

FEMININE THOUGHTS IN BUDDHISM

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Preface:

Rise of Buddhism in India in the 6th century B.C. From the very beginning of Indian history, women have been given a secondary place in the socio-economic and political spheres. At the root of all this inequality is the concept of patriarchy and gender. From an early age, women were traditionally confined to the womb and child. Not only in India but all over the world women have to endure various forms of injustice. Against this backdrop, Gautama Buddha has given a new revolutionary vision of gender equality not only to India but also to the world. This is one of the reasons why Buddhism is so popular in many countries. *Pravajya* is not given in Buddhism on the basis of caste discrimination. Therefore, women from the caste which was considered inferior at that time were also given admission in the *Sangha*. Many women like Mahaprajapati Gautami, Mahamaya, Amrapali, Khema, Pattachara, Vishakha, Punna, Sanghamitra, Vasavadatta appear in the Buddhist *Sangha*. The door of liberation was first opened for women by joining the *Sangha*. Before that, woman did not have the right to salvation. Many women have been promoted to the rank of *Arhant*. There is a book called '*Therigatha*' in which 73 *bhikkhunis* narrate their experiences and give examples of how they became enlightened. This is an ideal for today's women. That is why women have performed in Buddhism, what is their place in Buddhism. The thoughts and writings of women in *Therigatha* are bound to inspire feminist historiography. In Buddhism, women are treated equally. As a result, her personality developed. It is a big change that she was able to write down her own experience's. Buddhism was the first to dare to look at women in this way. That is why Buddhism was able to revolutionize the history of India.

A vision of the deeds of a Buddhist woman

'*Theri*' means respectable women who, following the eight strict rules of Dhamma prescribed for *bhikkhuni* after joining the team, are respectfully called *Theri*. Such *Theri's* poetry is *Therigatha*. Many women who have attained the status of *Arhant* in Buddhist philosophy are known from this *Therigatha*. The *Therigatha* contains a total of 522 sagas of 73 *bhikkhunis*, arranged in a total of 16 *sargas*. BhauLokhande and RatnamalaLokhande, Dr. Translated by Sheshrao Meshram and Dr. Rupa Bodhini has written on this. The *Therigatha* gives a powerful message about how women in the Buddhist era struggled to gain their human rights.² *Therigatha*, each *Theri* has a place of honor in religious and social work for the married woman, the woman who gives birth, the woman who is fortunate. Unmarried women, widows and childless women, on the other hand, are deprived of dignity. A collection of all these different experiences can be found in *Therigatha*. *Theri* seems to have causalized the intrusion of this injustice. Being self-aware, they appear to be introspecting themselves. They are also seen trying to find fault with themselves and overcome them.¹

Woman grief expressed in Therigatha

In *Manusmriti*, Manu says that a woman should live in the shelter of her father in her childhood, in the shelter of her husband in her youth and in the shelter of her children in her old age. That is to say, Gautama Buddha was aware of the painful life that she had to depend on man from birth to death. 'Ladies, you are very miserable. Explaining how the life of a woman is miserable, Gautama Buddha says that in a woman's life, all the incidents like self-coming, becoming a widow, death of a child, death of parents are sad. In Buddhism, attachment or craving is considered to be the root cause of suffering.² The only cause of grief for *Kisa Gautami* and *Ubbiriis* the death of their own child.

Pattachara's pain is even more different. *Pattachara* is married to a servant against the will of the father. Her two children died suddenly, she understands the news of her brother and parents' death and she goes crazy, she feels alienated. She is saddened by the ignorance that we become paralyzed.³ *Sundarinanda* belonged to the *shakya* clan, so she had taken all the relatives' *pravrajja*, but because of beauty pride, she did not go before Gautama Buddha. She did not understand the connection between eternity and misery. As a result, she did not attain *Nirvana* due to lack of proper knowledge. An unknown *bhikkhuni* has expressed his grief in *Therigatha*. She belongs to *Kshatriya* clan and when she gets married, she gets disgusted with life after listening to *Mahaprajapati Gautami's* sermon. Due to this incident, she had all the impermanent knowledge of the world. Gautam Buddha says about her, *Sthavirike*, you sleep soundly. Use your own handmade garments to achieve eternal peace in this life, because your anger has calmed down like a vegetable burned in a pan. Called *Sthvirika* because of the steady calm, she broke the boundaries of caste and caste distinction and joined the group of *bhikkhuni* based on the principle of equality of Gautam Buddha.⁵ *MuttaBhikkhuni* was born in a Brahmin clan. She left home and spent her days as a student in the company of Mahaprajapati Gautami. *Bhikkhuni Mutta* was completely freed from caste and caste barriers. The Buddha says about her, "You are free, O *Mutta*, just as the moon is free from the eclipse of *Rahu*, so you are free from all bondage. With a liberated mind, pay off the debt of the society and take food from the society"⁶

