



Research Paper

Relevance of Gandhi's Views and Visions on Women in J.B. Kripalani's *Gandhi : His life and Thought*

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Abstract

This research paper intends to evaluate and appreciate a social biography of Gandhi. The biographer, J.B Kripalani was intimately related to Gandhi from the working days of Satyagrah movement in Champaran, Bihar. The biographer's intimacy with Gandhi gives a true account of Gandhi's views and visions on women that people saw in the twentieth century. Kripalani's *Gandhi: His Life and Thought* relates fairly to the life and views of Gandhi that justifies his eminence and significance even in 21st century. People must discipline and order their lives by purposes and principles of Gandhi that are more constant and everlasting. Exploring the ways of the importance and relevance of Gandhi's views and visions on women and its impacts directly and indirectly on the condition and position of women in 21st century. The following issues are being considered, equality of gender, domestic violence, child marriage, widow remarriage, Chastity, Purdah system, Dowry as a cruel custom.

Keywords: Biography, Gender Equality, Marriage, Violence, Chastity, Women's Honour

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J.B. Kripalani, Gandhi's biographer, was a writer of the Gandhian ideas and ideals. He became the Congress president in 1946 and resigned from his post in 1947. He was a stern critic of his own party. He was a professor who authored his life-story, autobiography, *My Times*. He glorified Gandhian views and visions and dedicated his life to propagating mahatma's message serving national life. The oxford dictionary defines biography as "History of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature". (Prasad 231) A biography is a life-story of a particular person written by somebody else. It is a well-written account of a great man including his success and failure. It reflects his views on relevant issues. It helps the readers to understand the reason why the particular person is interesting and inspiring. The inquisitive biographers must carry out lots of research work on that particular person whom they endeavour to represent. A true value of a biography lies in inspiring the people for the purer and stronger lives.

J.B. Kripalani introduces Gandhi as a feminist in view of women empowerment. Therefore J.B. Kripalani's *Gandhi : His Life and Thought* seems to have been a social biography. The biographical relevance and significance of J.B. Kripalani's *Gandhi : His Life and Thought* lies in introducing Gandhi as a feminist whose views and visions on feminism are very precious in getting red of all grievances of Indian women in 21st century.

Kripalani describes that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born at Porbandar, in Kathiawar of Gujrat. His father Karamchand Gandhi was a Dewan at the court of the ruler of Kathiawar and Mother, Putalibai was a religious lady who inspired Gandhi deeply. She left a deep impression on Gandhi's mind. Following J.B. Kripalani's *Gandhi: His Life and Thought* in *Gandhi: A Life*, Krishna Kripalani refers, "She was deeply religious, gentle and devout. She left a deep impress on the mind of her son who almost worshipped her". (p.2)

Kripalani introduces Gandhi in his formative years as a brilliant and diligent while Gandhi does not present himself as a brilliant pupil but as a mediocre student. In his *An Autobiography*, Gandhi Writes, "As at Porbandar, so here, There is hardly anything to note about my studies. I could only have been a mediocre student". (p.5) Indeed, Putlibai and his elder brother were guides for Gandhi. Kripalani describes that as it was cultural tradition in those years, he was thirteen years old when he got married to Kasturba. In fact, he became

the victim of child marriage. A family friend suggested that he be sent to England to study for the bar he vowed not to use wine, woman and meat at the instruction of his mother. In his boyhood Gandhi was very timid and used to devote most of his time to his studies. After achieving his degree of law in England in 1891, he returned India to carry out his practice as a lawyer. But after sometime he left for South Africa to join a service in an organization, and there he felt and saw the racial prejudice against Indians. He organized the unorganized Indians in south Africa where he made them aware of their anguishes and rights. He finally left for India in 1915. He decided to support the British authority in the expectation of getting full justification from the British Empire.

Kripalani's Gandhi determined to work for the social and economic betterment of the women. He led several movements like non-cooperation movement in 1920, civil disobedience movement in 1930 and quit India movement in 1942. He was not a well ordered thinker. But he exhorted certain views and visions which were quite consistent. A few intellectual biographers have found to analyze and presented his thoughts systematically. Some of the important views of Mahatma Gandhi are his views and visions on Non-violence, Satyagraha, Swadeshi Swaraj, Spirituality, Democracy, Trusteeship, Verna system, and women empowerment. He awakened India from semi-consciousness. It was a difficult task. It was an Indian society where almost half of the population women was behind purdah system or confined to the four walls of houses. But the truth is that even today half of the population, women of this country suffers from domestic violence. There may be rural and urban women from elite families or normal families. Even if a male child is not born, even then the female is accountable for it, while everybody is acquainted with its scientific reasons. In this reference, The biographer, Kripalani records:

It was also on this account that while there was joy on the birth of the male child, there was expressed or silent mourning on the birth of a female child, Gandhiji says, 'invidious discrimination against the female sex is an anachronism. I fail to see any reason for jubilation over the birth of a son and for mourning over that of a daughter. Both are gods' gifts. They have an equal right to live, and are equally necessary to keep the world going. (p.402)

Here, the biographer beautifully reflects somewhat equality between the position and situation of women in ancient times and the position and situation of women in present times. The biographer gives also a reference of perfect equality between men and women in Gandhi's Ashram. His Gandhi gives a particular reason of domestic violence and its solution. Even in the 21st century, the position and situation of women is partly alike as it was in ancient times. There are several opportunities for Indian women in social work, public life and administration. They are devoting their time and energy in getting significant performance and place. Kripalani writes:

This was in accordance with what was current in ancient times in India. In Vedic times men and women were equal in all walks of life, including the religious and intellectual. Therefore, in proclaiming the perfect equality of man and woman, Gandhiji could and did claim that he was following the more ancient authorities than of the later law-givers, Manu and others. (p.399)

Indeed, Gandhiji made no discrepancy between men and women. In Gandhi's Ashram, men and women were participated in corporal and cerebral activities. They were behaved as alike and everybody was given equal provisions according to his or her requirements. The biographer describes that the development of nation depends upon its women too. So the education of women is equally essential so that they may be broad minded and well cultured. Indian society needs women of great discipline and controlled behaviour. Kripalani Writes:

With his belief in non-violence, Gandhiji was against all inequality in any walk of life, political, economic or social. He held that inequality ultimately led to exploitation, which for him was violence also, he held that all work socially useful is of equal worth, Whether that of a scavenger, a doctor, a lawyer, a merchant or a minister. (p.399)

Indeed, his Gandhi's Violence includes immoral thoughts, hatred, temptation and gender inequality. Gandhi's non-violence is the lack of all these. It is uniting force that means supreme and selfless love for every being and everything. Kripalani describes that Gandhi considered gender inequality as violence and removal of gender inequality as non-violence. This thought of Kripalani's Gandhi is relevant to the present time.

Kripalani describes that Gandhi believed the way men influence the public life, the domestic life falls under the influence of women and therefore women should have as much autonomy in her own domestic life of influence as man has in his own. Kripalani gives elaborately Gandhi's views on gender equality. His Gandhi fought for human rights of Indian women. He unceasingly worked for betterment of women. Kripalani aptly remarks:

Gandhiji invited the women of India to participate in the satyagraha movement not only because they were equal to men but also because they possessed virtues which made them superior to man in a non-violent fight which requires infinite patience and uncomplaining and silent suffering. (p.403)

Indeed, Gandhi's non-violence means endless deep affection and endless dimensions for tolerating. He regarded women as 'an incarnation of toleration'. He called upon women to realize themselves as self-sufficient individuals and enrich with sublime virtues so that entire humanity was gained. Kripalani writes:

He did not want them to consider themselves as the weaker sex. Gandhiji says: to call woman 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. (p.402)

Indeed Kripalani's Gandhiji considered woman to be superior to man because she is truly a creator of man like God. In this reference the biographer gives aptly the reason why woman is superior to man, Kripalani comments:

Who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in the largest measure? she shows it as she carries the infant and feeds it during nine months and derives joy in the suffering involved what can be at the suffering caused by the pangs of labour? but she forgets them in the joy of creation. Who suffers daily so that her babe may wax from day to day? let her transfer that love to the whole of humanity, let her forget she ever was or can be the object of man's lust. And she will occupy her proud position by the side of man as his mother, maker and silent leader. (p.403)

Of course, his Gandhi's views and visions on women in view of gender equality are significantly relevant to the present time. His Gandhi struggled for human privileges of Indian women. He opposed the sexual harassment of Indian women. He condemned and criticized the people for giving a lower-ranking status to them, because a female is the companion of male enriched almost with alike physical and mental dimensions. A female is authorized to the highest status in her own sphere of pursuits.

