

## **BUDDHIST IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY OF BUDDHIST WOMEN'S NARRATIVES IN NAGPUR CITY**

### **Abstract**

Indian women rarely observed as independent identity due to its caste hierachization. Thus a woman identity along with an identity of being lower caste simultaneously makes her a victim of a rigidly imbibed patriarchy and the caste system in our society. Lots of conversion had taken place to transform the life of human beings. But the investigative studies done on these kinds of religious conversions mostly focused on men and gave less importance on its impact on women identity. Among these conversions, Dr. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism had succeeded to a great extent in providing a new respectable identity to many. Yet the status of Buddhist women, among the Buddhist community, remained the most unexamined part of this conversion. Thus, this paper tries to examine whether the Buddhist identity succeeded to provide a sense of self respect and equal status to Buddhist women or what extent the Buddhist identity stood able to replace their stigmatized identity in public sphere by investigating the narrative provided by the Buddhist women about their own identity.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Brahmanism, Mahar community, Buddhhist community, Bhddhist women, Buddhist identity, Hindu festivals, caste and identity politics

### **Introduction**

It has been said that the history of ancient India is nothing but the conflict between Buddhism and Brahmanism. It means that Karl Marx's philosophy of conflict is still relevant to observed as a tool of social change. The social change occur in society at different level; firstly by targeting individual for change at limited sphere without touching system, secondly individual transformation in his behavior with specific context, example of religious movements. While other change could observed in the context of revolution or transformation in which people are not interested to work within system rather they feel that the system

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it's self has problems of values and morals that could not rectified at all and over through it applying any means. At the present scenario, the institution has become major centers for expecting social change in India either through political or social institution.

The social changes gradually started in India either to reform its society or to change the social system itself. Those who fail to rectify the notion of caste system within Hinduism like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Ayoti Tass, Laxmi Narsu have taken alternative step to reclaim the lost self respect and humanism which was existed in Buddhism. The leaders like him interpreted and explore lost dignity and pride of untouchable in Buddhism by presenting them the lost History from subaltern point of view. It has created the wave of consciousness and courage to question the faith in Hinduism. As a result of it, the Mahar and other untouchables Community embraced the Buddhism under the leadership of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1956. The reason behind of embracing Buddhism could locate into three folds that is Buddhism is an aboriginal religion of India and ex-untouchables as well as touchable were none other than Buddhists. Secondly, Buddhism is based on the rationality with scientific approach. In other words, Buddhism is not based on science rather science is based on Buddhism. Thirdly, Buddhism has universal principles which has been inculcated in Indian constitution that is liberty, equality and

fraternity with social justice. Thus, by quoting Richards Taylor's, it makes point that there is very much similarity between Constitution and Buddhism to express the religious and political life of the community (Vishwanathan; 1998: 228). It might be the vision of Ambedkar that this universal principle would be the solution to Indian caste based society. In the Indian caste based society, fraternity is more imperative step for cementing the different castes of Indian society. Therefore, in his posthumous writing of Buddha and His Dhamma, are carefully recognized to fall into symmetrical parts covering not only the conversion of sinful people like Brahmins, criminals and other fallen beings but also conversion of women and oppressed social classes (Vishwanathan; 1998: 229).

While embracing Buddhism, Ambedkar has given 22vows so that the common man of Buddhist community could follow the Buddhism at his/her simplest manner. He did not want any yardstick to become Buddhist or Buddhist monk. According to him, anyone who will follow the 22vows is the Buddhists. At the present circumstance, it has been said that due to Buddhism, the untouchable community like Mahar observed the drastic transformation in their life style. Now they are leading in every sector of life either political or social. In this regards, the acute riddle arise that at what extend the Buddhism has changed the life of Buddhist women. Whether the Buddhism has really created any impact on them or still they are treated with same caste mind as a lower or untouchable despite their formation of new entity. It is well known fact that this Mahar community embraced Buddhism to liberate themselves from Hindu social order but

they are struck with old caste identities and recognizing with new identity from different point of views.

The reason behind to examine the narrative is to explore the meaning carrying by the people about their life and grasp highly expressive cultural elements exist in narratives. It has stated that a narrative is beginning and ending a fact by distinguishing it from the rest of world and opposes it to real world (Mcquillan; 2000: 88). The individual experience has the meaning which could figure out from the past experiences. Therefore, providing the account of own stories is nothing but a reflection of own identity. In this process, an individual recognize him/herself in their narratives and we seek to comprehend human events, action and account to make sense in the form of narratives or stories (Venema Issac; 2000:117). It is not what happened to their life rather what meaning they carry while experiencing their lives. It is nothing but to subjectify the meaning while objectifying the reality. The meaning could be grasping through the conduct of human behavior or action because in every action there is intension and without intension the meaning is meaningless. For this, I have analyzed the narrative given by the Buddhist women about their understanding of new identity i.e. Buddhists identity.

