

# Buddhist Feminism A Dhamma Journey



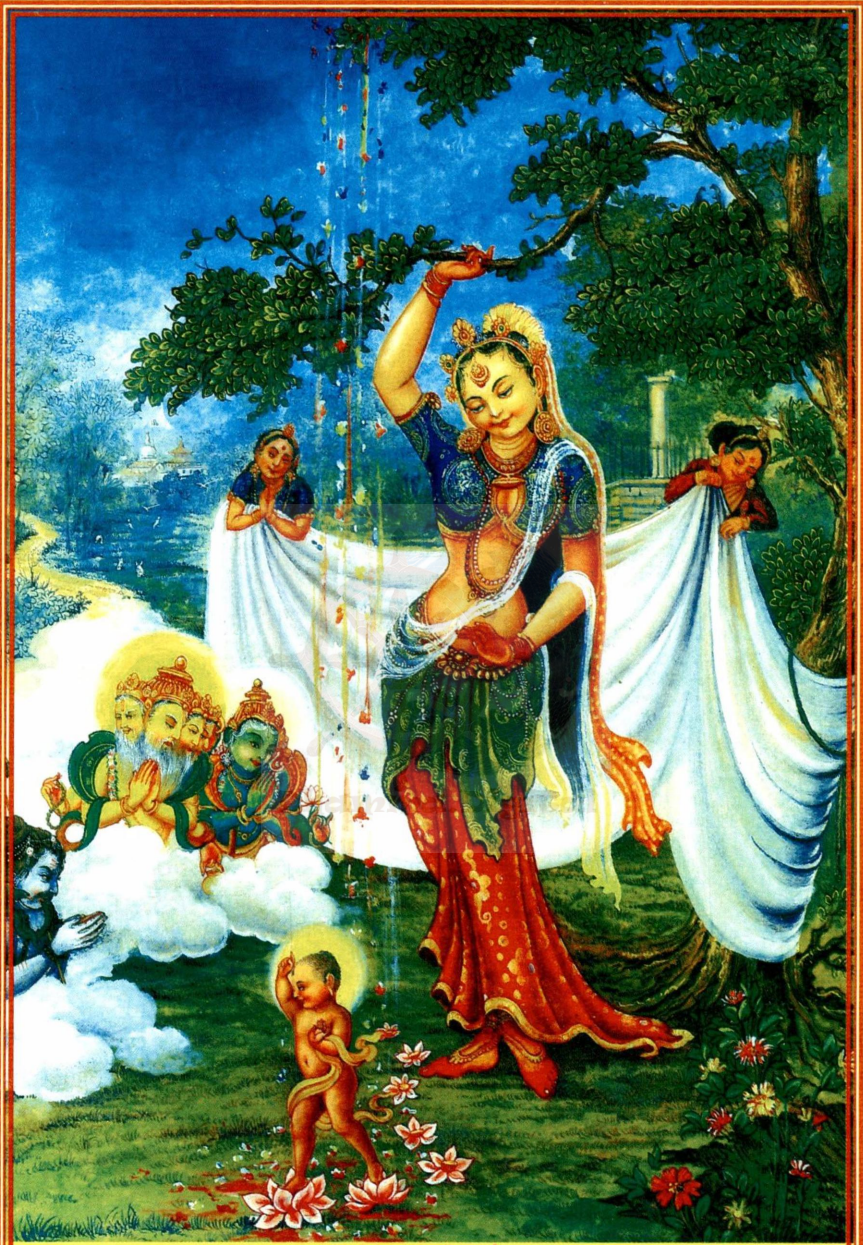
By  
**Dr. Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhamma Vijaya**  
**Deva Kaji Shakya**

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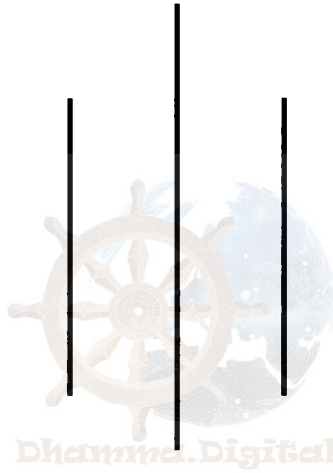
**Bhikkhu Ananda**  
Champion of Buddhist Feminism

**Lumbini**  
The Sacred Birthplace of the Buddha



*Maya Devi,  
Mother of the Illuminating Light of the Universe*

# Buddhist Feminism A Dhamma Journey



*By*  
**Dr. Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhamma Vijaya**  
**Deva Kaji Shakya**

