



“THERIGATHA - SYMBOL OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION AND ROOTS OF FEMINISM”

Sunita Santosh Borde - Khadase

Head, Dept. of History ,
Smt. C. B. Shah Mahila Mahavidhyalay, Sangli .

Abstract:

Indian women were always subordinate and discriminate under the name of religion, in this caste based patriarchal society. It's a proven fact that, in the caste hierarchical system the lower caste women have faced more painful life than the high caste Hindu women. They have faced three types of discrimination simultaneously like caste, patriarchy and their women hood. "To be born into a women's body was considered a cause for special suffering on account of menstruation, childbirth & menopause "1 “

KEY WORDS:

Buddhism, Feminism, religion, women, Therigatha. Freedom, Liberation, equality, sisterhood.

INTRODUCTION-

Dr. Ambedkar underlines the fact that, women enjoyed a high status in the pre-manu era, but the Manu was responsible for the downfall in the status of women "2 According to Dr. B.R.Ambedkar Buddhism was the first religious revolution in the World, which offered the equal status to women, "Buddhism has always aimed at the ideal relationship between men and women "3 " Buddhism has based on the principles of freedom, equality, fraternity and scientific approach towards life. Gender equality is also the part of Buddhism. When we studied about the concept of Feminism we come to know about that ,this concept was present in the Buddhist philosophy in different forms. The major hypothesis of Feminism is, "Women are exploited in the patriarchal society". We found that, Buddha was always against the exploitation of women. "The Buddha did not subscribe to gender discrimination and thought that girls too could be capable and virtuous" 4 we found the seeds of feminism in the Buddha's teaching and the Nunnery, which had formed by Buddha known as Bhikkuni Sangh. Buddhist Nuns called Theri had written the verses which are the first Feminist writing in the World. In this research paper I will try to find out the roots of feminism in Buddhist philosophy and Therigatha.

WOMEN IN BUDDHISM - ROOTS OF FEMINISM :-

According to Dr. Ambedkar "The co-existence of equality, brotherhood, freedom and justice may be called as religion"5 his definition of religion was shaped by the influence and deep understanding of the Buddhism. Buddha had opened the door for women's emancipation he allowed to women to get knowledge and right of renunciation. "On one occasion while the Buddha was conversing with King Kosla (Prasenjit) of India, a messenger came & informed the King that a daughter was born unto him. Hearing it, the King was displeased. But the Buddha comforted and stimulated him, saying. "A woman child, O Lord of men, may prove even a better offspring than male"6 Buddha never discriminate the women, Daughter's birth was welcomed by him. "Welcome of daughter's birth with happiness" is the first revolutionary step forward the

feminism, Buddha had taken it bravely before the 2500 years. He allowed women's entry in Sangh. Women were placed under various disabilities before the appearance of the Buddha." The establishment of the order of Bhikkunis was certainly blessing. In this order queens, princesses, daughter of noble families, widows, bereaved mothers, helpless women, courtesans all, despite their caste or rank met on a common footing, enjoyed perfect consolation and peace, and breathed that free atmosphere which was denied to those cloistered in cottages and palatial mansions"⁷ We found the principle of 'Sisterhood' in Buddhist nunnery, which we now discussing in the feminism & appeal to worldwide women that, they are united as sisters. Women played an important part in the spread of early Buddhism, both as lay disciples and Bhikkhuni's. "In Hindu Tradition, the major duties assigned to women were childbearing and housework. Consequently, a single life was seen as a wasted life and unmarried women were subject to scoffs. On the contrary, in Buddhism, married life was viewed as a hindrance to spiritual pursuits. Whenever the Buddhist point of view prevailed, a woman was no longer compelled to marry to achieve self respect and approval from her family."⁸ From the founding of this order. It has provided an even better opinion for women who were spiritually and religiously inclined. In the Feminist discourse Women are demanding for the right to marry or be unmarried. Bhikkuni were enjoyed this right in the Buddhist era. "Suman the youngest daughters of Anathapindika did not marry but joined the order at an advanced age. There are other instances recorded in the Therigatha"⁹ It means women had the freedom to right about their own life. This is also very important part of newly raised concept of feminism which have been already exist in Buddhism.

