet on 27th October 1951. Criticizing the treatment of the Bill in the parliament, in his resignation statement, he says, “the Bill was introduced in this House on 11th April 1947. After a life of 4 years it was killed and died unwept and unsung, after four clauses of it were passed.”⁷¹

Ambedkar gives the main reason for his tenure as the law minister in the parliament by saying that it was mainly because of the Hindu Code Bill, to get it passed. As he says the Hindu Code Bill is the greatest social reform measure ever undertaken by the Legislature in this country. No law passed by the Indian legislature in the past or likely to be passed in the future can be compared to it point of its significance.⁷² He continues “to leave inequality between class and class, between sex and sex which is the soul of Hindu society untouched and to go on passing legislation relating to economic problems is to make a farce of our Constitution and to build a palace on a dung heap. This is the significance I attached to the Hindu code. It is for its sake that I stayed on notwithstanding my differences.”⁷³ He concludes by saying that “My exit from the cabinet may not be a matter of much concern to any body in this country. But I must be true to myself and that I can be only by going out.”⁷⁴

The above discussion reveals the fact that Ambedkar was conscious of the interlinks between gender and endogamy and that he was very critical

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 1323.

⁷² Ibid., p. 1325.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 1326.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 1327.

about the Hindu social structures. In the following section the significance as well as the problems with his theory on gender is discussed.

II

Ambedkar's analysis regarding the caste system and the question of endogamy as the basis for caste system becomes extremely important from a gender perspective. His analysis of endogamy explains that customs like sati, enforced widowhood, and girl marriage were practiced in order to maintain endogamy. It is very recently that this aspect of gender is being explored in Indian academia. As earlier stated in the first chapter, till recently the upper caste, upper class Hindu women were portrayed as the Indian women without dealing with the endogamy, caste, and class perspectives of gender. It is on the concept of endogamy that the caste system is constructed and it is one of the major aspects to analyze the control and the construction of women's sexuality in India. For example, an upper caste woman cannot go and marry a lower caste man. If she marries him that violates endogamy. To this extent Ambedkar's analysis becomes extremely important. But he could not analyze some of the major questions like, why is it that if an upper caste woman marries a lower caste man it is considered as a violation of endogamy and why is it that it is not considered in the same way if an upper caste man marries a lower caste woman? In the second case neither the upper caste nor the lower caste is considering it as the violation of endogamy. This point reveals the need to analyze the concept of patriarchy. Ambedkar did recognize the point that an upper caste man can marry a lower caste woman but could not analyze the reason behind it.

In this context it is very important to analyze the interconnections between patriarchy and endogamy too. For example the act of a lower caste

woman marrying an upper caste man becomes an elevation in social status for the woman as she acquires the husband's caste, but the act of an upper caste woman marrying a lower caste man becomes a degradation in social status as she also acquires the husband's caste and becomes a 'lower caste woman'. This however is only one possible situation, no simplistic conclusions are sought to be drawn from it. However, further serious research has to be done in this area. In this context, analyzing the caste and gender linkages in South India, Gabriele Dietrich points out that the explanations of Mortan Class and Dr. Ambedkar are essential for understanding the deep-rootedness of the caste system, especially in the South, since a theory of invasion is totally inadequate here. She argues that at the same time neither Mortan Class nor Dr. Ambedkar could go into an analysis of how the closing into endogamous marriage circles is related to patriarchal controls over women. she analyzes that the specific functioning of patriarchy in different caste contexts needs to be understood.⁷⁵ The recent analysis on gender also stresses that women are treated as 'gate ways' to the caste system (Literally points of entrance).⁷⁶

Ambedkar's imagined community with regard to the analysis of endogamy also seems to be very simplistic as he explains the concepts of surplus man and surplus woman very superficially. Perhaps the concepts of

⁷⁵ Gabriele Dietrich, *Reflections on the women's Movement in India. Religion, Ecology, Development*, op.cit, p. 92.

⁷⁶ This argument is taken from Veena Das who explains that if men of ritually low status were to get sexual access to women of higher status then not only the purity of the women but that of the entire group would be endangered. Since the main threat to the purity of the group came from female sexuality, it becomes vital to guard it. Most groups solved the problem by the custom of pre puberty marriage, which transferred the problem of guarding the sexuality of the women to the husband's group.

