



FEMALE CHARACTERS IN DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S *BUDDHA AND HIS DHAMMA*

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ABSTRACT

Buddha and His Dhamma is undoubtedly saga of the Buddha. But it also include many female characters of importance without whom the story of the great Buddha remains incomplete. Female characters in this discourse play an important major role in the entire journey of the Buddha. It may not be an exaggeration to state here that female characters help to carve the complete character of the Buddha. Salvation of these female characters not only underlines but also glorifies the image of the Buddha. Sketching such characters in *Buddha and His Dhamma* must have been a difficult task for Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. It was quite challenging the to narrate, compare and contrast these female characters. But the keen acumen of the great architect of the Indian constitution successfully presented female characters in a very befitting manner. Dr. Ambedkar remains a life long supporter and champion of women liberation and there is a must curiosity to know the characterization of female characters in *Buddha and His Dhamma*. Flat and round, both types of characters can easily be seen in this work but writer has succeeded to sketch them in suitable manner maintaining their dignity.

Key words : *Buddha and His Dhamma, magnum opus.*

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1Page



INTRODUCTION

Buddha and His Dhamma is basically a praise literature glorifying the character of the Buddha. The entire story revolves around a single character i.e. Siddhartha, the Buddha. There are many round and flat characters in the saga of the Buddha. The narrative is well woven in epic style. Though the Buddha is the central figure of the discourse, there are many other male and female characters also. Comparative they are minor characters but play major role in the entire journey of the Buddha.

Undoubtedly *Buddha and His Dhamma* is the Magnum opus by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar welcomed by the world and neglected by the Indian English historians'. It also interesting to study female characters penned down by him. Sketching character of the Buddha and his epic life history must have been a herculean task for Dr. Ambedkar but to project women characters and give them equal importance in the narrative must have been double challenging for him.

Dr. Ambedkar's approach towards female characters :

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar provides fresh look out to evaluate the character of the Buddha and sparkling enquiry probing Buddha's life in entirely in a new manner. The narrative also provides readers an opportunity to have a close look at the female characters in the life story of the Buddha. The enlightenment of the Buddha is the theme of the story but it is not the journey of the Buddha alone. There many major and minor male and female characters who played significant role to carry the story forward.

The interesting part of the book is that it is written by the champion of Women liberation, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Curiosity to study female character in the work is quite obvious but natural. The story opens with blissful birth of Siddhartha and sad departure of Mahamaya in the exposition itself. Mahaprajapati, the step mother of the Buddha, is first to seek and obtention.

Sketching the character of Yashodhara :

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar provides to watch the character of Yashodhara from a very close distance. She is the daughter of a Shakyas named Dandapani. She occupies very few pages in the book but it is sufficient to trace her importance in the story. She know about the prophecy made by Asita about Siddhartha but she is determined to marry him and argued with her father whether to be in the company of saints was a crime. After she had reached



her sixteen year the marriage took place and after a long term of life Yashodhara give birth to a son named Rahul.

But suddenly a dispute at the meeting of the Sangh at Kapilavastu invites a great upheaval in the life of Yashodhara. This the place where strong determination of Siddhartha and gallantry support of Yashodhara is well narrated by Dr. Ambedkar. Here the write deviated from the traditional story that Siddhartha slinked in the midnight without informing Yashodhara. Renunciation of Siddhartha is not the decision taken in the darkness. The dialogue between Siddhartha and Yashodhara reveals that the decision of Parivraja was taken with full consent of Yashodhara. Here Yashodhara deserves credit to encourage Siddhartha on the path of enlightenment . After hearing the decision she did not collapse on the contrary asks Siddhartha what she would have done if she were in is place. She gives here consent and support and also express her wish to take Parivraja with him but declines due to the responsibility of Rahul and also assures to look after his parent till her life. The write must have choked while narrating this scene.

The condition after this scene is more pathetic. She repents that she will not be able to see her husbands face but Rahul also will not roll in his father'. She waits for Shiddharta's arrival in the palace. He returns but as the Buddha , the enlightened one. Yashodhara becomes Bhikkhuni along with Mahaprajapati and is known as Bhadda Kaccana. Siddhartha lived hard life in the forest and so Yashodhara lived in the palace. Her sacrifice makes her great and her entry as Bhikkuni and becomes an arhanta makes her immortal character.

Other important Female characters in *Buddha and His Dhamma* :

Sujata is another important character in *Buddha and His Dhamma* .She offers Pudding and rescues Gautama from death and Gautama end his trail of asceticism. Sunita is also highly accomplished disciple of the Buddha . Prakrati , a Chandalika , a low caste girl is also among the most beloved disciple of the Buddha. Captivated by Ananda's charm she pursues him to marry but realizing her ignorance ,she becomes Bhikkuni. The most important thing to note here is that the female characters are not left but led on the path of complete salvation and enlighten. They attend it by their own efforts. Here they win the battle against their own wills, worldly passions .

The conversion of Khema is the rare incident showing Buddha's influence. She was one of the beautiful queens of King Bimbisara.She becomes the chief disciple of Venerable Sariputta and Venerable Moggallana. Amrapali was the Nagarvadhū of the republic of Vaishali in ancient India around 500 BC. Following the Buddha's teaching she turns Bhikkuni and becomes arhant.



Vishakha is another important female character and chief female disciple of the Buddha. She erects a monastery for the Buddha near Savatthi. She was just seven when she became Buddha's lay disciple.

Dhananjani was the wife of Bhardwaja Brahmin and devotee of the Buddha despite her husband hatred for the Buddha. Once the Buddha while passing with his companions and happens to meet a sixteen years girl .She offers him flowers and worships Him .The Buddha smiles and makes a prophesy that she will be chief queen of Kosala that very day.

Few villainous female characters :

As there are many round characters in *Buddha and His Dhamma*, some of them are villainous in nature or flat characters. Buddha's life is full of many ups and downs. It was His great moral that made Him the great Buddha. Sundari was extremely beautiful and was assigned to spread a scandal about the Buddha to lower his influence and tarnish his image. Accordingly she tries to defame the Buddha everyday going to his Gandha Kutir. But all vicious plans collapse .

Chincha also tried to bring defame for the Buddha. One of the crafty schemers among the Tirthikas makes a plan to spread a scandal about Gutama to discredit Him. Pretending to be pregnant from Gautama ,she tries to defame the Buddha but the conspiracy is revealed.

Thus there are many such major and minor female characters in *Buddha and His Dhamma* revealing their different shades of personality. The destiny present them all on different occasion assigned with different roles. The cooperation rendered and obstacles posed by them in the Buddha's way done nothing but brightened the image of the Buddha.

CONCLUSION:

The importance of this discussion is the project gender equality in Buddhism, the zeal and enthusiasm for feminist perspective and equal opportunity to all low and high. Contrary to Hinduism , the Buddha broke the narrow walls of caste ,creed ,religions ,region ,language and colour. The *Buddha and His Dhamma* presents a mirror of Indian Constitution. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar succeeded in sketching female characters in *Buddha and His Dhamma* in a very befitting manner.



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