

My
Turn

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Mahatma Gandhi on women

There has been a renewed interest in Mahatma

Gandhi both in India and outside. And interestingly, in Malawi Gandhi is being discussed or targeted from different standpoints.

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence is an opportune time to reflect on Gandhi's view on women expressed about a century ago.

● Woman is more fitted than man to make exploration and take bolder action in nonviolence.

● There is no occasion for women to consider themselves subordinate or inferior to men.

● Woman is the companion of man, gifted with equal mental capacity.

● If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior.

● If nonviolence is the law of our being, the

future is with women.

● Woman, I hold, is the personification of self-sacrifice, but unfortunately today she does not realise what tremendous advantage she has over man.

Gandhi vehemently opposed the notion of women as a weaker sex.

He said, "To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is a man's injustice to woman. If by strength it is meant

moral power then woman is immeasurably man's superior.

Is she not more self-sacrificing, has she not

great 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 women."

Gandhi described discrimination against women as an

anachronism. He said:

"I fail to see any reason for jubilation over the birth of a son and for mourning over the birth of a daughter. Both are God's gifts. They have an equal right to live and are equally necessary to

and ahimsa".

He further states: "A daughter's share must be equal to that of a son. The husband's earnings are a joint property of husband and wife as he makes money by her assistance."

Gandhi firmly believed that if a husband is unjust to his wife, she has the right to live separately.

He averred:

"Both have equal rights over children. Each would forfeit these rights after they have

grown up, and even before that if he or she is unfit

for them. In short, he admitted no distinction between men and women except such as has been made by nature and can be seen with human eyes."

Gandhi described a woman as "the embodiment of sacrifice

Gandhi firmly believed that if a husband is unjust

to his wife, she has the right to live separately

keep the world going."

Gandhi called women as the noble sex. He said that if she is weak in striking, she is strong in suffering.

Gandhi described a woman as "the embodiment of sacrifice

In short, this is the Gandhian formula: sharing and sacrifice.

Women have to be conscious and aware to feel and realise at every step of their life that they are builders of their nation and the peaceful world.

The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world. As a social reformer, he placed great emphasis on women's education. Gandhi, undoubtedly had the ability to attract millions of not only literate but also illiterate women without the power of state, and without modern information technology. ■

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