### **Impact of Education on Buddhist Women**

Many studies has been conducted on the neo-Buddhists community on their development and soci-economic progress but all this studies are centre around the male point view and unable to provide the accountability of women perception which is the major part of Buddhist community. It is mentioned that perception of Buddhist has changed after the conversion. According to this study, Buddhist women carrying two perception where one is conversant with and inspired by the Dr. Ambedkar's thought while other one totally unaware of this about it which is useful for understanding the issues of consolidation of organization and unity (Paswan; 2002: 202) which is similar to my study. Therefore, I have divided the Buddhists women into two parts; firstly to understand the Buddhist women who are following the Ambedkar's principles and secondly those who are still not acquaint with Ambedkar's philosophy of Buddhism. Hence, the historical intelligible of Buddhist conversion could be phenomenologizes by analyzing the narratives of Buddhist women. It focuses the objectification of meaning in the context of Buddhist conversion which would reflect the consciousness about the Buddhist conversion under the leadership of Ambedkar. It has been observed that Buddhist women perceived the Buddhist conversion in the arena of caste system and feel that worshipping Hindu God doesn't have place in their home and it has happened due to the education. The supriya, a married and Post graduate Student of Pali, explain explicitly about the progress in Buddhist women due to Buddhism and education. She said:

*"There is change in Buddhist women due to emancipation from caste system and more opportunity of upward mobility to avail education. I got consciousness because of my father and some movies like Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar about the condition of my people".*

It means that conversion has benefited them and provided opportunity to advance them in the domain of education. Historically the women does not have place in education system. The code of Manu law has restricted the women to right to have education. It is well known aspect that education leads to think and ask to behave rationally. Prapti, working in Central Bank of India explains that it is the impact of constitutional rights which was denied by the Manu constitution. It has been observed that Buddhism has considered being caste due to caste certificate in which the neo- Buddhist has to mention their caste. Although, the caste is not at all exit theologically but might be practice by them:

*"There is change in Buddhist women due to educational opportunity which was denied by the constitution of manusmirti but the present constitution has granted the equal rights and right to education to us. For me Buddhism is not caste and any one can follow it. It is very pity that Buddhist women doesn't know about the Buddhism and even devoid of having the knowledge about Buddhists conversion under the leadership of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar"*

There is no doubt that the education has changed their thinking and become conscious about their constitutional rights which has assisted to open the door of progress. There might be thinking of Dr. Ambedkar that education could lead to create casteless society. It could tantalize on the individual's perception that in what way it has been engaged whether to maintain the caste or annihilate the caste. The main impact of Buddhist conversion is education. For dish, a Civil Engineer, it has happened due to education.

*"The education has changed the thinking process of Buddhist women especially the educated women but the uneducated women is still dependent on other and feel weak. Now educated women can inculcate the culture in the right direction and can play her major role in every direction of development like in economic, culture and social"*

The change in Buddhist women doesn't occur only due to Buddhist conversion. It could be seen merely the impact on the first or second generation of Buddhist community but the third generation become more enthusiastic after knowing about the Ambedkarism's ideological dimension of social change on the basis of universal principles that is liberty, equality and fraternity. The rationality of Buddhism dispenses the space to question the existing social order which is not allowing them to live with dignity. Hence, the Buddhist women after becoming conscious about their own history worked in the different Buddhist or Ambedkarite organization. The subhangi katekar administer the account that 'Buddhist women which are working in different Ambedkarite organization are

more independent and free to take their decision as compare to inactive Buddhists women.

*I became conscious due to Buddhist organization and developed my personality. As a result of it, I am no more dependent on others and can take decision which is applicable to my consciousness. I have observed that women working for society are no more dependent on others at all.*

It is creditable that change in Buddhist women is due to accepting the Buddhist principles. The Buddhist principle of equality is inculcated in the thoughts of their family members. The educational consciousness has penetrated into the mind of Buddhist women due to Ambedkar's message of Educate, Agitate, and Organize. The message implies to individual consciousness in which an individual not only has to educate himself but also about the society. While educating himself, the individual would come across ideas which may not applicable to the concept of universal principles i.e. equality, liberty, and fraternity would agitate and after arriving on issues of humanism would lead to organizing the society. In the Buddhist community, the mutation in their life honorary to education but the others aspects has not materialized practically. It's shows that Buddhists community has given more emphasis on education. In this regards, the Kalpana Meshram, an Architect, explicit that Buddhist women lead in education due to the Ambedkar's message of Educate, Agitate and Organize.

*Buddhist women are leading in education due to the Ambedkar message of Educate, Agitate and Organize. Education has created impact on our life. Even in poor family, women have given more important to education which is the main reason for transforming the life of Buddhist women. She has developed very speedily compare to other women (Non-Buddhist) of society.*

It is has been observed that in Buddhist community explicitly availing the space to question the traditional aspects of Buddhism like paritaran pat (rituals done before to enter in newly made house), superstition exist in Buddhism and Hinduism and also to patriarchal values. According to them, it is only religion which allows questioning every aspects of reality with rationality. Conversion to Buddhism has transit their life and able to shed the feeling of inferiority complex. In other words, the Usha Jambulkar, M.Sc (Zoology), B.Ed and working teacher, focus the broader aspects of conversion in the reference to caste system of Hindu religion.