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**Authors : Dr. Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhamma Vijaya  
Deva Kaji Shakya  
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**Dedicated To**

**Late Ama Dawa  
Chomola Tuladhar**  
Swayambhu, Kathmandu

  
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With the highest tribute  
from

**Ms. Padma Tuladhar**  
Swayambhu, Kathmandu

“पञ्जानरानं रतनं”

**Ven. Ashwaghosha Maha Thera**

**Dhyanakuti Vihar**

Dachchu Tole, Banepa, Nepal

Phone: 011-661254

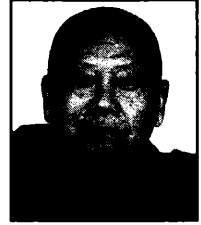
भिक्षु अश्वघोष महास्थविर

ध्यानकुटी विहार

दछुटोल, बनेपा, नेपाल ।

फोन: ०११-६६१२४४

## Words of Blessing



It's a welcome news that a book on Buddhist Feminism jointly authored by Bhikkhuni Dr, Dhamma Vijaya and Mr. Deva Kaji Shakya is being published. Such a book clearly reflects the need of time to understand the Buddha, the Enlightened One's attitude towards Women's position at the time when they were treated low in the status by the male dominated society.

It's a revolutionary step that the Buddha permitted the first ever establishment of Bhikkhuni Sangha. The Buddha had crystal-clear opinion that women can attain the highest spiritual stage of Arhanta on a par with men. Dhamma is Dhamma, it draws no demarcation between male and female in spiritual achievement as it is concerned with the mental state of a person. Buddhism is entirely related to practice of Moral Precepts (Sheela), Meditative Concentration (Bhavana) and Intuitive wisdom (Prajna) for all.

The authors had historical survey in the book, how women suffered discrimination during different periods of time and how Shakyamuni could discern women's ability and talent to prove themselves quite capable to stand par excellence.

It is necessary for women who are devotedly in the campaign to boost women's right for good, to have very sound

knowledge on position of women in Buddhism and the Buddha's acts of generosity and compassion to elevate women spiritually.

In my opinion, this book will help alleviate, to the greater extent, the mistaken belief that The Buddha had no positive attitude towards women regarding their abilities and the role they can play in the growth and development of society. The book will certainly be useful to scratch out the wrong conception that the Buddha had given inferior status to women.

I would like to express my blessings to both the authors for their joint endeavour, in the book, to highlight on how women suffered discrimination for the long period of time and how the Buddha rescued them.

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2017



**Bhikkhu Aswaghosh Mahasthvir**  
**Agga Mahasaddhmmajyotikadhajja**  
Sanghanayak, Nepal





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## A Few Words



As the title of the book, “Buddhist Feminism – A Dhamma Journey” itself suggests, the book has gone through in detail to throw light on how women struggled hard the prevalent male dominant attitude of that time. The book also illustrates how women proved themselves outstanding in their long march ahead to realize the supreme state of bliss and peace, Nibbana during the Buddha's contemporary period. It is inspiring to note that Shakyamuni Buddha very compassionately and gracefully showered blessings on women to lift them higher spiritually up to the summit of Dhamma stage of 'Arhanta'.

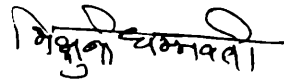
I hope and believe that the above titled book will immensely help to repudiate the misconception that the Buddha had negative attitude towards women and they have no place of repute in Buddhism. The book elucidates very clearly, how the Buddha spoke highly of, admired and caused Dhamma awakening of women with his skillful means.

It is praiseworthy that the authors have brought into light, in the book, the famous Theris of the Buddha's time, who had extraordinarily exhibited their talents and genuine dedication to realize universal absolute truth, the reality of life and to tread on the path Tathagata demonstrated. Therigatha is the perfect example, one need to emulate, the source of inspiration for women, who want to strive for righteous, blissful and successful living.

The book has explicitly mentioned some of the events in the Buddha's life and they will be quite interesting for them, who are voicing for women's right, to draw inspiration from those. One of the events in Buddha's time that king Prasenjit expressed his disappointment at the birth of a baby girl to him. The Buddha admonished him in the most effective and impressive way that women could prove far superior to men and they could become mothers of great sons.

