



## GANDHIAN SATYAGRAH IN SOUTH AFRICA: SPESIAL REFERANCE TO CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN

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### **Abstract:**

*It was Gandhi, who brought a dramatic change among Indian women, when on his bidding they came out in large numbers from the shelter of their homes to take their part in the struggle for freedom, once the old shackles were removed, it was no longer possible to replace them in the same way. Thus the credit of Indian women's political awaking and political participation is undoubtly goes to Mahatma Gandhi, not Only in Indian freedom struggle but also in his first experiment of satyagrah in south Africa. Gandhiji had thought that women can be great satyagrahee because of their great power of tolerance, patience and firmness. So he urged women to participate in the satyagrah. Women had the great response to his bid and followed his philosophy and contributed in the satyagrah movement on large number. In this research paper I will try to focus on the contribution of women to Gandhian satyagrah in South Africa.*

### **KEY WORDS:**

Satyagrah, discrimination, color prejudice, serfs, army of peace, freedom, women, rights, South Africa, Mhatma Gandhi.

### **INTRODUCTION-**

Mahatma Gandhi was a great and revolutionary leader who brought a dramatic change in the role and status of Indian women in South Africa and in India. "It was Gandhi, who brought a dramatic change among our women, when on his bidding they came out in large numbers from the shelter of their homes to take their part in the struggle for freedom, once the old shackles were removed, it was no longer possible to replace them in the same way."1 Thus the credit of Indian women's political awaking and political participation is undoubtly goes to Mahatma Gandhi, not Only in Indian freedom struggle but also in his first experiment of satyagrah in south Africa. "Satyagraha is the vindication of truth not by infliction of suffering on the opponent but on one's self. The opponent must be weaned from error by patience and sympathy. Weaned, not crushed. Satyagrah as sums a constant beneficent interaction between contestants with a view to their ultimate reconciliation"2 Gandhiji had thought that women can be great satyagrahee because of their great power of tolerance, patience and firmness. So he urged women to participate in the satyagrah. Women had the great response to his bid and followed his philosophy and contributed in the satyagrah movement on large number. In this research paper I will try to focus on the contribution of women to Gandhian satyagrah in South Africa.

### **GANDHIJI'S SATYAGRAM IN SOUTH AFRICA :-**

After having a degree of Barrister at law in London Gandhiji had returned to India in 1891 "As a

lawyer he failed both in Rajkot and Bombay. Just then a firm of Porbandar Muslims (Dada Abdula & Co.) offered to send him to South Africa for a year as their lawyer, He accepted "I wanted somehow to leave India, He admitted sadly"<sup>3</sup> After His arrival in south Africa Gandhiji had faced the Maritz burg incident and acquainted with color prejudice in South Africa. He convened a meeting of the Indians in Pretoria and delivered his first public speech on white discrimination. From 1860 Indian began coming into South Africa as indentured laborers to work for the British owned sugar, tea and coffee plantation. They came as term serfs for a period of five years sometimes they remained as free workingmen for more years. Frequently they chose to remain in South Africa as free man "Disturbed by the growing number of Indian residents and by their affluence whites changed the regulations in 1884; Thenceforth an indentured person had to return to India at the expiration of his first five year term or become a serf in South Africa for life, if they want to remain as free workingman they had to pay an annual tax of three pounds for each and every person of their family. Indian had forced to carry a pass if they appeared on the streets after 9 P.M. They were forbidden to buy own land, three pond tax for residence permit, limited to the slums only. They prohibited from walking on pavements. Whites were using an insulting term 'coolies' applied to Indians.

"Transvaal Government Gazette a August 22, 1906, published the draft of an act requiring all Indians to submit of official registration and fingerprints on pain of fines, imprisonment and deportation from the province"<sup>4</sup> The Asiatic Registration Act was passed on July 1907. Gandhiji refused to registration. "August 16, 1908, more than two thousand Indians threw their registration certificates into burning paraffin"<sup>5</sup> Gandhiji launched the satyagrah Against the Asiatic Registration Act. Many Indians courted imprisonment. In the year 1913 women were allowed to join the satyagrah because the court had refused to recognize Indian marriages and the Government had declared invalid it. Women played a glorious part in the satyagrah. "A batch of women from Tolstoy farm crossed the border into Natal in defiance of the immigration law. They went to the mines and urged the indentured laborers to down tools. This succeeds in inducing some 3000 to 4000 Miners in the Newcastle area to go on strike on 23 September 1913, according to plan 16 women were arrested for crossing the border and entering the Transvaal without permits. They were tried and sentenced to three months imprisonment with hard labour in the Pietermaritzburg jail"<sup>6</sup> The scope of satyagrah was increasing day by day. After the pressure from British Government and Indian Government the talk between General Stums and Gandhiji had occurred finally on June 30. 1914 Indian Relief Bill was passed Three pond tax has canceled, Hindu, Muslim, and Parsi marriages were declared valid. Gandhiji called the new law 'The Magna Charta' of South African Indians. After completed his mission Gandhiji returned to India with his family in 1915 that his great victory.