Veena Das, "Indian women: work, power and status" in B.R. Nanda (ed.), *Indian Women, From purdah to modernity*, op.cit, p. 135.

enforced widowhood, girl marriage and sati must not have started because of the reasons that the women were 'surplus.' It is very important to recognize that these customs mostly have existed in the upper castes. In this connection there is a need to analyze the control of sexuality of women in upper castes and lower castes separately. It is also important to note that most of the times the concept of 'purity' and 'chastity' is related to the upper caste women. The history of sexual exploitations in India reveals the fact that upper caste man always had the access for sexual exploitation of a Dalit woman. A perfect example for this is that in Rajasthan, on an average, one Dalit woman is raped every sixty hours.⁷⁷

Ambedkar's comparison of compulsory widowhood with a milder form of burning becomes important to analyze and understand the suppression of the Hindu woman in the name of 'widowhood'. As earlier discussed, enforced widowhood can be viewed as an ideological suppression and it is very evident by Ambedkar's discussions that he was conscious of it. But his explanation regarding the reasons behind practicing these customs is not satisfactory. He rightly recognizes the fact that caste without endogamy is a fake, but he did not realize that endogamy without patriarchy, also is a fake. However, this point needs an in-depth analysis.

Ambedkar's analysis regarding the suppression of the Hindu woman by the smritis like Manu's becomes very crucial to understand the hegemonical subordination of the Hindu woman. But the attempt is filled with certain theoretical flaws. His very idea of "Rise and Fall" of Hindu woman is very problematic. This indicates that at one point of time they were in a raised

⁷⁷ P. Sainath, "A Dalit goes to court" in *The Hindu* (Sunday, July 11, 99), p.viii

position and at another point of time their position is degraded. This is the same argument of nationalist historians as well as the nationalist leaders. Yet, Ambedkar differs from this idea as he deconstructs the brahminical domination with his critical insight which is very significant to understand brahminical patriarchy too. His analysis of Manusmriti and the suppression of women and sudras in Hindu society paved a way to understand and critique the structural domination as well as exploitation.

But the problem here is that he has chosen Buddhism as a counter-alternative. Perhaps no religion has ever treated women as equal and independent human beings. An analysis of Buddhism from a gender perspective reveals the fact that it has treated women as subordinates to men. The control of sex and sexuality in Buddhism needs to be analyzed from a gender point of view. Ambedkar's analysis regarding the subordination of Bhikhuni Sangha to Bhikhu Sangha is highly problematic. His underlying aim seems to be the legitimization of Buddhism. Buddhism also is not as rosy as Ambedkar presents it. His description regarding Buddhism itself shows the discriminatory and male oriented concepts of Buddha.

In this connection Uma Chakravarti argues that despite the fact that Buddhist culture recognized the right to salvation irrespective of caste, class, and sex, the general attitude of society was against women. She describes that Buddha did not want Bhikhunis in the Sangha and if permission was finally granted it was entirely because Ananda made the Buddha concede that women were as capable of salvation as men. She, with critical insight points out that in the entire early Buddhist literature, only Ananda seems to have genuinely believed in the principles of equality between men and women and he

systematically championed their cause.⁷⁸ She also explains that in Buddha's opinion a woman is neither capable of being *thathagata* (Head of the Buddhist Monks) or a *Cakkavathi* (King) which means that they are not capable of being heads of the social or asocial world.⁷⁹ This shows that Ambedkar could not go to a deeper analysis of Buddhism in understanding its male domination.