*We have gain the confidence and wipe out the inferiority complex being part of caste system after the conversion. I feel more confident and pride. I don't feel that I am inferior to any so called upper castes nor to men of our community. This change occurs in our life due to conversion and three words Educate, Agitate and Organize given by Ambedkar. As a result, it has developed the healthy atmosphere of education and struggle against unequal system of Indian society. Due to education and*

*awareness, we are not getting into Hindu religion and nor involved into superstition. We have feeling of equality*

But the inquisition arises that change in Buddhist women could not locate complete transformation in their life. It has been said that Buddhism is based on practice and merely conversion is not enough to claim themselves as Buddhists until each individual of community would not follow the path of 22 vows given by Dr. Ambedkar.

After fifty decades of conversion, Mahar community usually recognized as Buddhist on government records but in practice it is difficult to categorize them as Buddhist. The reason behind it is a perplexity of inter relationship between Buddhism and Hinduism. Palavi Nandeshwar, Civil Engineer, has shifted the responsibility on educated people which has not played role for annihilating the caste system due to devoid of knowledge about Buddhism. Thus, they remain aloof from Buddhism and still attach with the notion of Hinduism.

*This has happened because of unaware about the Buddhist history and don't know about the basic aspects of Buddhism. It is not clear to my community. I feel that role and responsibility of educated people to propagated Buddhism in right direction has not played properly. As a result of it, there is lot of puzzle among Buddhist community. If we get the awareness of Buddhism and spread it with right direction, I feel, our people would not feel hesitate and reluctant to reveal their Buddhist identity.*

Thus, the transfiguration in Buddhist women is abided with reference to leaving Hinduism. It has visualized that the definition of change has limited to worshipping and celebrating Hindu festivals. It clarify that Buddhist women are superstitious due to influence of Hinduism but those who followed and read Ambedkar has different picture of Indian history and Buddhism itself. The question of investigation has raised by the Buddhist women itself that there are people who worship both religion by keeping Hindu God and Goddess picture along with Ambedkar and Buddha's idol. If any would oppose this particular action would often replied on the name of orthodox Buddhist. This understanding raise the issue whether Buddhist are opposing the teaching of Buddha or not been trustworthy to Ambedkar itself.

### **Politics of Festivals**

It is perceived that the Mahar community left all the Hindu god and goddess by adopting 22 vows given by Dr. Ambedkar in which it has mentioned that mahars would not celebrates and worship any Hindu God and Goddess and follows the panchsheel of Buddha. The idea and reason behind the conversion has passed out from grandfather or father to their children. This new generation and old generation have their own intelligible about this conversion. It occurs due to oppressive system of caste and for some it is to negate the religion of inequality

and establish the Buddhism on the basis of rationality.

After the fifty decades of conversion, the Buddhism has been perceived by the Buddhist community at different level. It is overtly observed two religious ideologies at equal platform by celebrating their festivals without differentiating them because of fusion exist in their relationship between Buddhism and Hinduism (Shastree; 1996:73-74). Thus, it is surprising to know that people of Buddhist community is popularly proceeding the both religious ideologies which is in very contradictory to each other. It is un-adjustable to represent the ideas of equality and inequality at the same platform. The Hindu festivals like diwali, dushhare, holi, etc are not only the symbolic representation of domination of Hindu culture but also perpetuate the principles of inequality on the name of equality principles which goes against the Buddhism and Phule-Ambedkar understanding. It is not that Buddhist are celebrating only Hindu festivals but also Buddhist festivals by keeping portrait of Buddha and Ambedkar. They celebrate Buddhist festivals like birthday of Ambedkar i.e. 14, April, ashokdushami (14<sup>th</sup> october) and Buddha Pornima. Thus, it is enthusiastic to capture the perception of Buddhist women in domain of conversion and 22 vows. It has observed that people are following both traditions that are old and new at the same time by providing their own reasons. One of the respondents says that supriya speaks what Buddha and Babasaheb said teaching provided by her father. She speaks that how her Buddhist friends celebrate and invite her for Hindu festivals

*My Buddhist friends celebrate all Hindu festivals like Navratra, gauri Puja, Diwali and all Hindu festivals. My father has told to follow what Baba Saheb and Buddha have said. I feel if it is not in my culture why I should follow. I don't have any restriction to follow Hindu culture and Ambedkar hasn't done only for SC's but he has done for all community. It is different things the people has not take cognizance of his contribution.*

The other side of viewpoint is that just negating the Hindu culture and tradition would not make themselves as a Buddhists. It has emphasized that the principles of Buddhism is based on practice and rationality. If it is follow, than it is complicated to claim as Buddhist. It always struck to non-Buddhists world that despite having guidance of Buddhism, why there is commonality between Buddhist people and Hindu People. For this, people belong to Phule-Ambedkarite ideology resist to celebrate festivals and follow the Hindu Culture but who are untouched to ideas of phule-Ambedkar are still roam around old tradition of Hinduism. It has been argued that converted Buddhist people in fact belong to Hinduism. Thus, it is not easy to separate them from their old identity. Hence, it makes to think that are the Buddhist community deceiving the Ambedkar and His teaching or inferiority complex make them to behave in such manner. Kir-ti, working girls in Panjab National Bank focus the broader aspects of Buddhist Community and question the action of Buddhist women itself.

