

AMBEDKRITE PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS GENDER

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Introduction :-

• Ambedkrite perspective is very crucial perspective of analysis and reinterpretation in the field of knowledge. It is not merely related to the work and contribution of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar to the various fields; but actually it denotes the way of historical interpretation through the Ambedkrite lense . Ambedkrite Standpoint of critical and analytical thinking is the major characteristic of Ambedkrite perspective . When we investigate the mainstream Indian history through the Ambedkrite perspective, we can able to reinterpret the whole history which deliberately hidden the contribution of Ambedkrite thoughts to History. In this regards we can focus on the great intellectual contribution of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to the field of social equality , which was based on the Buddhist philosophy of Freedom, equality and fraternity. Recent trend of Gender history , which focus history as a whole in the perspective of male-female equality dates back actually to the Buddhhist era. ‘Gender’ is very recent concept in the field of knowledge. It focuses on the social roles of men and women in the equal perspective. It demands the coexistence of men and women as equal stockholders of society. When we broadly look towards the characteristics of Gender, we may easily identify the similarities to the Buddhist philosophy of male-female equality. We always read that Indian women were always subordinate and discriminate under the name of religion in this caste based patriarchal society. But it is a fact that Buddhism was the first religious revolution which had given the equality to women. The modern concept of Gender was already present in Buddhist philosophy 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 fold discrimination simultaneously. That was base on 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 & menopause¹ Dr. Ambedkar underlines the fact that, women enjoyed a high status in the pre-manu era, but the Manu is responsible for the downfall in the status of women² 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 women³ Buddhism was 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 virtuous⁴ We found the seeds of Gender equality were inscribed in the Buddha's teaching. In this research paper I will try to find out the roots of Gender equality in Buddhist philosophy.

Understanding Gender Through Buddhist perspective :

The modern English word gender comes from the Middle English gender, gender a loan word from Anglow –Norman and middle French genere. This, in turn came from Latin genus. Both words means ‘kind’, type or sort.⁵ The word was still widely used, however, in specific sense of grammatical concept. According to Aristotale this concept was introduced by the Greek philosopher Protagoras. The word genere in the modern academic perspective of social roles of men and women dates at least back to the year 1945. The concept of gender has popularized and developed by the feminist movement from the 1970’s onwards⁶ in

the decade of 70th the feminist movement in India has introduced and was in full swing. The concept of gender has become popular among the academician and also among feminist activists and scholars all over the country. To understand the concept of gender is very critical process because gender is not an isolate concept but it has multi dimensions. Cast, class, race are some prominent social factors which affects and forms the concept of gender. To understand the meaning of gender we should look into the social stratification of Indian society. If we have an outlook of some prominent definitions of Gender it would be easier to understand the actual meaning of gender.

1. Gender is the state of being male or female with reference to socially and culturally defined characteristics of masculinity and femininity .⁷
2. Gender is the state of being male or female in relation to the social and cultural roles that are considered appropriate for men and women. ⁸
3. Gender not only defines how men and women are constructed but it also sets out the expected relationship between the two.
4. Either of the sexes male and female, especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. The term is also used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female⁹
5. WHO: “Gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviours including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places. When individuals or groups do not ‘fit’ established gender norms they often face stigma, discriminatory practices or social exclusion”¹⁰
6. Considering the various definitions of gender, we can understand this concept clearly. Very often the term sex and Gender have used in same way not only by students but also so called scholars. Therefore it is very important to understand the difference between these two concepts.¹¹

Gender is a Sociological concept Gender start working after the birth Gender is a socially constructed phenomena Gender can identify by the term masculinity and femininity By the tool of reproduction control on women is the main aim of gender Gender has the social characteristics such as gender roles of male female, Behaviors, responsibilities, expectations, duties etc Gender can engender by the change of social pattern and practices of society. Gender is an artificial inequality made by society therefore it can be change

Broadly speaking, sex is a term that denotes the biological aspect of human being and gender is used to describe associated notions of masculinity and femininity given to us by the society. Often sex is used a stand in for gender. Male children are assumed to be ‘masculine’ and therefore socialized likewise. Female children are assumed to be feminine and socialized likewise.¹² Gender had refused to study women as separate element. It matters that human being do not appear neuter individuals that they exists as male or female. In this view existence of male and female is figured in social relationship, beliefs, practices and institutions is gender, and gender is inherently historical. With the development of gender history it had been recognized that true understanding and interpretation of historical events and past cannot be archived without paying the full attention to women and men both. ¹³ Gender historian sees the differences between men and women, they argue that these differences are rooted in society, not in nature, and as such can be historicized. Moreover, gender scholars point out, if women's lives have been

shaped profoundly by gender prescriptions, then so, too, have men's. Cultural ideals and practices of masculinity and femininity have been created together, often in opposition to one another; therefore, both men and women have gender histories that must be analyzed in tandem. Indeed, gender studies is relational in that research into the history of gender ideals and practices is always linked to investigations about the operation of the economy, the construction of racial ideologies, the development of political institutions, and other phenomenon typically studied by historians.¹⁴