Whenever the discussion about the equality for women in Buddhism & Buddha's view towards women's equality starts, Some questions raised about the Buddha's reluctance to give the permission to women in Sangha and credit had given to Ananda to convince the Buddha for admit women's to Sangha. "But it seems to be an addition to the original Buddhist text" ¹⁰ According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar "That text from Mahaparinibbansutta was interpolation by Bhikkhus. This reference was written after 400 years of Buddha's mahparinirvan. So it seem to be addition by Bhikkus in the original text"¹¹ "It is important to note that, this passage does not occur in any other sutta notwithstanding the fact that they contain so many other passages from this sutta. In the Chinese version of this sutta it doesn't find"¹² similarly the eight rules for nuns are also added to original text. Buddha always opposed to subordination of women and he was the one and only revolutionary religious reformer who had given equality to women in Indian History.

THERIGATHA - SYMBOL OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION :-

Therigatha were the proof of women's freedom and emancipation. It had proved that, women were intellectually free as well as equal to men. Therigatha is a collection of verses attributed to senior (Theri) nuns of the same period of Theragatha (verses of monks). Therigatha is a part of the Khuddka-Nikaya, which is part of the sutta-pitaka of the Buddhist Pali canon. Therigatha is a collection of 73 gathas (verses) of elder nuns who became very famous through their virtue during the time of Buddha. It has a total of 522 verses. Bhadda, famous for her discourses and for her memories of former lives; Vishakha a wealthy patroness of the order, Ambapali ; a courtesan who became a convert and supported the Sangha, Dhammadipa, the great Preacher, Mahaprajapati the Buddha's foster - mother, who found the Sangh for women Khema, the consent of King Bimbisara, renowned for her profound insight & Yashodhara, the wife of Gautama also entered the Sangha"¹³ Mukta the Brahmin woman who became a Bhikshuni exclaimed. "Aha! I am really free and there are no limits to my freedom."¹⁴ It shows the freedom of Women in Buddhist era. Another Brahmin woman turned Bhikshuni replies "As I sit in meditation on this rock every day, the breath of freedom flows ceaselessly over my spiritual dedication"¹⁵

Thus, we find freedom for women in Buddhist Philosophy and that's way Therigatha is the symbol of Women's Liberation also we can find the roots of feminism into the Therigatha.

CONCLUSION :-

Buddha was the emancipator of Indian women & we found the roots of feminism in Buddhism. "Feminism is an ideology which has a specific relationship to a political movement. It offers some kinds of analysis and explanation of how & why women have less power than men and how this imbalance could be challenged and transformed"¹⁶ Feminist movements are trying for women's liberation. In Buddhism we found that, the Buddha had tried for the women's liberation; he had given them right as equal as men & offered them the right to salvation through establishment of nunnery. When Hindu religion "denies the knowledge and the right of renunciation to women"¹⁷ Buddha had spread the preaching of equality, fraternity & freedom to women. "He allowed women the access to Pravara and thus at once brought an end to two kinds of injustice. 1) Women could participate in the processes of knowledge as could as men, 2)

Women could experience spiritual enlightenment. Thus, Dr. Ambedkar concludes that, the Buddha freed the Indian women from enslavement & brought about revolutionary changes in their lives"18

We can see the roots of the various concepts such as women's liberation, sisterhood, right to decision, equality, in to the Buddhism. This concept now adopted by the modern feminism as ideology "When investigating feminine images in Buddhist literature, it is important to keep in mind that the social & cultural setting within which the teaching were given."19

Social, Economical, Political, Religious situation may be changed now but the message of Buddha about the women's liberation has the relativity to this era.

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