If we follow Buddhism, we can create separate identity which is yet to form....whatever the changes has taken place in the life of Buddhist women only due to the efforts of Baba saheb Ambedkar. If Babasaheb has said something we must have to follow because he has provided the reasons and rationality to understand it. He is Guru to us, if Guru's Guru (Buddha) is saying something, it must have logic. Now people are moving to that direction which has opposed by Ambedkar. His wish was that they should not follow Hindu religion based on caste system or superstition. He has studied in great Universities of the world and given us Buddhism after studying all religion. Even after this, people do not trust him, what a disappointment and shame to our community!! If he could wish, he would have taken Mahayana or Hinyana but he has taken only Buddhism so that it could reach to common understanding of people. In spite of taking all facilitates, if people are not paying back to society and not following Buddhism, it means that they are deceiving Babasaheb.....they usually do the puja of Gautama Buddha and babsaheb but never do the puja in the direction of panchsheela and astan marg along with her children.

It is realized that youth of Buddhist community expecting the change within community in the direction of what Ambedkar said to them. The celebration of Buddhist festivals now has changed. It has been argued that the Buddhist celebration is not restricted to only dancing or just distributing sweets among the people but now the people at the contemporary epoch moving towards organizing such programmer in which an individual could enhance his/her capacity to know about Buddhism and thoughts against system of slavery. For it, Disha, an Civil Engineering unfold the changing activities taking place in Buddhist community and question just following Buddhism without thinking is not make any difference to other religion.

Now days, Buddhist people organizing seminar, speeches and debates related to phule-Ambedkar and Buddhism which is new trend in our society. I feel that some years back people for the sake of going, they were going to vihars and doing vandana which was celebration for them. I have observed and seen last two years there is group discussion. Women's participation is always in large numbers at Buddhist celebration. Just following rituals of Buddhism is not but following Hinduism. If you are following Buddhists thoughts is Buddhist. If Buddhist are following both culture (Hinduism and Buddhism) cannot be said as Buddhist.



It is well known fact that Ambedkar has denied refugees to sangha as he said that present monk are not capable to conduct his behavior on the basis of morals and according to principles of Buddhism. There might be a reason that Buddhist community could not produce the Buddhist monk who could be conscious about Buddhist values and become the light of knowledge for Buddhist community. As a result of it, the Buddhist community become paralyzed due to lack of enlighten Buddhist monk which make them understand the modern principles of Buddhism on the basis of science. It is historical proved that the lack of Buddhist laity has become one of reason for the decline of Buddhism in ancient India. Even without the monk guidance people still celebrates Buddhist festivals according to their own knowledge. The respondent kalpana Meshram, an Architect, provide mix account of festivals they celebrate in their home which seems to disorientation in her perception.

There is lack of awareness in those who perform Hindu rituals. It is because the Buddhist monk has not worked for the propagation of Buddhism. We don't celebrate any Hindu festivals which exist in my family. But sometime we prepare some sweets and fire crackers in our family. But I feel when I read and understand these things, gradually this type of celebration cease to celebrate. If we are not doing these things doesn't mean that we celebrate Hindu festivals.....we just have to propagate our own religion without hurting anyone feeling. In short we should practice our religion rather one speaking about others.

The statement seems to be defensive regarding the celebration and distributing the sweets on the occasion of Hindu festivals. This is ergo it is unable to make remarks that whatever the notion they celebrate the Hindu festivals or participate, it is indirectly supporting the Hindu festivals only by saying that our notion of celebration is different to what Hindu perceived or celebrate it. The other phenomena exist in Buddhist community is that they endeavor to negate all Hindu tradition but celebrate anyone of the Hindu festivals by giving their own reason or general perception of society. Usha Jambulkar, M.Sc (Zoology) B.Ed expresses her comprehension and justification about celebration of Buddhist festivals in relation Hindu festivals.

I don't know much about other festivals and the purpose of their celebration. I use to celebrate Diwali because of my children. I feel Diwali is festivals of everyone and because of it the feeling of sarvadharam sadbhav. I felt why we should not celebrate diwali during 14<sup>th</sup> April or day of Dhamma Chakra Parivartan Din.

It seems that Buddhist people trying to replace the same tradition of Hindu festivals on the days of Buddhist festivals which is nothing but transferring

the Hindu tradition on the name Buddhist festivals of 14<sup>th</sup> April or 14 October. Although, the Buddhist community people denied the celebration of Hindu festivals or tradition of inequality exist in social system but at the same time they participate in close friends function or Hindu festivals. Being close friends, it is difficult to deny them and if they would agitate on such issues would spoil their social relationship and remain stuck forever. In return, Buddhist women would not call them for their Buddhist celebration. Vibha Gajbhiye, an financial Advisor of LIC, make visualize the pressure of their close surrounding and actively participate in social issues and regularly visit to dikshabhoomi of Nagpur.