Kripalani describes briefly Gandhi's views and visions on socially and morally bad condition, child marriage dominating in Indian society. He supported morally inter-caste marriages. He himself was a sufferer of child marriage. He regretted it throughout his life for getting married at the age of thirteen. Gandhi's wife, Kasturba grew into not only the wife of the most popular leader of India, but also a reformer on her own. This was possible both because she herself was adaptable to the progress. Gandhi constantly tried to share his thoughts and deeds with her. From being a dominating child-husband he had become a fan of his wife in view of women's honour. But still he condemned child marriage throughout his life. In his Autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi himself writes:

If I claim to be a worshipper of truth. It is my painful duty to have to record here my marriage at the age of thirteen. As I see the youngsters of the same age about me who are under my care, and think of my own marriage, I am inclined to pity myself and to congratulate them on having escaped my lot. I can see no moral argument in support of such a preposterously early marriage. (p.7)

Indeed, His Gandhi opposed strictly this destructive system, child marriage. It resulted in the unhealthy conditions of the newly married children. The biographer selects the harmful reasons of child marriages. Child marriage is one of the chief causes of many widows in Indian society and is liable reason for physical, social and moral downfall of women.

In Gandhi's thinking, the evil practice of child marriage is essentially responsible for early widowhood. To remain a widow by one's own deliberate decision is doubtlessly the mandatory heritage of the Hindu religion. But meantime it could become a curse to force widowhood for life on a reluctant woman. Kripalani records Gandhi's statement, Gandhi says:

We cry out for cow protection in the name of religion, but we refuse protection to the human cow in the shape of the girl widow, we would resent force in religion. But in the name of religion we force widowhood upon our girls widows who could not understand the import of the marriage ceremony. To force widowhood upon little girl is a brutal crime for which we Hindus are daily paying dearly. If our conscience was truly awakened, there would be no marriage before 15. (p.400)

In fact, Gandhi stood for giving due consideration and cooperation to the issues of widows. Kripalani describes that Gandhi believed in the case of full-grown widows who had children, he would have liked those widows to be faithful to their marriages' bond rather than remarry. But those views and visions of Gandhi must be put in an application similarly to men. In *Mahatma Gandhi A Biography*, Gandhi's biographer, B.R. Nanda, comments: "True control of sex in the Gandhian scheme of life is part of a larger discipline of body and mind. The attainment of this larger discipline is, however, an uphill task for an average member of modern society" (88). Indeed, Gandhi rejected sex as the basis of man-woman relationship. He held voluntary widowhood as better. In case of young widows, they should be set free to decide whether they want to live alone or remain a widow or to get marry again. Kripalani records:

If a widow could not or did not wish to live alone, she had every right to remarry and society must not look down upon such marriages. Remarriage was any day better than the suppression of a legitimate desire through fear of misleader public opinion based on custom or the authority of certain quotations in the Shasta's, which are against reason or humanity. (p.400)

Indeed, rape, mental harassment and sexual slavery are largely existed by the only all violent people. Misogyny is a belief of immoral people. Misogyny is the hatred for females. It is an appearance of sexism used to keep females at a lower social position than that of men. It has been largely executed for thousands of years. It appears in art, literature, human societal order and historical events. The condition and position of Indian women are worse off than that of men, straightforwardly because they are women. This discrimination against female gender corrupts the societal order. Emphasizing on voluntary widowhood and widow remarriage, J.B Kripalani records Gandhi's statement, Gandhi says:

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 by religion itself. Widowhood imposed by religion or custom is an unbearable yoke, and defiles the home by secret vice and degrades religion. (p.400)

Indeed, Kripalani's Gandhi says voluntary widowhood consciously embraced by a woman adds dignity and elegance to her life. Her sacrifice would glorify the Hindu religion itself. Focusing on widow remarriage Kripalani describes that Gandhi supported widow remarriage in view of girl widows. In *Mahatma Gandhi: A Biography*, B.R. Nanda, the biographer, also supports this statement. Nanda writes:

He became the stoutest champion of the political and social emancipation of woman' his voice was raised against the tyranny of the purdah, the iniquity of child marriage, the ban on widow remarriage, indeed against everything which cramped Indian womanhood. He roused India's woman to the sense of their own dignity and power. (p.89)

Of course, he criticized child marriages and supported widow remarriages. Because forced widowhood might lead to certain social vices.

Moving on, purdah system was another societal vice which still affects badly women's lives in certain sections of Indian society. The biographer describes that they participated in public debates and discourses and their lives were less controlled when purdah system was unknown. Kripalani's Gandhi denounced purdah as a "barbarous custom". In this reference, in *India of My Dreams*, Gandhi writes, "Chastity is not- house growth. It cannot be protected by the surrounding wall of the purdah. It must grow from within, and to be worth anything it must be capable of withstanding". (p.186) Indeed, Kripalani's Gandhi held that females had been subdued under custom and tradition made by men. He attacked powerfully on purdah system that was responsible for woman's slavery. The custom of dowry became a target of his criticism. He described dowry marriage as "cruel" conduct in human society.