It is also very interesting to note that, most of the time Ambedkar addressed a Hindu woman as a 'Hindu woman' but not as the 'Indian woman.' This shows that he did not homogenize the women in India. Pratima Pardeshi interestingly depicts that Ambedkar has followed the non-*brahminical* path of women's liberation along with Phule.⁸⁰ She also says that Ambedkar burnt Manusmriti in 1927, as a protest, not only against the suppression of sudras but also of women.⁸¹ Ambedkar's entire discussions on gender reveals the fact that he has followed the non-*brahminical* path but the opinion that he burnt Manusmriti in his protest against women's subordination needs further exploration. Another important thing to recognize is that criticizing *brahminical* patriarchy is undoubtedly a major step but is not 'the only step' that is required. Recently some Dalit male scholars have been trying to legitimize Dalit patriarchy by saying that the Dalit woman is relatively less suppressed, when compared with the suppression of an upper caste woman. Does this mean that all Dalit men are very gender conscious? It is time to recognize the importance of Dalit women's voices in this regard. Dalit women

⁷⁸ Uma Chakravarti, *The social Dimensions of Early Buddhism* (Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 31-32.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁸⁰ Pratima Pardeshi, "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and the question of women's liberation in India" (trans) *op.cit.*, p. 1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

have to counter the upper caste men and women for their caste domination and sexual exploitation and Dalit men for their patriarchal domination. They should also counter the domination of upper caste and upper class/middle class feminism as 'the feminism'. Today Dalit scholars and Dalit leaders have to rethink about their gender consciousness. How far has the Dalit movement addressed the question of Dalit women seriously?

Coming back to Ambedkar, his criticism regarding Manu does not stop with it, but ends with the concept of 'freedom of women' in Buddhist and Kautilya's periods which is also highly problematic. His analysis of Kautilya's thought itself shows male domination through the rules and regulations and code of conduct on women. By this it is very evident that Ambedkar has concentrated completely on Manu. It is a fact that Manu suppressed Hindu woman to the core but the suppression before and after Manu also is very important. At this juncture the need to analyze the social construction of gender, sex and sexuality becomes very crucial. But at the same time Ambedkar's analysis of Manu and Kautilya reveals the importance of analyzing political thinkers and ancient laws from a gender perspective. Unfortunately 'mainstream' Indian political thought has never tried to focus on this point.

Coming to the question of the Hindu Code Bill, perhaps no other Indian political thinker has stood for women's rights as Ambedkar did. Anybody who thoroughly goes through the entire discussions on Hindu Code Bill will recognize this fact. His constant efforts to get the Bill passed and to counter the male oriented Hindu structures as shows his effort in critically understanding the structures and then destroying them. It is very surprising to note that neither Dalit scholars nor feminist scholars have explored this aspect

of Ambedkar's thought. The recent discussions and controversy regarding the common civil code can trace out their base in the discussions of the Hindu Code Bill itself. This is not to come to a conclusion that the Hindu Code Bill was perfect and it has no problems. But definitely it was a major step towards a gender sensitive society. Ambedkar's analysis of the Hindu Code Bill, for its non-inclusion of agricultural property is not satisfactory and, has a patriarchal bias in it, as he opines that the agricultural land should be with the primogeniture son. What are the reasons behind the daughter's 'inability' to inherit the agricultural property?

Ambedkar being an expert in law, has rightly analyzed the inferior position of Hindu woman in Hindu laws. This shows the need to break the discriminatory laws and to construct the gender sensitive laws to break them again to move towards an egalitarian society where there will be equal opportunities and equal rights. His ideas regarding the rights of women such as right to divorce, right to maintenance, right to inheritance and right to adoption are extremely important for a woman to counter patriarchal domination. By these rights certain sections of women already started asserting their individuality and their fight against male dominated society. The rights that this Bill was providing were major contributions towards raising the suppressed voices. His idea of sacramental marriage as a system of slavery for women is path breaking. Even today for many people it is difficult to recognize it as a male oriented system whereas Ambedkar vehemently argued and severely countered it, making us think that he was very conscious of gender discrimination in Hindu marriage system. For many of the parliament members his comments and criticisms were highly offensive and they were unable to receive it. For them, he was vilifying the Hindu religion on no solid

ground. Here not only the discussions in the parliament but also the history of fifty years of 'Independent India' reveals the Hindu dominance.