We go participate in Hindu festivals in very selective places like our close friends. They involve us in their family programmer with respect and speak very respectfully. I feel that as a friend there is nothing wrong to participate because they are our close friends. I have friends like Brahmins, Panjabi which won't call us on such occasion but other occasion like birthday or get-together we participate to maintain our relationship. We don't call any non Buddhist people as we don't make any sweets nor we called them in our house.....we celebrate all Buddhist festivals and regularly visit dikshabhoomi and conduct medical camps for people who visit Dhamma Diksha Day.

The other aspects of Buddhist women's perception towards festivals of Hindu and Buddhism internalize it while communicating and inviting non Buddhist people in her religious festivals. The reason behind to celebrate Hindu festivals is rooted in their inferiority complex and frightens to question or denied their religious authority. It is surprising that Buddhist wants to maintain their relationship at their self respect but this phenomenon is not seen and applicable to know Buddhist people. It is not that Buddhist women never resist but at very minute way and sometimes have to follow their Hindu religious god and goddess for sake of their happiness or feel good factor. In this regards, respondent Dharmapala pakidey, Housewife, explicitly express the relationship between Buddhist and non Buddhist.

We don't celebrate any Hindu festivals rather we celebrate Buddha jayanti, Ambedkar jayanti and Buddha Pornima. In our celebration, we call others community people like Brahmins, Maratha, Kunbi in our colony. Very few come like Brahmins but when they call us we won't go for any Hindu festivals. Sometimes I go for haldi Kunko (celebration of opening ceremonies) but unwillingly. They sometime ask us to take namaskar of their deity which I don't like and that's why I try to avoid their home visit on such occasion. I feel that bowing Hindu deity means we go to his/her refugees which I don't want to

do it. They might be feeling bad but whenever they ask me why I don't come to their festivals!! I tell them that we have taken oath of not worshipping Hindu God and Goddess. They use to feel surprise of my act by saying that the Buddhist from my community follow Hinduism than why not you? I say that those who follow only Buddhism is Buddhist and those who don't follow are not Buddhist at all.

It is also internalized by the Buddhist women that whatever they are doing is going against the values of Buddhism and Ambedkar's teaching. It might be matter of minority and majority. It has been captured that where the population in some areas of Nagpur is less compare to Non Buddhist people like Hindus, the experience of Buddhist people reflect the pressure and inferiority complex in their thoughts of performing tradition of Hindu culture. They agree that they are feeling contradiction while celebrating Hindu festivals which don't have place in their everyday life, despite having participation of upper caste and lower caste in every festival. The Sobha Suryawanshi, housewife, explain the same sight of thoughts while responding the perception of celebrating the Hindu and Buddhist festivals.

We celebrate all festivals. We have to do it because we have to live with other castes people in their areas and to maintain our relation we have to do it which is not applicable to our consciousness. We call them in our festivals and we also go to their festivals. Sometime I feel it is contradictory to my consciousness but we involved with them in their festivals just as fun and they insist us to come and we have to go as don't have choice. I feel we haven't become Buddhist the way we want to become.

Other side of picture speaks with very positive hope and more concerned about her community. It seems that some Buddhist women do not bother about the relationship. The reasons behind is that they are having their own Buddhist community people in large number and other community people less in quantity. Sureka suryawansi produce positive hope of negating Hindu culture based on inequality and people would follow the Buddhism on the basis of rationality.

Our religion is based on rationality and more emphasis on reason. If it is suitable to your logic, than you should follow it or leave it. It is based on science and one should practice it. The gradual change occurring in women, it is because of involvement of women in Buddhism. We celebrate our Ambedkar jayanti just like diwali. We accept the sweets of diwali occasion but never participate in their festivals. When our celebrations come we use to give sweets to other community in

same way. If won't participate in Hindu religion festivals, it never disturbed my relation with other community members. I feel that if I would follow my religion properly, than my community people will also follow in the same way. Thus, there is need to create good example before my community.

It confirms that a Buddhist woman could maintain social relationship without compromising her Buddhist identity. Historically, the isolation and exclusion has resisted the different castes to communicate with each other. As a result of it, the cleavage in communication created confusion and misunderstanding in society. The present era has diluted the feeling of isolation and sharing the values of culture without disturbing social relation exist in society.

### **Politics of Equality and Patriarchy**

Women of Buddhist community have acquired new identity as Buddhist after the conversion. At the time of conversion, Ambedkar has explained reasons behind of conversion and provided 22 vows which explain basic tenets of Buddhist philosophy for common man and women to follow it. It was Ambedkar understanding that without actively participation of women in any social movement would not make it successful. It has been said that women in Ambedkarite movement could contextualize into three aspects that is role in Ambedkarite movement which yet to studied in direction of their contribution in movement, participation and responsibility in movement, and economic empowerment of Dalit women (Paswan; 2002: 204). Thus, the question rose that men of Buddhist Buddhism is not only focus on rationality but also emphasis on universal principles essential for human being. If we analyzed the concept of equality in the context of Buddhist community, it has notice that Buddhists men are preferably less patriarchal compare to other non Buddhist men. It has said that patriarchy in Buddhist men gradually getting wipe out due to Buddhist humanistic principles of equality. In what sense, the dominance and unequal power relation between men and women perpetuated is unexplored aspect of Buddhist community. The patriarchy prevents women in every sphere of life like decision making position, under representation in premier state institution and imposes violence on them. The story of patriarchy in Buddhist women's perception explains patriarchy differently. In this regards, Sarika, M.A in Pali literature situate patriarchy at liberal position and make an agreement that male wishes to give equal opportunity to female but resist their male ego.