The book has mentioned how it was prestigious matter for the women that the Buddha rejected the invitation extended to Him and the Bhikkhu Sangha by the Licchavi princes for lunch because He had already accepted to the request of offering for the same by Ambapali, the courtesan.

Taking into view of different matters raised and mentioning of the events, the book has its own type of remarkable speciality. I have words of appreciation and congratulate my pupil Bhikkhuni Dr. Dhamma Vijaya and Upasaka Mr. Deva Kaji Shakya for their hard work to write and publish the book. I wish them best in every step of life.



**Bhikkhuni Dhamma Wati**  
**Shasanadhajja Dhammachariya**  
**Agga Mahaganthakavachaka Pandit**  
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## **Congratulatory Message**

I am so grateful for Dhamma Vijaya's work on "Buddhist Feminism" because it illuminates the importance of women in Buddhism. The Buddha recognized women's ability to attain enlightenment and He taught that all people had the capacity for the achievement of it if they practiced and purified their minds. The Buddha's inclusion of women into the Sangha shows women's power and energy, which was often overlooked in Indian society at the time. We know that women have always played a critical role in Buddhism and the present work highlights that importance.



Thanks also goes to Mr. Deva Kaji Shakya, who jointly worked hard with her to produce such a superb work. It deserves appreciation that both the authors have put up a lot of efforts to throw light on how women suffered in course of their struggles to earn equal status along with men and how Bhikkhunis came on par with Bhikkhus to reach the spiritual height of 'Arhanta'.

The book highlights clearly how the Buddha, the Enlightened one, showered compassion and blessing to enlighten and rescue women, when they were going hopelessly through the state of depression and frustration.

The book, I hope, will help readers to eliminate their misconception that women have no proper place in Buddhism.

This book may serve best for women to draw a stimulus to work harder for the genuine cause from the illustrated Bhikkhunis of the Buddha's time.

With Metta

**Dr. Mohini (Ph.D)**

PRINCIPAL OF Dhamma Moli  
International Buddhist Education and  
Meditational Center.

Dhamma Moli Vihara, Mindhamma Road,  
Mayangone T/S, Yangon, Myanmar.

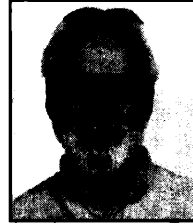
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Dear Sister Dhamma Vijaya,

It brings me great pleasure to learn that the book titled "Buddhist Feminism-A Dhamma Journey" based on your research on Buddhist Feminism is to be published in book form with other interesting additions. This work is a valuable addition to the literature available on women in Buddhism, particularly in regard to the Bhikkhuni Sangha. The presentation covers many of the theoretical approaches taken in modern Feminism as well as the values and attitudes that Buddhist cultures have had in regard to women. This comprehensive and comparative work will be a useful resource for all those interested in the history of Buddhist attitudes toward women. For this, sincere thanks also go to Mr. Deva Kaji Shakya, who jointly authored and extended hands to produce such a remarkable work of significance.



Of particular interest is the presentation on Buddhist values as presented in the Therigattha. This is one of the oldest Buddhist texts available and its portrayal of the active participation of Bhikkhunis in the practice of meditation and their subsequent realization of enlightenment is an inspiration to all of us. In addition, your description of Ananda and the Buddha's attitudes toward the nuns as reflected in early Buddhist sutras is an important addition to our understanding of those times.

While acknowledging that no major teaching of Buddhism supports gender inequity or gender hierarchy, you have also presented evidence to show that attitudes toward women prevalent throughout Buddhist history were always ambiguous. Finally, in comparing modern Feminist theories with Buddhist, you have given us a valuable insight with regard to the relative importance of practice over theory. This analysis gives us much to consider and will be an inspiration for many who follow you in the future I heartily congratulate you and Mr. Deva Kaji Shakya on the publication of this valuable work.

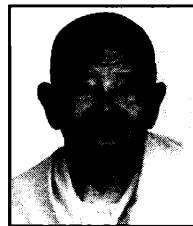
October 23, 2015  
Bodhi Gaya

With Respect,



C. Robert Pryor  
Director, Buddhist Studies Program  
Antioch University

## Congratulatory Notes



I congratulate Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhamma Vijaya and Mr. Deva Kaji Shakya for jointly authoring and publishing such a useful and interesting book with the title, “Buddhist Feminism – A Dhamma Journey”, which I think, help enormously to dispel the mistaken view that Buddhism has not given any place of respect to women.