Ambedkar's resignation from the cabinet in protest against the failure to pass the Hindu Code Bill shows his sincerity towards the women's question. Now the question is, why is it that the 'mainstream' Indian academia has not projected this angle of Ambedkar's thought? What are the reasons behind it? Why is it that the Hindu Code Bill could not become one of the major debatable issues in the discipline of Political Science, a subject which basically deals with the rights of the 'human being'. Is it that women's rights do not constitute 'human rights' A serious exploration is needed in to this angle of academic and intellectual suppression.

When the discussion regarding Ambedkar's discourse on gender comes, it is also important to recognise the Dalit women's participation in the Ambedkarian movement. In Indian academia, a student of the social sciences would know about the women's participation in the nationalist movement but not the Dalit women's participation in Ambedkarian movement. In this connection, Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar depict the participation of Dalit women in the early untouchable liberation movement by revealing the history of Dalit women's participation. This shows the history of marginalised histories. The authors say that the movement begun by Dr. Ambedkar generated enthusiastic participation from Dalit women and it is very evident that he has organized several conferences of the untouchables and saw to it that women's conferences were held simultaneously with that of men. They point out that by 1930s Dalit women became so conscious that they started conducting their own meetings and conferences independently. In the Mahad movement of 1927 Dalit women actively participated in committee meetings

and participated in passing resolutions about the claim for equal human rights.⁸² This point shows the need to write history from a Dalit women's perspective too. But one has to see this history also from a critical outlook. What was Dalit woman's role in this movement? Whether the women's issue is hierarchised by the caste issue or not? What was the space for Dalit women to raise their voices? What is the construction of gender within the Dalit movement?

To conclude this chapter, a serious study of Ambedkar's discourse on gender reveals the fact that Ambedkar stood for Hindu women's rights. At the same time one has to recognize the theoretical problems within his thought. And a gender conscious person should move beyond Ambedkar to analyze the gender oppression, not stopping with mere eulogisation of Ambedkar and yet recognizing his path breaking efforts regarding Hindu Code Bill as well as his impact on Dalit women to participate in the movements.

⁸² Meenakshi Moon and Urmila Pawar, "We Made History too: Women in the Early Untouchable Liberation Movement", *op.cit.*, p. 68-69.

CHAPTER IV

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

A common question that comes into one's mind whenever the idea of comparison arises, is why is it that a comparison is needed? What is it that one is going to gain by comparison? And if the comparison is between thinkers like Gandhi and Ambedkar, it becomes a tough task. The analyst will be surrounded with questions like 'why this comparison?' 'Why only between Gandhi and Ambedkar?' and also will be branded with different names and various intentions. Hence, before one starts a comparative analysis of the Gandhian and Ambedkarian discourses on gender, it is important to know the reasons for the comparison.

A comparison is at the same time to see the differences and also the similarities. It is also to understand and analyze the reasons behind it. So the purpose here is to analyze and compare Gandhi's and Ambedkar's ideas regarding the gender question. Gandhi and Ambedkar are not only contemporary political thinkers, but also represented two different streams of thought. Since their paths are different and opposite it is very important to see whether this difference has made any impact on their ideas regarding gender or not? It is also important to see the impact of social backgrounds on their ideas. If Gandhi is the leader of the Nationalist school of thought, Ambedkar is the leader of the Dalit school of thought. It is important to see the way they have addressed the gender question and to see the relevance of their ideology to the present day. It is very important to note, as constantly reiterated, that the purpose here is to look at them from a gender perspective and not either from a Gandhian perspective or from an Ambedkarian perspective. This means that

neither sympathetic justifications nor mere eulogisations will be undertaken in this analysis.

To start the comparison, after reviewing Gandhi's and Ambedkar's ideas on gender one can easily know that there are certain common issues about which both of them have expressed their opinions. They are, the question of right to inheritance for women, right to divorce and maintenance, the Hindu marriage system and Hinduism per se and oppressive customs like sati, enforced widowhood and child marriage.

Regarding the question of right to inheritance for daughters Gandhi opines that this issue is the least among the women's rights. He claims that he uncompromisingly stood for this right for women and condemns the legal inequalities. But he asks women to deal with the root cause for the desire of power, which is based in acquiring property. As he thinks that woman is the embodiment of sacrifice, he asks women to restrain the ambition of accumulating property. At another point, when somebody raises a question that women's economic independence would lead to immorality and disruption of domestic life, Gandhi answers that if economic independence and holding property lead to the spread of immorality among men, let it be so also with women.