I feel men of Buddhist community are not much liberal but want to keep her under control. They think that giving more liberty would hurt their dominance and status. They want to give equality in walk of life but male ego resists them. But now days, some men are

really giving the opportunity to their wife but the percentage of such persons are very less.

The above expression also unfold the understanding that liberal atmosphere also remain in the hand of male. In other words, sometime male become the deciding factors on the behalf of female. It means that concept of liberty has been understood by men but the same concept has narrow down for women which is nothing but patriarchy notion. The expectation and hope of Buddhist women has related to Buddhism itself and expecting that male approach would transform towards women when men would grasp Buddhism outlook towards women on the basis of equality. Kirti, working in Panjab National Bank, explain the two categories of men existing Buddhist community.

In Buddhist community, the men are developed themselves speedily compare to women. It has happening because of long patriarchy values carrying by Buddhist men which is not part of Buddhism. It is not that all men are doing and behaving in domain of patriarchy but some are having liberal attitude and behavior towards the women. Those who don't have such approach due devoid of Buddhism and nor they Buddhists at least in the level of equality. In this context, we cannot Buddhist, if our women and girls are not enjoying the liberty, equality. The mentality is superficial where they speak and lecture on the liberation of women emancipation but practically they are not doing.

Thus, it is matter of validity attached to Buddhist men's on practice and theory. The theory of justice percolates in Buddhist community, on other hand they won't allow provide space to their women the way they acquire. This type of notion existed in Buddhist community because men are not enlighten nor conscious about the Buddhists or Dalit women's contribution in social movement against system of caste inequality. This approach created impact on the Buddhist community that they prefer to call Buddhist monk rather Buddhist female monk. The disha khandare, Civil Engineer, drew the attention towards discriminative process in the regards of Buddhists Monk.

In dhamma, compare to Buddhists men, female Buddhist are much better and this is because of female actively participation in vihars and conducting programmer. I have seen female Bhikuni is less preferable to Buddhist community compare to male Bhikuni which show less respect to Buddhist female which is setback for Buddhist community's concept of equality. It can be overcome just making conscious about their contribution in social movement of emancipation from the caste slavery.

The discriminative process in Buddhist community has inter-related to marriages. It has been said that marriage usually prevents the liberty of women and make her to adjust in the framework of marriage. In this regards, she has to compromise with her wishes and decision often influence under the male dominance. In general sense, the liberalism of Buddhists men has forwarded by women in compare to other non Buddhists women. Vibha Gajbhiya, a financial Advisor LIC explains the how the Buddhist women after marriage get limitizes her wishes and compromise at certain level but at the same time reflect comparative account of Buddhist women and non Buddhist women.

I have more space compare to other women. But in a very limited manner, I feel marriage is compromise where we have to squeeze our wishes but at the same time we get stronger support from our husband. I tell you Buddhist men are more liberal than other men. I have got lot of opportunity to develop my personality. Limitation mean to me, when I compare men with women in general we find that men never tolerate his wife being more intelligent or smarter than him. Sometime we have to show them that we are not less in capacity and intelligent than anyone including him also. You know when I say Buddhist men is liberal in the relation to Buddhism which I feel they may be understanding women position but unable to control his patriarchic mind...he may be understand and one day he will come to follow the concept of equality rooted in our religion.

If the women are not locating in place of equality, would create vacuum in modernistic values of liberty, equality and fraternity. Another respondent claims that those who haven't accept the basic thoughts of Buddha and Ambedkar is still in the clutches of patriarchy and follow its function to dominate women. According to Nandeshwar, she asserted that Buddhist identity could be developed only by negating the patriarchy system. It also mentioned that educated parents can internalize the seeds of equal opportunity to their next generation only by adopting Buddhists thesis.

Ya we don't have space and I agree with it. It is very less percentage of people who have understood it. The reason is not accepting the Buddhists principles of equality, liberty and fraternity. The male dominance we can observe not only in him but also in other caste and religion and we are yet to reach to the level where men enjoy their liberty. I got the space due to my educated parents and they taught about it and make us to learn Buddhism at our home.

From it, an outer world of non Buddhist could make a reference that the emancipator project Buddhism is held up between those who are endeavoring to overcome from mental slavery of patriarchy and those who are unable to break boundaries of patriarchy system. At this line of thought, poonam pillawer, a lecture has projected phenomena of liberal scope for development of women at equal par of men. She provide us some element which makes to think that at extent patriarchy has been diluted and in some manner.

I have full liberty at my home. I use to work outside and my husband takes care of all my domestic work including rearing the children. Even my husband parents don't have any objection for it and in reverse of it I always get encouragement from the side of my Husband.