Punna belonged to the *Shakya* clan of Shrivasti. She went beyond caste discrimination and followed the path of equality and humanity. The grief expressed by Theri in *Therigatha* appears to be of different kinds, sometimes due to his own ignorance and sometimes due to ignorance of the society. But knowledge and wisdom help them to destroy this ignorance and craving. Gautama Buddha has instilled in women the ambition to be free from ignorance and has changed their minds by giving practical examples. Buddhism seems to have instilled in women the belief in self-liberation.

Life of Buddhist Worshipers.

Followers of Buddhism are called *Upasaka* and *Upasika*. Women are called *Upasika* (Worshippers) are housewives. *Bhikkhuni* is a woman who has migrated to the Buddhist community. The Buddha is often accused of disrupting the structure of society by admitting women to the *Sangha*, but there is evidence that the Buddha taught housewives properly and they were not forcibly admitted into the *Sangha*. Once Gautam Buddha went to the *Anathpindakas* house, he heard a loud quarrel. Buddha asked *Anathpindaka* what happened then he replied that. She is very proud. She doesn't respect her husband, so there are always quarrels in the house. Buddha called *Sujata* and asked, "*Sujata*, tell me, how are you, wife?" "What kind of housewife are you in *Vadhikasama*, *Chorasama*, *Pramadasama*, *Matrusama*, *Bhaginisama*, *Sakhisama* or *Dasisama*?" *Sujata* did not understand any of this. Then Buddha has given explanation about 7 types of wife. A housewife who is always angry and thinks of taking revenge on her husband is a *Vadhikasama*. A woman who uses her husband's wealth for her own pleasure and mourning water is called a *Chorasama*. A woman who is lazy is called *Pramadasama* and a woman who is always worried about her husband is called *Matrusama*. The wife is given the status of mother. A wife who loves her husband like a sister should be called *Bhaginisama*. *Sakhisama* is the name given to a woman who shares her joys and sorrows with her husband. And the last type of housewife who endures all the hardships of her husband and obeys him is called *Dasisama*. The Buddha then asks *Sujata* which of the seven types of wife are you? *Sujata* repented of her behavior at the Buddha's instruction and promised Buddha a good housewife religion.

Feminist views of the Buddhist community:

In the time of Gautama Buddha, there were different opinions about women. By denying them the right to salvation, the path of knowledge was closed to them. Against such a backdrop that it was difficult for a beautiful, good-natured woman to live, Gautama Buddha not only protected women by

admitting them into his team, but also broke with the theological evidence denying women the right to salvation by showing that women can also attain *Nirvana* and *Arhant*. Anyone of any caste had free access to the Buddhist community. The goal of every person entering the Buddhist *Sangha* was to attain *Nirvana*. *Bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* used to work day and night for this. Buddha's rituals were opposed to the sacrificial culture.

Thoughts are the basis of religion, that is, a person removes bad thoughts from his mind and cultivates good thoughts instead. That is why Gautama Buddha had laid down some rules on how to behave *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhuni* in the *Sangha*. Adherence to rules was necessary to establish a moral ideal. The Buddhist community was respected by all in the community. The aim of the *Sangha* was to liberate the people from misery by preaching *Arya Satya*. *Abhikkhu* who went to the common people for preaching had a moral punishment that would not cast doubt on his stone. The Buddha taught that a *bhikkhu* or *bhikkhuni* should be able to present himself as a moral ideal while entering the society.⁸ The Buddha seems to have made the rules thoughtfully. There seems to be a moral gap between *Bhikkhu* and *Bhikkhuni*. By making rules about how to treat a *bhikkhuni* woman as well as a *bhikkhuni*, Gautama Buddha set an example of how to treat a woman with dignity and humility in the team and outside the *Sangha*. There was no separate rite of passage for women in the *Sangha*. From the time of his initiation, the Buddha looked at him as a human being without any discrimination between men and women.⁹