Surveying through the general condition of women during the Buddha's time, it will not be difficult to find out how it was pathetic and how the Buddha demonstrated the full sympathy towards them. During the Buddha's time, along with men, women also appeared in the front line in following the Buddha's teachings and sermons seriously and faithfully. Theris of the Buddha's time were able to show their caliber to reach the highest stage of spiritual achievement.

Like Anathpindaka, lay devout Buddhist woman Visakha could earn the highest honour as a donor, who offered in Dana, the Purvaram Vihara for the Buddha and Bhikkhu Sangha. It will be encouraging for both men and women to get knowledge of how Dhammadina earned the distinction with the wide knowledge of Dhamma. There is abundance of examples, which help learn from illustrated Buddhist Theris as well as from Buddhist lay women followers for spiritual gains.

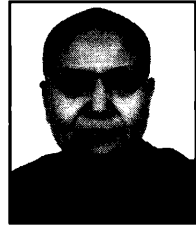
From the point of view that there is plenty of knowledge on Buddhist Feminism , the publication of such a book is praiseworthy and I express my thanks to the authors.

May Triple Gem bless both the authors with Peace and Happiness in life.

*Madhavi*

- **Venerable Bhikkhuni Madhavi**

## Acknowledgement and a Note on 'Buddhist Feminism- A Dhamma Journey'



It is my genuine intention to publish materials and facts consisted in my Research Paper, 'Buddhist Feminism' precisely for general readers with additions of some interesting subjects and topics related to women. We find some misconceptions among people, regarding the Buddha's attitude towards women, which we wanted to put forward to clarify them for the benefit of all.

Mr. Deva Kaji Shakya and I made joint endeavour here in this book to put all the things before the readers as far as possible regarding the Buddha's teachings in true and crystal clear perspective. Mr. Deva Kaji Shakya and I are of the same opinion that The Buddha's teaching is timeless, which is true in past, present and future and it is all the time relevant and can be adapted in changing situations of the world as appropriate. We are of the opinion that Buddhism suits to different faiths, culture and traditions as it speaks of universal truth and humanitarian values to be applied indiscriminately for the benefit of all living creatures.

We have made efforts in this book to go in detail the following points:

- a. **Meaning and Developments of Modern Feminism**
- b. **Buddha advocates Feminism and the Buddhist Feminine Ideals**
- c. **Importance of Therigatha to have clear understanding of Feminism in true sense and the biographical sketches of famous Theris**

- d. Significant role played by Ananda in the promotion of Feminism for good of family, society and for humanity as a whole

Although the teachings of Buddhism are androgynous in nature free of gender bias, there is gender discrimination present in the Buddhist Order. For example, the very word for 'woman', in Tibetan Language, means 'Low Birth'.

Even Jataka stories seemed misogynic because we find Buddha as female, non-existent in His previous lives. Kajiyama Yuichi writes that the doctrine characterized by misogyny has come into the Buddhist literature late in the early Buddhism. There is a kind of a misconception that female birth is the unfortunate consequence of past bad or inferior Kamma.

Kajiyama Yuichi gives the list of the woes of females :

- a. leave home and family at young age
- b. patriarchal arrangement having to be subservient to men remaining under their protection
- c. care as they are considered weaker sex
- d. biological cause of menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and
- e. the typical Indian stereotype sexual attitude.

Anguttara Nikaya wrote the worst that women never were able to get enough two things- intercourse and childbirth.

Entire period of early Indian Buddhism was essentially misogynist, ambiguous and self-contradictory. Southeast Asia was least sympathetic to contemporary women's drive for a full and dignified participation in their religion. The patriarchal interpreter says that male dominance is necessary if we are to be faithful to the tradition. Feminists say that they should discard and eliminate such a mentality and traditional attitudes.

Theravada line of thinking is simply a faithful pristine form of Buddhism. Some misogynist passages in Pali are simply

emotional outbursts of individual frustrated monks. Traditions see women as temptress of men meditators, a wrong notion exclusively expressed for women. Women are viewed as Maras (evils), frequently, suggesting misogynist tendencies on the surface that they are the main factors in the battles against entrapment in sangha. We can find many examples of women treated as Maras, the source of temptation for the Buddha to be and for the Buddha himself.

We find many misinterpretations, misguidance, prejudice and derogatory remarks in Buddhist treatises even in tripitaka regarding women's abilities, thoughts and their roles. We find how women are underestimated in their capacities to perform different activities. We have tried our best to evaluate women in real and true perspective.