### **Caste and Identity Politics**

To understand the revolutionary step taken by Dr. Ambedkar against caste system and declaration of renouncing Hinduism, one has to take the journey of historical account of parallel religious ideology of Vedic religion and Buddhism. It is agony that exploration of Buddhism in ancient India has been taken from the Hindu's religions point of view. Thus, the conversion of untouchable community like Mahar into Buddhism is a process of revival of Buddhism which India has lost in the time of ancient India. After the conversion, it was expected that Buddhists as new identity would vanished the caste identity and liberate India from system of social stratification rooted in caste inequality. In other words, the realization came upon may be among the neo Buddhist that conversion of religion will not bring about their economic and social status of neo-Buddhist and fundamental change in the whole social system is necessary (Singh; 2008: 155). There is no doubt that Buddhist community has progressed in every sphere of life where they feel confident and proud to be Buddhists. Thus, it is imperative to explore whether the newly acquire identity is able to replace the stigmatize identity of caste within Buddhist community and in the perception of non Buddhist. The respondent of Buddhist community has mixed feeling about the caste discrimination within Buddhist community women in relationship non Buddhist women. It has been observed that Buddhist women feel secure in the surrounding Buddhist locality and rarely face any caste discrimination, while in non Buddhist locality; they have external pressure and perception of caste discrimination. It show that Buddhist community's perception relay numbers of household situated in which areas of Nagpur. Although, there is change in Buddhist community and perceived identity with more proudly with but caste identity has congruence with Buddhist identity from the perception of non-Buddhist. It could observe in the context of inter-caste marriages where it has been viewed that the notion of caste has been kept under the carpet of difference of culture and tradi-

tion in between Buddhist and non-Buddhists. In this regards, Neha, pursuing her graduation, explicitly admit that there is confusion whether discrimination is on the basis of caste or behavior and eating habits.

It is not easy to speak anything about what they think about us but one thing is very clear that the perception of non-Buddhist has not changed. This I feel when we call them in our any programmes, they won't come nor they eat in our house. I feel that Buddhists identity has not able to replace caste identity in full manner from non Buddhist perception but I can say it is in process of making of identity. In villages, there is caste but in city I don't find through the naked eyes.

It is conceived notion of Buddhist women that there is might be chance that this perception has not changed due to celebration and following both tradition of Hindu and Buddhism by Buddhist women. One of respondent kajal (House wife and post graduate in Pali) and priya (Post graduate In Ambedkar thoughts, teacher in corporation school), has not faced caste discrimination because of having Buddhist surrounding around them.

I have not seen that caste identity has wiped out being Buddhist. The reason may be that women follow both traditions of Hindu and Buddhist or because of surnames which we carry. In this way, women are neither Buddhist nor Hindus. I haven't come across any such type of experience of caste discrimination or being Buddhist might they (non- Buddhist) feel but non- Buddhist has not shown openly..... (Kajol)

I remember that sometime we face discrimination at community level due to caste but I don't have experience of it as I kept my work perfect nor I have come in contact with Non Buddhist community as I hardly get to time to interact with other community people. Sometime I have observed that Buddhist community use to get discriminated only due to reservation.... (Priya)

Hence, it has to notify that identity use to perpetuate in public sphere from two ways that is perception within the community and perception from outside the community. Due to amalgamation of both religious identities, the Buddhist community is unable to achieve the level of respectful identity. As a result of it, the non-Buddhist in public domain or individual interaction remembered them old identity because of the resemblance in Buddhism and Hinduism. Thus, Sneha Nandeshwar, electronic engineering, preparing for Civil Services Exam, openly put unspoken view of upper castes or non Buddhist people.

Yes, we are converted people and Buddhism has not become stronger the way Babasaheb Ambedkar



was expecting from us...even from our personality, we hardly reflect our Buddhism and from our behavior or actions, we reflect Hinduism. This is because we feel that we are part of Hinduism and that's why other also perceives us in the same manner and other castes people make you realize that you're from lower caste. If we accept their notion and thought of caste identity, than we cannot progress in our life.

The new technique has obtained to overcome the caste discrimination and pursue the Buddhist identity by making excellence in every sphere so that no one should raise or question them on the basis of their caste identity. For some respondent, caste is not primarily factor rather how they are representing themselves in society and in their working places and their confidence would cease to speak about their stigmatized identity. But other studies focus that militant and literary movement cherished the value of inequality and increased consciousness in educated men and women that in spite of their efforts to change in their identity by conversion, there is not much recognition given to their redefined social position (Shastree; 1996: 102). The Alpana Meshram, working as Architect in her own company (Alpana Enterprizes), enforces to wash out the caste identity through intelligence.

For me, it is very necessary to be competent or become complete women or by placing your views differ than rest of group of members, than I feel there would not be caste first...thus, it is depend how you present or represent yourself would definitely take the notice by the people. If you have something, the non Buddhist person would try to know about you. Even if they come to know about your caste, I don't think that they would speak something about caste before you.