Ambedkar supports the right to inheritance for women and explains the complexities of laws regarding women's property. He denies the argument that women are incapable of dissolving the property by saying that when they can wisely deal with the property like *stridhan*, they must be capable of dealing with the absolute property also. He often gives the examples of Smritis, which have given one fourth share to the daughters to justify his

argument of equal property right to women. He counters the argument that this right will lead to the fragmentation of property by saying that if it is not considered as fragmentation when it is divided for the sons, it should not be considered so for the daughters also.

Here Gandhi at one point of time seems to be idealistic and comes to a conclusion which can be very burdensome for women because he thinks that women are sacrificing by nature, he expects them not to have the desire for power or property. In a practical sense this makes the issue of women's rights very problematic. One of the major dependencies of women comes from her economic dependency as she is not entitled to the property right. The whole concept of the self sacrificing tendency of women is highly hegemonical. While answering another question Gandhi seems to be practical and supports the economic independence of women. Ambedkar's argument regarding the right to inheritance becomes very crucial from a gender perspective. He recognizes women as independent individuals and the need for them to be financially independent and supports their claim to the inheritance right and also discusses the problems that will arise by not providing the same. Regarding the question of right to divorce, Gandhi opines that the facility of divorce is of no use. As earlier discussed in the second chapter, his advise to a woman who was facing difficulties with her husband is to live apart from her husband without breaking the legal tie and feel as if she is not married. According to him, legal remedies like punishment to the husband for common assault and asking for the husband's support for the wife are worse than useless. In his opinion this never brings any comfort to a virtuous woman, but makes the question of the husband's reform more difficult, which should be the aim of the society and every wife. He also comes to the conclusion that a woman whose marriage proves unhappy does not want to be remarried.

For the same question Ambedkar's answer is different from Gandhi's. Ambedkar supports the right to divorce and right to maintenance and he argues in the parliament to get these rights passed. He also gives the example that the sudra communities have customary divorce. He opines that since sudras constitute 90% of the Hindu society, the general law should be the law of sudras. He gives the examples from Smritis regarding the right to divorce and says that even the Smritis have provided this right. Referring to the new rights introduced by the Hindu Code Bill, he says that the new principles introduced in the law of marriage or divorce is just and reasonable and supported by precedent not only of our Shastras but the experience of the world as a whole. He criticizes the Hindu marriage system for not giving the right to divorce to the wife and says that a woman can not get her liberty from her husband, however bad or undesirable he may be. He opines that it is slavery but not free labour and explains that free labour means the ability to break the contract when the necessity for breaking it arises and says that the ancient ideas are most archaic and impossible for anybody to practice.

Here also one can see the difference in the opinions between Gandhi and Ambedkar. Gandhi's advice is like any other common man's argument in the contemporary society. After all why should a woman stay without breaking the legal tie? Why is it that the husband's reform is the responsibility of the wife? How is it that anybody can decide whether a woman should get remarried or not after she breaks her relationship with the husband? What is her will? Gandhi does not give importance to any of these questions. His concept of gender revolves around the concept of an 'ideal woman' who is 'virtuous'. Ambedkar's opinions regarding the same question seems to be gender sensitive as he thinks that a woman should have the right to divorce. His point that sudras have the customary divorce also is significant in

analyzing the different castes and their customs. It is true that certain 'lower castes' have the customary divorce but it is a doubt whether 90% of Hindus have this right or not? His opinion regarding the right to maintenance also becomes very important, because where a woman is made to be dependent she should have the right to maintenance. Shabano's case is the best example for this. At the age of 70, when her husband divorced her, she was denied the right to maintenance after three months as per the Muslim personal law. Similarly, even under the Hindu law (before the discussions of Hindu Code Bill) a wife is not entitled to claim maintenance from her husband if she does not live with him in his house. Ambedkar explains that the Hindu Code Bill recognises the reasons behind a wife living separately and provides the right to maintenance to a wife. But Ambedkar also is moralistic at times as he says that it is an unfortunate thing that even a 'concubine' is included in the category of dependents. Here the whole concept of concubinage shows the attitudes of a male dominated society, where a man is never considered as a 'concubine' and no matter whether a woman has a relationship or a man, it is the woman who becomes a 'concubine'. This is also problematic because a woman's status is valued within the marriage system and as a 'wife'. And outside this status if a woman has a relationship with a man she becomes a 'concubine'. This not only shows the gender bias of society but also reveals the control of woman's sexuality by it.