Eight Terms / Conditions for *Bhikkhuni*

- 1) No matter how many years she has been in the *Bhikkhuni Sangh*, she should greet all the *Bhikkhus*, older and elder.
- 2) Don't live in a village where there are no *Bhikkhu*.
- 3) *Bhikkhunis* should ask the *Bhikkhu Sangh* for *Uposath* and preaching.
- 4) After the rainy season, the *bhikkhuni* should *Pravarna* of both the *Sangha*.
- 5) The *Bhikkhuni* who violates the rules of the *Sangha* should get 15 days *Manat* from the *Sangha*.
- 6) *Shramneri* who has learned for two years should get resources from both the *Sangha*.
- 7) *Bhikkhu* should not be abused for any reason.
- 8) *Bhikkhuni* should not preach to *bhikkhus*.¹⁰

From these eight rules, it seems that Gautama Buddha underestimated women, but since the *Bhikkhu Sangh* was formed long before the *Bhikkhuni Sangh*, they must have known the rules of the *Sangh*, so the Buddha must have made these rules. We also see some limitations of the Buddhist *Sangh*. According to Gail Omvedt, the Buddhist Dhamma and the *Brahmani* tradition were the major ideological-philosophical schools of thought at the time, and both seemed to reflect patriarchal relations. Buddhism allowed women to join the *Sangha* but their social status was inferior but in spirituality they had equal status with men. Moreover, the male dominance of the family was less socially accepted and the Buddha had reluctantly joined the *Sangha*. The Buddha states this rule in the *Mahavagga* in *Vinaya*. "Happiness in a house where there are more women and fewer men can be easily looted by thieves, just as religion does not last long on the basis of teachings which allow women to be deprived of worldly life. Anand sugarcane field gets disease on good sugarcane and that field does not last long. Also, the religion on the basis of whose teaching's women are allowed to go free from worldly life, does not last long. Just like a man builds a big dam around the water so that water does not get carried away, so I have laid down eight rules for Ananda *Bhikkhuni*. So, their lives will not be lost. "I even more than the *Bhikkhuni* when the *Bhikkhuni Sangh* was formed worldly women were appreciated for their cooperation.

According to the Buddha, the ideal of worldly life was for women. Women were essential for the arrangement of the house. This ideal is described in the *Sigalovaad Sutta*.¹² Worshipping the west by

the husband means treating his wife in five ways. Respecting her, respecting her, being loyal to her, giving her control of the house and giving her jewelry etc. In the same way, a woman whose husband has behaved in such a way should take care of her husband in five ways. She should be able to do the housework, she should take good care of her servants, she should be clean, she should take care of the things her husband brings home, she should be skilled in all her work and she should carry out her duties without getting tired.¹³ On the one hand, we see that while the Buddha did not challenge patriarchy, there are many extreme forms of women being cheaters. However, the forms of patriarchy preserved in the Dhamma are very different from the life offered to women in Manusmriti and other traditional *Brahmanical* texts. Two things are absent in Buddhist texts. One is that the ideal of dignity has not been rewarded anywhere. Secondly, although the Buddhist Dhamma portrays women as lustful and deceptive, *Manu's* idea that men should control them is not seen here.¹⁴

Conclusion

From all the above considerations, it is clear that in Indian culture, it was Gautama Buddha and his religion who first opened the door of salvation for women by treating them with respect. Indian culture is a rich culture and it is diversified by the various religions, sects, philosophies and ideologies that are embedded in it. Although Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and other religions are formed from a single muse of Vedic religion, their attitude towards women is different. Among the names that came to the fore among Indian women were Draupadi, Sita etc. Are. In this context, the question of the exact position of ordinary women in the society and their personality remains unanswered. We find the answer in Buddhism on the basis of *Therigathas*. This not only sheds light on the personalities of ordinary women in the society, but also shows how egalitarian Gautama Buddha's and Buddhism's approach to women was egalitarian.

Reference Books:

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- [3] Ibid Pg.45
- [4] Ibid Pg.48
- [5] Dr. Vimalkirti (Trans. Editor): 'Therigatha', Sammyak, Pune, 2003, Pg. 32
- [6] Ibid Pg.33, 34
- [7] <https://navbharattimesindiatimes.com>
- [8] Chatre Lata, Ibid Pg.01, 102,103
- [9] Ibid Pg.105
- [10] Ibid Pg.105
- [11] Gail Omvedt: 'Bhartatil Bauddh Dhamma' Bramhani Dharma va Jatiyatela Avhan, Sage, Pune, 2003 Pg. 99,100
- [12] Ibid Pg.101
- [13] Ibid Pg.101
- [14] Ibid Pg.103