It is usually said that inter-caste marriage is solution for caste system. Through it, there would be sharing of culture and tradition between different castes. It is hard to speak about the successfulness of inter-caste marriages because it has been observed that in inter caste marriage, any one of the individual has to subordinate to other one in order to maintain this sacred thread. It is reflected in Buddhist community that inter castes marriages often takes between bride from upper caste and bridegroom from lower caste. It has said that the upper castes bride always marry to economic status quo person of lower castes but it hardly happened in reverse order. The other aspect deals with taking the importance of women in the family by the Dalit communities where the marriage merely depended upon caste background of individual which is very significant for it. The study related marriages, many of Dalit community hide their caste background and very few reflect it without hesitation (Encyclopedia of Dalits in India; 2003:247). Its means that person having low economic status never

become option for upper caste bride. Hence, the pre-conceived notion of caste identity hides at the back of upper castes on the issues of marriage. For the Buddhist community, it is process of crippling the community by brahmanising him who could become emancipator of lower castes community and social movement. Thus, Prerna Jambulkar (M.Sc Zoology, B.Ed), working as teacher in junior Science College, and Swati More (M.A, B.ed), has talked about mentality of other community people in relation caste.

The Hindu people come together with us and share food with us but somewhere they have caste in their mind that we are SC.....the reasons behind that they are not willing to give their girl for marriage to our community boy but love marriage is different thing. I never feel that other caste women would ask willing SC girl for her son marriage. The roti beti process has not happened as said by Dr. Ambedkar. The marriage can bring equality but other caste people are not ready for it. The Buddhist community following the sub caste notion while selecting bridegroom or bride is itself a anti Phule Ambedkarrism .... (Prerna)

We have come from Hindu religion therefore, we have caste identity. We use to identify and remembers us that we are converted people of 1956 conversion. Even though we have converted but still we are same in their eyes. I feel no one say anything before us but at the back of mind we feel caste. They follow mental untouchability. They don't take cognizance of our progress and development by saying O!! He/she is Mahar!! Doesn't know anything. The thing of themselves has not changed but it is not our problem, it is their mentality not ours!!.... (Swati)

Despite having Buddhist identity, the Buddhists people still in domain of inferiority complex due to unaware of about Buddhism. The other issues is prevail in Buddhist community that Buddhist identity could not percolate at the level of humanism due to inculcation of caste in government official document and find no difference between Hinduism and Buddhism. As a result of it, the Buddhist people hesitate to identify themselves in public sphere and reflect their constitutional identity. The respondent Indu Pillewar, Contributory Lecturer in College, post graduate, find contradiction between Buddhist identity and Schedule Caste.

Even we have taken diksha but in our official document we find caste. I feel that we should write Buddhist rather than caste. I feel pity for it. In general sense, for outside world, we are Buddhist in our community while

enquiring in public we become Schedule caste but never say we are Buddhists. There are other Buddhist communities from lower castes except Mahar who don't reveal their identity in public just like Mahar. As result of it, there is perception that Mahar has not taken the Buddhism at all.

## Conclusion

There is assorted feeling profoundly persist in the perception of Buddhist women in their own religious identity. Buddhist conversion is created separate identity on paper but could not able to conceptualize it in their practical behavior and action. The expectation of Ambedkar to create an Idealized society based on Buddhist values has yet to achieve, in which some Buddhist women endeavor to rectify deeds within the community by questioning their faith in Buddhism and loyalty towards Ambedkar thoughts on idealized society. It discerns that Buddhist community perpetuating the politics of identity within arena of patriarchy and festivals by locating the tool to examine identity of Buddhist. The generalized perception has occurred in the context of caste perception of non- Buddhist. Despite, fifty six years of development in the field of soci-economic and politics, it is scrutinize that caste of mind doesn't shown any transformation towards acquire new identity as Buddhist. It seems that Mahar caste as an identity has established the same symmetrical phenomena with new identity as Buddhist.

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## Аџај Чоундари

# БУДИСТИЧКИ ИДЕНТИТЕТ: ПРИЧЕ О БУДИСТКИЊАМА У ГРАДУ НАГПУРУ - СТУДИЈА СЛУЧАЈА

### Резиме

Жене у Индији су ретко посматране као независан идентитет услед кастинског система. Због тога идентитет жене, заједно са идентитетом припадања нижим кастама, чине да оне буду жртве ригиног патријархата и кастинског система у нашем друштву. Десио се велики број конверзија не би ли се променио живот људских бића. Али истраживања рађена са фокусом на религијску конверзију су се у принципу концентрисала на мушкарце, са малим освртом на утицај на жене. Међу овим конверзијама, конверзија др Амбедкара у будизам је успела да пружи нови и поштован идентитет за многе. Али статус будистичке жене, у оквиру будистичке заједнице, је остао најнеистраженији део ове конверзије. Због тога ће овај рад покушати да истражи да ли је будистички идентитет успео да обезбеди облик самопоштовања и једнак статус за будисткиње и до којег је степена будистички идентитет успео да замени њихов жигосани идентитет у јавној сфери истражујући приче будисткиња о њиховом идентитету.

**Кључне речи:** будизам, браманизам, Махар заједница, будистичка заједница, будисткиња, будистички идентитет, хинду фестивали, касте и политика идентитета

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