Another important issue is that both of them have addressed the Hindu marriage system. Here also both of them differ in their perceptions. For Gandhi, marriage is a sacrament and he values the Hindu marriage system with all its rituals and customs. For him, the whole conception of marriage is sacred as it is performed in the presence of sacred fire. He also compares the Hindu marriage with the sacred thread ceremony and says that marriage is a

consecration and new birth as the sacred thread ceremony also is. He also thinks that Hinduism regards the husband and wife as absolute equals and millions of Hindu wives live in perfect peace. At times he criticizes Hinduism for its treatment of a woman as inferior but generally he concludes with the legitimization of Hinduism and its structures. Differing from Gandhi, Ambedkar does not regard marriage as a sacrament and condemns the sacramental marriage for its treatment of woman as inferior and subordinated. He says that it does not satisfy the basic principles of constitution which are liberty, equality and fraternity. He argues that anybody who observes the sacramental marriage fairly and honestly will know that it does not satisfy these ideals. He describes the Hindu marriage system as “polygamy for men and perpetual slavery for women” Here also one can see Gandhi’s brahminical ideas and male oriented arguments. Ambedkar rightly recognizes the suppression of woman in Hinduism and also its male dominated structures. It is also true, as Ambedkar points out, that in spite of its ideal being monogamy, practically it is polygamy for men and slavery for women. The mythical construction of monogamy always has targeted women and controlled their sexualities. Gandhi does not at all try to point out the suppressions within Hindu structures. His comparison of marriage with sacred thread ceremony reveals this fact. He does not question the reason behind women and sudras not being eligible for the sacred thread ceremony. Most of the time he takes the oppressive customs for granted and legitimizes them. Ambedkar with his critical insight, recognizes the enslavement of women and sudras in Hinduism. But at this juncture it is very important to recognize the fact that one cannot homogenize the category of Hindu women also, because the suppression differs from an upper caste woman to a lower caste woman. If one applies bell hooks’s analysis of the suppression of Black woman to the

Dalit woman, it can be recognized that an upper caste man is always in the oppressor's position whereas a Dalit woman is always in the oppressed position. Upper caste men suppress upper caste women and Dalit men and women; upper caste women suppress Dalit men and women and Dalit men suppress Dalit women. Here upper caste women and Dalit men are at the same time suppressors and suppressed.¹ Generally upper caste women are not recognized as the suppressors and women are categorized as a single oppressed category. For example, the oppression of upper caste women over the Dalit men can be seen in the issue of violence on Dalits in Chunduru (Andhra Pradesh), where the upper caste women helped their upper caste men folk in suppressing Dalit men.² Hence one has to recognize the problem in homogenizing Hindu women.

Another important issue that Gandhi and Ambedkar have commonly addressed is the dowry system. Both of them have criticized the dowry system. Gandhi opines that marriage must cease to be an arrangement made by parents for money. He feels that this system is intimately connected with the caste system and advises the people to break the bonds of caste. He criticizes young men by saying that those who make dowry as a condition of marriage, discredit their education and their country and dishonour womanhood. He asks people to refuse to treat marriage as a marketable transaction instead of status or a sacrament. He consciously recognizes that the custom of dowry prevails only among the middle class people.

¹ See bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, op.cit., p. 14-15.

² Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana, "Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender" in *Social Scientist*, (vol. 22, nos. 3-4, March-April 1994), p. 100.

