

# Restoring the Ideals of Buddha and Gandhi on Gender Equality

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## ABSTRACT

*Gender Equality is a very important topic in present era. It means no discrimination should follow on the ground of sex and equal opportunity must be given to female as to male or some other gender too. In spite of the developments in science and technology and a consequent rise in the standard of living, gender discrimination still exists in the society. The sole aim of this research paper is to find out the causes of gender discrimination and trying to solve the problem by restoring the views of Buddha and Gandhi on this issue. The causes of social inequality are patriarchal society, economic dependence, illiteracy, etc. In order to fight discrimination the ideals of Buddha and Gandhi should be restored and adopted. Buddhism is a religion of kindness, humanity and equality. According to the teachings of the Buddha, there exists no practical difference between the sexes. Buddha was a great social reformer, a believer in the equality of all human beings and a democrat. In the Buddhist text women are always named before men. Similarly, Gandhi was also a supporter of gender equality. He was neither feminist nor anti-feminist but gave a new perspective regarding gender equality. He brought about a revolutionary change in the status of women during his time. He opposed the harmful practices like female infanticide, purdah, female illiteracy, child marriage, dowry system, sati, polygamy and subjugation of wives and supported equality of sexes, women education, economic independence, birth control, widow remarriage and participation of women in constructive programmes. Hence, the conclusion is that by restoring the views of Buddha and Gandhi and adopting them in our lives we can change the mindset of people regarding sub-ordinate status given to women and bring equality in the society becomes a better place to live in.*

## 1. Introduction

Gender equality is an immensely discussed topic in present times. Gender equality is made up of two words-gender and equality. The word gender refers to the social and cultural roles prescribed to male and a female. The word equality is a multi-dimensional concept. However, it means equal opportunity in the form of rights and privileges. We are talking of gender equality because gender discrimination still exists in our society, and equality remains only a utopia. Gender discrimination refers to the practice of granting or denying the rights or privileges to a person based on their gender. Gender discrimination may be defined as "differentiating people as male and female on the basis of gender or gender based functions and treating them unequally in the matter of social functions, or treating them unjustly in the distribution of burdens and benefits in society." (Y.V. Satyanarayana 186). Despite the development in Science and Technology, global economy, standard of living and brilliant thoughts in social, political, religious and philosophical fields, gender discrimination still persists.

There are several cause of gender discrimination and some important among them are as follows:

- Patriarchal society and gender based division of labor.
- Difference in socialization of children i.e., generating the feeling of being a boy or a girl in the mind of the child.
- The system of seclusion.
- Economic dependence, illiteracy, child marriage.

The Indian society is biased and though women are oppressing and exploited whenever and wherever opportunity is found. Rape, Feticide, Dowry-death, Sexual-oppression and exploitation are taking place every day. This had prevented Indian women from achieving a higher standard of living. In spite of natural inequalities human beings are endowed with certain capacities and needs that are radically different from each other and other living beings. Human beings are rational and responsible moral agents who have been provided with certain natural rights such as right to life, right to freedom, etc. The idea of equality has thus grown out of the idea of privilege. Hence, gender equality is a basic right and this can only be established by some strong basis and ideal as propagated by great philosophers Buddha and Gandhi where views on gender equality will help to uplift the status of women in society.

## 2. Objective

Gender equality is an important factor of social progress and welfare but the irony is that it is almost lacking in society. Following are the aims of this research paper:

- Construction of conceptual framework of gender equality by restoring the views of Buddha and Gandhi.
- Creation of new values as well as re-interpretation of thoughts of Buddha and Gandhi.
- Changing the mindset of people regarding subordinate status given to women and bringing about the feeling of equality in the minds of people.
- Develop a social ethics where in there is no male bias.

### 3. Significance

The topic of 'Restoring the ideals of Buddha and Gandhi on Gender Equality' is significant because the Buddhist and Gandhian conception of gender equality is very practical and motivating which will help in changing the mind-set of the people regarding the status of women. It will also help to create a feeling of equality among men and women and secure a respectable position for women.

### 4. Methodology

This project is based on materials collected from books, news-papers, magazines and internet and its interpretation is being done. The method is descriptive, analytical, critical and evaluative.

### 5. Buddhist Perspective on Gender Equality

The word humanism has gained importance in present times so that every theory and institution claims to have a humanistic outlook. Buddhism succeeded so well because it was a religion of love, giving voice to all the inarticulate forces which were working against the established order and the ceremonial religion addressing itself to the poor, the lowly and the disinherited (S. Radhakrishnan 402). Gautam Buddha who appeared in the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. is unique among the founders of religion. Buddha was a humanistic philosopher. He was more a social reformer than a social reformer than a metaphysician. His teachings reveal his humanistic attitude. After attaining enlightenment the Buddha preached his realization to bring about betterment in human welfare. Buddhism is a religion of kindness, humanity and equality. His attitude towards women was more enlightened and considerate. According to Buddha, a female child may prove to be a better offspring than a male. Women's position in Buddhism is unique. The Buddha gave women freedom to participate in a religious life and maintain their own position in the society. Before Buddha women's duties were confined to the households only; they were not allowed to enter any temple or to receive any religious scriptures. They were subjugated in all circumstances. The Buddha was criticized by the prevailing establishment when he gave this freedom to women. At first this was not accepted by the society. His move to allow women to enter the holy order was extremely radical for the time. Buddha had to face many evil criticisms for this. Yet, the Buddha allowed women to prove themselves and to show that they too had capacity like men to attain the highest position in the religious way or the life by attaining *Arhathood*. Buddha was a great social reformer and a believer in the equality of all human beings and a democrat. Buddha made efforts for

emancipation of women. In the Buddhist text women are always named before men. In the beginning Buddha made rules for nuns to make them dependent on monks. It may be possible that the Buddha had already delivered teachings to monks and instead of repeating I again he preferred women to consult and get knowledge from monks.

### 6. Gandhian Perspective on Gender Equality

The contemporary Indian thinker Gandhi had very efficiently and brilliantly expressed his views and written on numerous issues that concerned the Indian society in particular and humanity in general. His view on gender equality is remarkable. He was neither a feminist nor an anti-feminist. The Mahatma by far can be considered as the best friend of women in India and the world. The Mahatma by far was one of the most honest and divine historical figures of the modern age. The Mahatma's purity of thought and honest intentions are beyond question. He wanted women to play an important role in social, political and economic life of India. He opposed the social evil practices like female infanticide, purdah, the dowry system, female illiteracy, child marriages, widowhood, sati and polygamy and subjugation of wives. Gandhi did not stop at the opposing practices which were derogatory to women but also forcefully advocated in favour of various rights of women.

Following issues were supported by Gandhi: equality of sexes, education and economic independence, women in political arena, property, birth-control, women as individual and women in constructive programmes.

Thus, we find that Mahatma Gandhi was the most powerful and effective supporter of women power.

### 7. Conclusion & Suggestions

- By restoring the philosophy of Buddha and Gandhi on gender equality it was realized how rationally they have expressed their views concerning numerous issues that concern the Indian women.
- Their philosophy will motivate the people to undergo a change in their behavior and mind-set regarding women.
- Their teachings should be made a part of curriculum in the schools and the colleges.
- A new society should be re-constructed based on the values of Buddha and Gandhi.
- Everyone should respect each other and understand the dignity of human being for a better and peaceful society. People should follow the thoughts of Buddha and Gandhi for the progress of society and preservation of mankind.

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