

## **Dr.B.R. Ambedkar's the Buddha and His Dhamma : A Feminist Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

The Buddha and His Dhamma is the last literary creation of Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar. It was published posthumously by the People's Education Society in November 1957, almost a year after the great leader's death. During his career of 30 years, Dr.Ambedkar adorned diverse fields. Always a controversial figure, his speeches, as well as many books and pamphlets on diverse subjects, invariably provoked not only plenty of thoughts but also a lot of heat and controversy. He was a great sage of knowledge. A journalist, Beverly Nicholas in 1944 had counted him amongst the six most learned men in India. He was the last doyen in the series of great intellectuals like Tilak, Ranade , Bhandarkar, and Telang. His profound study, great industry, and conquering intellect gave new dimensions to the Indian English Literature through his writings.

Dr.Ambedkar is the staunch supporter of Women's emancipation from the age-old traditions and dogma of religion. It is the well-known fact that he resigned for women's cause on the issue of Hindu Code Bill in 1951. Through the annals of The Buddha and His Dhamma, we can get vivid pictures of women of ancient India. Buddhism is not only the religion of peace and kindness but also the religion of gender equality. There are various instances which help us to understand the situation of women.

**KEYWORDS:** Renunciation, feminist, Parivraja

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### **Preface :**

The Buddha and His Dhamma exposes Hindu approach towards women and elaborates Buddha's efforts to defy orthodox Hinduism. It is needless to discuss here the place of women in the Hindu religion. He dared to challenge useless Hindu customs, baseless traditions and doctrines. He could read the caste system and rigid hierarchal pattern in Hindu religion which made women not less than a slave and just a breeding machine. In this book, Dr. Ambedkar discussed Buddha's concern for women, his revolutionary and visionary thoughts and creative, functional activism. To curb all inequalities The Buddha accepted all males and females in the fold of his Sangha and introduced a new way of liberation. Dr.Ambedkar found their emancipation in Buddhist values, which promotes equality, self-respect, and education. Ambedkar trusts that Buddha treatment to women was that of respect and love and he never attempted to degrade them as Manu did. He taught women Buddha Dharma and religious philosophy. Ambedkar cites women like Vishakha, Amrapali of Visali, Gautami, Rani Mallika, Queen of Prasenajjth who approached Buddha, as pieces of evidence of Buddha's treatment of women as equals. It was mainly the Hindu culture and social customs, which stood in the headway of women's empowerment.

### **Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar extending Buddha's feminist perspective :**

The Buddha and His Dhamma exposes feminist perception of the Buddha. Buddha's philosophy of equality is the solace for Dr. Ambedkar who observed the miserable conditions of Untouchables in India. Babasaheb criticizes that Brahminism made women powerless, snatched their power to rebel, denied their rights, completely robbed the significance of their life and turned them only devotees. Dr.Ambedkar brings back the Buddha in the 19th century and finds he relevant as he was 2500 years ago. Buddha succeeded in eliminating inequality and establishing equality. King Pasenadi of Kosala was displeased when queen delivered a girl child rather than the desired son. Buddha preached him that a woman may be wise and virtuous. She may be a devoted wife, respecting her mother-in-law. Buddha clearly declared that women have the same potential for awakening that men have.

Buddha clearly states the irrelevance of gender in the path of enlightenment. The Nun Sona's encounter with Mara clears Buddha's feminist perspective. Mara tries to dissuade her from her path and claims that a woman can not attain awakening. Sona replies that womanhood does not matter if concentrated. She says either a man or woman can attain enlightenment. Only characters through Babasaheb can dare to state like this. These statements are a challenge to those who created many hurdles in the path of women's emancipation.