In the satyagrah in South Africa so many women had contributed very bravely. Kasturba Gandhi, Kashi Gandhi, Santok Maganlal Gandhi, Jaykunwar Mehata, Emily Hobhouse, Olive Schreiner, Elizabeth Molten, Ruth Alexander, Valliammah Munusamy Moodliar, Shantiwathi, Dr.K.Goondm, Zainab Asvat, Veeramah Pather, Khatija Mayat, Fatima Meer, Manonmani, were some of the prominent women who had played a crucial role in the Gandhian satyagrah in South Africa.

### 1)Kasturba Gandhi :-

Gandhi went to south Africa only for one year but soon after the well known about the situation of Indians in South Africa and he realized that his antidiscrimination work would required his presence in south Africa for an extended period, he returned to India in 1896 and fetched Kasturba, his son Harilal and Manilal to south Africa. When they arrived at Durban Gandhiji had faced a big attacked by a hostile crowd, thus Kasturba had realized the situation of South Africa and the nature of her husband's work. She always stood behind Gandhiji in the satyagrah of South Africa. She had the leadership of women participants and worked for guide them. She had tried her best to maintain the discipline in women's troops. "A treasure of jewels, including a gold necklace for Kasturba, was presented to Gandhiji in 1901 as he was planning to return to Bombay he spent a sleepless night from between a yearning for security, which the little heap of diamonds, pearls, rubies and gold trinkets would have brought him, and the desire to achieve freedom by owning less. Finally he decided to give up the jewelry. Kasturbai protest availed nothing. The gifts were used to create a trust fund for South African Indians."<sup>7</sup>

Gandhiji's decision to give up sex was accepted by Kasturba without a protest. She agreed to spare him for give more time and devotion to the South African satyagrah, her devotion and sacrifice was really great. "But while In Zululand he took a vow and that made it final. On demobilization he went to Phoenix" Farm and told Kasturba about his resolution she made no protest, She was never the temptress."<sup>8</sup>

She had actively participated in the satyagrah against the Asiatic Registration Act-1907. She was the inspiration of Gandhiji's satyagrah. She worked for satyagrahees in the phoenix farm in Natal. She had also participated to get a jail sentence. They went to Natal and return to Transvaal. This violated the immigration ban and was punished with one to three months in prison "At one time, of the thirteen thousand

men, women and children of Indian descent in Transvaal, twenty five hundred were in jail, and six thousand had fled the sate”<sup>9</sup> This incidence shows us the participation of women in satayagrah.

On the Tolstoy Farm Kasturba had Supported all the activity regarding satyagrah by Gandhi, She was the member of Gandhi army of peace “At 6.30 on the morning of November 6.1913 Gandhi Counted his force. There were 2,037 men, 127 women and 57 children. We offered prayers and commenced to march in the name of God.”<sup>10</sup> Kastura had the leadership of women in march “Some of the women carried babies on their hips or backs”<sup>11</sup> Kasturba, insisted on joining the satyagrah despite her poor health and was in the first batch from Natal Which crossed the Transvaal border in defense of the law

**2)Valliammah Munusamy Moodliar :-** Valliammua was the first generation freedom fighter and Martyr of satyagrah in south Africa, she has participated in the satyagrah against the Asiatic Registration Act which invalidated all non Christian marriages. She got the imprison for three months. In the jail she had faced the harassment, poorly treated and abused so she got ill. She released on 22 February 1914 and she was confined to bed after her released. Gandhiji went to meet her and had the conversation with her,

“Valliamma, you do not repent of having gone to jail? I asked”

“Repent? I am even now ready to jail again if I am arrested, she said”.

“But what if it results in your death? I pursued.

“I do not mind it. Who would not love to die for ones motherland? Was her Reply.”<sup>12</sup>

**3) Kashi Gandhi:** - Kashi Chaganlal Gandhi was the relative of Kasturba Gandhi she had participated in the batch of women from Tolstoy farm crossed the border in to Natal defiance of the immigration law.

**4)Santok Maganlal Gandhi:** - Santok Gandhi was also the close relative of Kasturba Gandhi, She had also participated in the march to Natal. She was one of the members of 16 women who were arrested for crossing the border and entering the Transvaal without permits they were tried and sentenced to three months imprisonment with hard labor in the Pietermaritzburg jail.

**5)Jaykunwar Mehata:** - She was the daughter of close friend of Gandhi; she had participated in Satyagrah against Asiatic Registration Act, and fused the imprisonment.