Kripalani's Gandhi held that young women should never marry men who require a payment and property as a gift at the cost of their identity and dignity. He believed that the foundation of marriage is mutual affection and coordination. Kripalani's Gandhi is of the opinion that women were superior to men in their moral and spiritual force. They had better and greater powers of self- sacrifice and suffering. They play several roles at the national and international levels where citizens, leaders and lawgivers are nurtured. Kripalani describes that Gandhi firmly opposed Purdah system because of purdah system was existed in the Indian society. He did not agree with the immoral convention of purdah as Indian tradition and was shocked to see with attention the humiliated situation and position of women by the practice of purdah. Kripalani comments :

He was against the purdah system. It crippled not only the free movement of women but interfered with their advancement, and their capacity for doing work useful to society. I have seen Gandhiji simply ignoring purdah. He insisted on his being taken to sanctum sanctorum of the family, the ladies quarters. And who could resist him in this? The Hindu women considered themselves as blessed to have the darshan of the Mahatma, as he undoubtedly was in their eyes. (p.401)

Indeed, the biographer beautifully brings out his Gandhi's attitude and responsiveness against societal vice, purdah system through his literary efforts. His Gandhi's views on women in 21st century are still relevant not only to make women socially stronger but also to develop the nation intellectually brighter. His Gandhi advised people to count on their women and not to enforce women to practice this immoral purdah system for keeping alive purity of character. Kripalani aptly remarks:

Gandhiji held that women's grace lay in her character and her modesty. He did not want her to be a plaything for man. He, therefore, was against costly clothes, jewellery and make up. Talking to women on one occasion, he said: women must cease to consider herself the object of man's lust. The remedy is more in her hands than man's. She must refuse to adorn herself for men, including her husband, if she will be an equal partner with man. (p.403)

Indeed, true honour of women lies in their character. Purity of character is not preserved by keeping women in purdah. The only self-control and purity of thinking can do it that is morally fair. In this connection, J. B. Kripalani writes:

Rama would be nowhere without Sita, free and independent even as he was himself. But for robust independence, Draupdi is perhaps a better example, she was gentleness incarnate. She was a delicate flower. Draupdi was a giant oak. She bent mighty Bhīma was terrible to everyone, but he was a lamb before Draupadi. She stood in no need of protection from anyone of the Pandavas. (p.401)

Indeed, It is bodily impractical to breach a woman against her desire in view of honour. When a woman is assaulted, her moral duty is self protection. God has given her strength. She must utilize it in self-respect if need be or die in her efforts. His Gandhi boosted Indian women to be fearless, because of Gandhi's behaviour with women was to give them a perfect dignity as human beings. Many women would find his guidance regarding their individual problems concerning with women's honour in Indian society.

The most significant relevance of Kripalani's Gandhi regarding women in 21st century lies in enjoying the same opportunities, rights and duties as men enjoy. True progress and growth can only be gained by taking true steps to eradicate deep rooted ideologies of gender bias and discrimination. In the same way, women should be given equal opportunities for education. A well qualified woman can contribute in the process of national development. In this reference, Kripalani writes:

Indian women after independence were given equal opportunities within all sphere of national life. There never has been any opposition from men in this respect. Unlike their sisters in Europe and elsewhere, Indian women did not have to undergo a separate struggle to secure their rights. (p.404)

Indeed, in India both theoretically and practically women should enjoy a status of equality with men. A woman should have economic and professional liberation. It will lessen financial dependence of women on their male partner. If they are empowered, national life of India can develop by leaps and bounds.

We find that Kripalani's Gandhi raised his voice for the women's honour and his thinking was feminist in his own untiring and literary efforts. He believed in women's rights that refer to complete emancipation of women from social, economic and political shackles of dependency and deprivation. His Gandhi wanted to encourage women to be self-reliant, self-esteemed and self-confident. He supported young women to remain bachelor girls all their lives than to be humiliated and dishonored by marrying men who required dowry. He realized dowry marriage as a cruel custom. His Gandhi favoured reciprocal consent, affection and admiration between husband and wife. He was grieved by the unfortunate condition and position of Indian women. We discover that he advocated and worked for gender equality. Kripalani's Gandhi was truly successful in making desired transformation in the lives of Indian women. He condemned all traditional hurdles to widow remarriages. He believed in the protection towards the girl widows who were like the human cow. The biographical relevance of his Gandhi's views and visions on women should be put into practice for the happy, healthy, prosperous, and harmonious existing and forthcoming generations. Biographical applicabilities of Kripalani's Gandhi regarding the dreams of women in 21st century are yet to be come true.

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