Dr.Ambedkar categorically has focused many women characters in this book who are the torch bearers and pioneers of women emancipation. Yashodhara is a major character.She was determined to marry Siddhartha. Her decision was respected by Dandapani and consented her to marry. This instance in the book indirectly promotes women's right to willingly marry. Dr.Ambedkar also takes care of many legal and social aspects while doing his characterization. At the time of marriage Yashodhara is of 16 years old. But the birth of Rahul took place after a long term of married life. He indirectly also want to oppose early child marriage and child birth at an early age. It clears that motherhood is not forced upon Yashodhara at the early tender age. Dr.Ambedkar conveys his message and cares while writing that logic, legality and constitutional values do not deviate. He appreciates, "What though this hero be, great by his exalted glory, yet ' great is the might of woman."

Renunciation of Buddha i.e. Gruhatyaga is the most important episode in this book. Dr.Ambedkar disagrees with the traditional reasons and adds his logical interpretation. He does not accept that Siddhartha skipped at midnight while Yashodhara and Rahul were in sleep. The conversation between Siddhartha and Yashodhara reveals that the issue of Parivrja was well discussed.The following extract clears the fact.

24. He asked her:—" Yeshodhara, tell me what you think of my decision to take Parivrja? "

25. He expected she would collapse. Nothing of the kind happened.

26. With full control over her emotions, she replied: " What else could I have done if I were in your position? I certainly would not have been a party to a war on the Koliyas.

27. "Your decision is the right decision. You have my consent and my support. I too would have taken Parivraja with you. If I do not, it is only because I have Rahula to look after.

28. " I wish it had not come to this. But we must be bold and brave and face the situation. Do not be anxious about your parents and your son. I will look after them till there is life in me.

29. " All I wish is that now that you are becoming a Parivrajaka leaving behind all who are near and dear to you, you will find a new way of life which would result in the happiness of mankind."

30. Siddharth Gautama was greatly impressed. He realized as never before what a brave, courageous and noble-minded woman Yeshodhara was, and how fortunate he was in having her as his wife and how fate had put them asunder. He asked her to bring Rahula. He cast his fatherly look on him and left. *ibid* p.32

This conversation clears the vagueness of traditional myth. Also shows intimacy and matured understanding between husband and wife. When Buddha visits his palace after enlightenment, Shuddhodana informs him that during the seven years that she has lost her husband when she heard that Siddharth had shaved his head, she did likewise; when she heard that he had left off the use of perfumes and ornaments she also refused their use. Like her husband, she has eaten at appointed times from an earthen bowl only. This shows her true love and sacrifice for Siddhartha.

It was Anand's persuasion that compelled the Buddha to allow women in the fold of Buddhism. Buddha opened doors of Buddhism for women and offered the opportunity to attend enlightenment as males can. This was never done before. He dismantled the barriers of class, caste, and sex. He preached that the road to knowledge must be open to all—to males as well as to females. *ibid* p.287

When the king of the Kosalas, Pasendi, had complained that Queen Mallika had given birth to a daughter and expressed his sadness. Thereupon the Exalted One, discerning the matter said: ' A woman child, O lords of man, may prove even a better offspring than a male. For she may grow up wise and virtuous, her husband's mother reverencing true wife, a daughter. The boy that she may bear may do great deeds and rule great realms, yea, such a son of a noble wife becomes his country's guide. *ibid* p.376

The Buddha preached him the valuable place of girls. The courtesan Ambrapali also surrendered to Buddha and found solace in the fold of Buddhism.

### **Conclusion :**

Buddhism is the blessed philosophy for women compelling the world to accept them as the human being and equal counterparts. Dr. Ambedkar underlines and reiterates the golden words of the Buddha through his book. He links many missing episodes in the life of Siddhartha and Yashodhara. He focuses on many instances and spotlights on many women characters from all stratum of life. Undoubtedly the Indian constitution is the replica of Buddhism. There is a need to rethink about the orthodoxy, rearrange religious

philosophy with the context of the constitution and to translate Buddhist feminist perspective in action. The book emphasizes the need to reassess the religion in terms of recent scientific, intellectual and social progress. This paper necessitates a study of The Buddha and His Dhamma with multiple perspectives.

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