**6) Emily Hob house :-** Emily Hobhouse was born in the Britain in 1860. She became eminent philanthropist who had worked for the victims of Anglo Boer war. Gandhi met Emily Hob house in the year 1914. She had great regard for India “that was the time when Gandhi most needed help and she provided it without hesitation.”<sup>13</sup>

**7)Olive Schreiner :-**Olive Schreiner was the great women activist as well as the most prominent writer of South Africa. She vehemently opposed the Anglo Boer war. Gandhiji told about her, “I claim the privilege of having been a close friend of that great poetess and philanthropist and the most self effacing women olive Schreiner. She was a friend of the Indians equally with the natives of South Africa. She knew no distinctions between white and black races; she loved the Indian, the Zulu and the Banta as her own Children. Such precious men and women have also been born and bred in South Africa.”<sup>14</sup> She had always assistance to mahatma Gandhi in his work in South Africa.

**8)Elizabeth M. Molteno:** - Elizabeth Molten was born in to the very rich and prominent family of south Africa. She was the close friend of Emily Hob house and worked for the opposition to Anglo Boer war. She met Gandhi in 1909 and she visited the Phoenix Aasharam in 1912. She liked the Phoenix very much “She bought a cottage at Ohlange a mile or two from Phoenix, and was there during the crucial phase of the satyagraha, lending invaluable moral support which no European of her standing could conceive of”<sup>15</sup> on January 1.1914, she spoke at a meeting to welcome Mrs. Sheikh Mehtab and Hanifa Bibi, the two Muslim women passive resisters, on their release from prison. On January 20 she spoke at another meeting to welcome a group of women passive resisters from the Transvaal and expressed the hope that in the future South Africa, women would take a prominent part.”<sup>16</sup>

**9)Ruth Alexander :-** Ruth Alexander was a daughter or an American Jewish scholar. She married Morris Alexander in 1907 and went to South Africa. Her husband was a relative of Herman Kallenbach, who was a great associate of Gandhiji. Soon after Ruth became a close friend of Olive Schreiner and Support the satyagrah Movement of Gandhiji.

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**10) Shantiwathi :-** Shantiwathi was born in 1935. She was an active member of South Africa Federation of women. She has arrested in 1965 due to act against the prohibition act. She was threatened by the Government for her activity. She was the witness in Vini Mandela's case. After the dismissal of Vini Mandela's case she released from jail & for the permission to leave South Africa.

**11) Dr. K. Goonam:-** The most prominent in the South Africa India congress in the 1940 was Dr. K. Goonam a medical practitioner who was appointed its vice president in a very short time. She had the leadership of Indian in South Africa at war with Government.

**12)Zainab Asvat :-** Asvat was the great Indian activists to be placed under house arrest in the 1940 for – going links with women activists in the Congress party of South Africa. She pledged the support of Indian women in the fight against passes, at African women's and pass meeting, "her unbroken record of involvement in politics spanning a period over 50 years ranged from active campaigning to being imprisoned 18 times for her passive resistance activities."18

**13)Veeramah Pather :-** Veeramah pather had participated in the initial satyagraha campaign at the time of Gandhi, she said Though individuals would disappear from the mortal scene, the straggle would go on.

**14) Khatija Mayat :-** Khatija Mayat was also the active member in satyagrah she urged all Indian women to heed the call of the Transvaal and the Natal Indian Congress to support the Battle against the Ghetto Act.

**15)Fatima Meer: -** Fatima Meer was a stalwart of the struggle inspired by earlier veteran activists. She was banned for a period of nine years, imprisoned for south Africa a national coalition of Black & White women in Protest against pass laws for Africa women"19

**16) Manonmani :-** was the daughter in law of Mr. Thambi Nandu the follower of Gandhiji in South Africa ,and the wife of Narayanswami. She had participated in the break the law movement and had the punishment of prison for two times."20She had become Amma (Mother) of the people who were participated in the movement in the South Africa. Not only she and her husband but their five sons were contributed to satyagrah movement. They faced lot of trouble but never give up the commitment with movement.

#### CONCLUSSION :-

Women had allowed to participated in satyagrah by Gandhiji after the year 1913 when the South African Government had declared all non Christian Marriages invalid, that meant all Married Indian women in South Africa were reduced to status of concubines whilest their progeny were classified illegitimate and deprived of all their rights of inheritance, property assets and legal claims. Women had fought against that act and also Asiatic Registration Act. They had proved their energy and efficiency in satyagrah. Not only Indian women but also British women, South African women were contributed in the satyagrah, but the proud heritage of the women has unfortunately been muffled and silenced by the lack of exposure. So we must find out the contribution of women more deeply in the satyagrah under the leadership of Gandhiji in South Africa.

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