Ambedkar describes dowry as a scandalous affair. Referring to the provision related to dowry, he explains that in spite of bringing enormous lot of property from their parents either by way of dowry or *stridhan* or gift, girls are treated with utter contempt, tyranny and oppression. Here both Gandhi's and Ambedkar's opinions are significant to understand the dowry system and also to oppose it. Gandhi's understanding that this custom prevails in the middle classes is very important from a gender perspective, because generally it is considered as a common system for all sections of people. In this connection it is very important to recognize that particular systems exist in particular sections of people.

One of the most interesting things to recognize in Gandhian and Ambedkarian ideas on gender is that both of them have tried to analyze oppressive systems like sati (widow immolation), enforced widowhood and child marriage. Here also one can easily find out the differences in their ideas. Gandhi criticizes the three systems, whereas Ambedkar tries to find out the reasons for their existence. Though Gandhi criticizes these oppressive customs, he fails to identify the underlying ideology that leads to the ideological suppression of women. Only regarding the question of child marriage, he seems to be radical. He almost attacks the system, and asks people to save the girls of tender age from man's lust. As earlier stated his criticism regarding child marriage is very significant from a gender perspective, as he constantly asks men to transform and not to see women as mere objects to satisfy their lust. But to counter the enforced widowhood he creates and constructs an ideological widowhood in the name of voluntary widowhood and to counter sati he construct an ideological sati which can be achieved through constant immolation of the spirit from day to day. Contrary to Gandhi, Ambedkar analyzes that it is to maintain endogamy that these

customs are created by the male dominated caste communities. As earlier discussed, there are certain theoretical problems with Ambedkar's analysis because he has not taken into account, patriarchy. But in spite of that his analysis is path-breaking as recent gender studies in India have been focussing on the importance of the analysis of endogamy. Gandhi's advice regarding sati and enforced widowhood can lead women to a more marginalised state as women suppress themselves in the name of 'voluntary widowhood' and the 'immolation of spirit'

After comparing Gandhi and Ambedkar's ideas regarding the individual issues it is very important to notice the ideology behind their ideas. It is very evident that their paths are completely different. Gandhi very few times differs from Hinduism and most of the time tries to construct a glorified Hinduism. It is a fact that Gandhi could not separate religion and gender. The very concept of man and woman's relationship in Gandhi is based on Hindu religion. On the other hand, Ambedkar separates religion and gender and analyses the suppression of women within Hindu religion and counters it. He also relates the suppression of women and sudras by the brahmanical ideology. Here one can say that if Gandhi's is the brahmanical path of understanding women's subordination, Ambedkar's is the non-brahmanical path of understanding it. Though Gandhi was very much aware of the brahmanical texts like Manusmriti, he never tries to criticize them. When somebody criticizes Manusmriti for its suppression of women, he just says that it is not sacrosanct for me. Contrary to Gandhi, Ambedkar thoroughly analyses the brahmanical texts and especially Manusmriti and counters it for its ideological subordination of women. Here Ambedkar's path is a definite departure from Hindu ideological forces. But Ambedkar could not analyze the suppression of Hindu women beyond Manusmriti and in order to counter it, he legitimizes the

subordination of women in Buddhism and Kautilya's period which is also problematic. For that matter no religion has treated women as independent individuals and preached the equality of sexes.

It is important to notice that, inspite of the differences there is a commonality between Gandhi and Ambedkar as they have not taken the issue of women as seriously as they have taken their primary goals viz. the Nationalist movement, and the Dalit movement respectively. Gandhi has always subordinated the gender question to the Nationalist question and Ambedkar has not discussed the gender question extensively before he discussed the Hindu Code Bill. Within the Dalits' question how far has he taken the Dalit women's question as seriously as he has taken the issue of caste? It is a fact that Gandhi has inspired the upper caste, upper class/middle class women and Ambedkar has inspired the Dalit women. But how far have they taken the gender question as seriously as they have taken the "main" questions?

If it is the question of women's rights Ambedkar's ideas are not only relevant for the present society but are gender sensitive also. Gandhi's ideas regarding the rights of women are quite problematic and lead to the ideological suppression of women. But the impact of both on particular sections of women paved the way for ongoing women's movements. Yet, before anybody eulogises them in the name of their impact on women's movements, one should thoroughly analyze their gender ideology and the way they have taken it.