Buddhist philosophy is based on the principals of freedom, equality and fraternity. These three principals are the core concern of the concept of Gender. Therefore we can't discuss the concept of Gender without the reference of Buddhism. According to Dr. Ambedkar, The co-existence of equality, brotherhood, freedom and justice may be called as religion¹⁵ 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 acquired knowledge and right of renunciation as equal as men. "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 male¹⁶ Buddha never discriminate the women, Daughter birth was welcomed by him. "Welcome of daughter's birth with happiness" is the first revolutionary step forward the Gender equality ; which Buddha had taken bravely before 2500 years. He allowed women's entry in Sangh. There were equal rights to men as well as women to entered in Buddhist 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 mensions"¹⁷ We found the principle of 'Sisterhood' in Buddhist nunnery, which we now discussing in the feminism and appeal to worldwide women that, they are one as sisters. Women played an important part in the spread of early Buddhism, both as lay disciples and Bhikkhuni's. "In Hindu Tradition, the main 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 women was no longer compelled to marry to achieves self respect and approval from her family.¹⁸ 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 want 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 Therigatha¹⁹ 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 was already exist in Buddhism. Whenever the discussion about the equality for women in Buddhism and Buddha's views towards women's equality. Some questions rose about the Buddhas reluctance to gave the permission to women in Sangha. Some so called intellectuals criticized Buddha , for not allowed women in Sangha at first and they had given the credit to Ananda to convince the Buddha for admit the women's to Sangha. But According to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar "it seems to be an addition to the original Buddhist text²⁰ That text from Mahaparinuibbansutta 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 text²¹ 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 find²² Similarly the eight rules for nuns are also added to original text. Buddha always opposed to subordination of women and he was the one & only revolutionary religious reformer who had given equality to women in Indian History.

• **Gender equality through Therigatha:-**

Therigatha were verses written by Buddhist male Monks and Therigatha were the verses written by Buddhist Nuns. This intellectual freedom of knowledge was given to male- female both equally by Buddha, that was the first kind of incident in the World. That was really very first successful experiment of Gender equality in the History of mankind. Therigatha were the proof of women's freedom and emancipation. It had proved that, women were intellectually equal to men, as this is the major principal of modern concept of Gender; we found it was already preset in the Buddhist way of life. 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 Sangha for women Khema, the consent of King Bimbisara, renowned for her profound insight & Yashodhara, the wife of Gautam also entered the Sangha²³ Mukta the Brahmin woman who became a Bhikkhuni exclaimed. "Aha! I am really free and there are no limits to my freedom."²⁴ It shows the freedom of Women in Buddhist era. Another Brahmin woman turned Bhikkhuni replies "As I sit in meditation on this rock every day, the breath of freedom flows ceaselessly over my spiritual dedication"²⁵

"Punna, Tissa 1st, Tissa 2nd, Dhira, Vira, Mitta, Bhadda, Upasama, Mutta 2nd, Dhammadina, Uttara, Sumana 1st, Sumana 2nd, Dhamma, Abhirupa Nanda, Jenti, Sumangal Mata, Ada Kasi, Chitta, Mettika, Abhay Mata, Abhaya, Sama 1st, Sama 2nd, Uttama 1st, Uttama 2nd, Dantika, Ubbari, Sukka, Sela, Soma, Bhadda Kapilani, Vimala, Siha, Mittakali, Sakula, Sona, Bhadda, Kundalkesa, Patachara, Sujata, Anopama, Mahapajpati Gaotami, Gutta Vijaya, Chala, Upchala, Sisuchala, Kisa, Gaotami, Uppalvana, Punnika, Ambapali, Rohini, Sundari, Subha Kammardhita, Subha Jivkambika, Sumedha were some of the great Bhikkhunis who were contribute to Therigatha."²⁵ Thus, we find freedom for women in Buddhist Philosophy Therigatha that's way Therigatha is the symbol of Women's Liberation.

• **Conclusion :-**

According to the Ambedkrite perspective, Buddha was the first emancipator of women. We found the roots of Gender equality in Buddhism. In Buddhism we found that, the Buddha had tried for the women's liberation, he had given them right to lived as equal as men and offered them the right to salvation through establishment of nunnery. When Hindu religion denies the knowledge and the right of renunciation to women Buddha had spread the preaching of equality, fraternity and 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 men, 2) Women could experience spiritual enlightenment. Thus, Dr. Ambedkar concludes that, the Buddha freed the Indian women from enslavement and brought about revolutionary changes in their lives. We can see the roots of the various concept women's liberation, sisterhood, right to decision, equality, in to the Buddhism. This concept now adopted by the modern concept of Gender. Gender says that social stratification of male and female roles are the

socially constructed and prescribed thing it is not made by nature . Exactly the same thing had said by Buddha before 2500 years. Thus we can able to connect the modern concept of Gender to the ancient Buddhist philosophy by the Ambedkrite perspective .

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