Conclusion

A compact understanding of Gandhian and Ambedkarian discourses on gender reveals the fact that Gandhi has been over projected for certain ideas and some of his ideas are not projected. Ambedkar was not projected for his ideas on gender either by 'main stream' academia or by Dalit or Feminist scholars. It is very important to understand the reasons behind these facts. As there will be motives behind the projections there will be motives behind ignoring also. This is not a mere negligence but a conscious suppression of knowledges. The 'mainstream knowledge' has a legacy of avoiding the gender perspective too. At this juncture one has to realize that it is not only the society that has to be gender sensitized but also the academia. Mere justifications of the thinkers in the name of 'historical limitations' and in the name of 'in that context', 'at that time' they tried to do their best and by saying that one cannot expect them to be 'great persons', will stop the progress towards a gender sensitive approach.³ Again, one has to recognize the problems associated with the 'iconisation' of certain persons. Why is it that anybody should iconise the thinkers. Perhaps in Indian political thought, no other thinker was projected as Gandhi for his 'liberating' and 'emancipating' ideas on women. Today the Indian academia should rethink for its projection on Gandhian ideology on gender. This is not to completely reject his ideas or

³ See Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, "Recasting Women: An introduction" in *Recasting: women Essays in colonial History* (ed.), Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, Kali for women, New Delhi, 1989, p. 19. They argue that by giving the argument of historical limits one is pushed to a position of sympathetic criticism which is to say that at that time, at that place, they tried to do their best inevitably could not exceed the limits of their age; and if contemporary feminists wish they had done so, they are not only being unrealistic but are also reading history solely by hindsight. They say that this kind of argument shows that how the history of feminism in India is inseparable from a history of anti-feminism.

to neglect Gandhi's importance. But when one is recognizing the importance one has to equally recognize the problems as they are. In the same way as some scholars recently started projecting Ambedkar's thought on gender, they should also recognize the problem with iconisation. When they are discussing the importance, there is a need to discuss the problems within Ambedkar's thought. Apart from this one has to see them within the history of women (if it is the discussion on gender) as the history of protest against male dominated society, by women, has started before Gandhi and Ambedkar. Today Pandita Ramabai is being focussed on in the mainstream thought, but one does not know how many more hidden histories of women are there. At the same time Ambedkar's discussions regarding Hindu Code Bill and his ideology regarding gender have to be focussed on and seriously discussed.

The ongoing debates on common civil code can trace out its base in the discussions of Hindu Code Bill. It is astonishing to note that certain male Hindu members of Parliament opposed the Bill because it denies the right of Hindu man to have more than one wife and does not deny the right of Muslim man to have four wives.⁴ Here women became mere objects to be discussed. It was the question for Hindu men whether to have one wife or 'four wives.' It is the question for them to 'give' rights to women or not to 'give.' This itself shows the need of women who are conscious of their oppression to be there in the parliament to stand and demand their rights. Another important issue to be noticed regarding the Hindu Code Bill is that when members were opposing the Hindu Code Bill in the name of 'Common Civil Code' their intention was not really to get a gender sensitive common civil code, but to stop Hindu Code

⁴ For details Kumkum Sangari, "Politics of Diversity: Religious Communities and Multiple Patriarchies", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (December 23, 1995), p. 3295.

Bill from being passed. At this juncture one has to recognize the problem with the argument of Common Civil Code, when there are several personal laws existing and also the problem with the argument of not having the common civil code, when all the personal laws are gender discriminatory. In this connection, 'new laws should be created' – as Kumkum Sangari puts it – 'which would move in three directions viz. encouraging religious diversity, establishing inalienable rights for all women and finding ways of dealing with the diversity of patriarchies.'⁵

To conclude, it is not only the change in the laws that should come, but also the change in the academics. Today the academics should discuss the hidden histories of marginalised sections as well as the histories of marginalised thoughts. It also has to rethink about certain projections and not projecting certain ideas and should recognize the need to open a serious debate regarding Gandhian and Ambedkarian discourses on gender.

⁵ For details Kumkum Sangari, "Politics of Diversity: Religious Communities and Multiple Patriarchies", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (December 30, 1995), p. 3386.

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