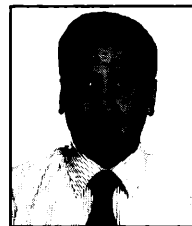
We have endeavoured to put things clear how the Buddha himself spoke and treated women equally on a par with men. We have selected the title of the book, as "Buddhist Feminism–A Dhamma Journey" to express our effort to study on Buddhist Feminism in historical prospective and to seek proper interpretation in respect of the position of women in Buddhism at different periods of time.

We acknowledge with grateful thanks for the gracious help and cooperation of Ms. Padma Tuladhar, Swayambhu, Kathmandu, Sister Eva and E. Dan Hira Kansakar, Kalimati for sponsorship of the publication of the book. Our sincere gratitude goes to Most Venerable Aswaghosh Mahasthavir, Sanghanayaka Bhikkhu for the kind words of blessings and to the most Venerable Dhamma Wati, my great teacher for her 'A Few Words' for the book. Heartfelt thanks to Mr. C. Robert Pryor and Venerable Nun Madhavi for their Congratulatory remarks.

**- Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhamma Vijaya Ph.D**



## A Note on 'Buddhist Feminism - A Dhamma Journey'



The above titled book is a historical survey on the state of affairs, the women went through during ancient period before the birth of Shakyamuni, the Buddha, the contemporary and the period after his Mahaparinirvana.

The book has its source, mainly from the Research work Buddhist Feminism by Dr. Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhamma Vijaya, the abbess of Nirvan Murti Vihara, Kimdol, Kathmandu, for which she got the Doctorate Degree. The book has also dealt with the burning topics related especially to women on spiritual, social, cultural, religious and intellectual aspects.

The authors centralize their focus on the Buddha's attitude towards women, the privilege, position and status given by Him to the nuns (Bhikkhunis), and lay women. In the book, the authors attempt to analyze on prejudice and bias against nuns in the contemporary situation of that time, in the Holy Order of Bhikkhus itself and even in the Buddhist texts and treatises like Jataka.

The texts on Buddhism extoll the virtues and qualities of Buddhist nuns and lay Buddhist women like in Therigatha and in other references. The fact is that thoughts, ideas and attitudes expressed in the Buddhist texts seemed to be always ambiguous and contradictory. We can find wide disparity and conflict between Buddhist theory and practice among Bhikkhus. The early Buddhist attitude was quite ambivalent towards women. Many earliest Buddhist texts have revealed their fear that the Order of nuns would dramatically hasten the decline of Buddha Shasana (The Buddha's Dispensation). The ambivalence is misleading

and there are uncertainties and confusion. There is rather multiplicity of voices each expressing a different set of concerns with the consequence of inconsistent texts of various types.

The concept of “common humanity” and Dhamma as well is neither oriented favourably to male nor female, therefore, the propagation of Dhamma and its practice should not be linked with sex differentiation. So it is quite illogical and unreasonable to treat men and women, discriminatingly speaking for or against one another. It is not justifiable at all to denigrate women in their abilities, to cause them lag behind and not let them participate in Dhamma practice, Dhamma learning and performances of activities related to Dhamma.

The matter of fact is that the spirit of the doctrines of Buddhism is not androcentric or misogynic. Derogatory remarks towards women were on the surface because the course of time was shaped by prevalent situation of the society, the mode of thinking and perspective of looking at things with the feelings dominated at the time. As conceived in Buddhism, the Ideal Pure Land is the inhabitation of both men and women.

If the true significance of Buddhism is unequivocal equality and if its spirit is universal fraternity and humanity, then we should focus our efforts on eradicating sexual discrimination between male and female. Such a step will help promote the principle of theory and practice of peaceful coexistence, loving-kindness, compassion, **altruistic joy** and equanimity, which are the fundamental teachings of **Shakyamuni**, the Buddha.

Venerable **Buddhist monks and nuns** should be the role model of these **Buddhist values, virtues and qualities** so that the lay Buddhist followers would be inspired to emulate them in the real life situations. In such circumstances only, the Buddhist Campaign to establish peace and harmony in the world without any kind of violence, **prejudices and extreme thinking** will take

shape, helping the enhancement and promotion of the global village concept, Sukhabati Bhuban in real sense, in this very Sahaloka, the world of sufferings.

In its original form, Buddhism is a pragmatic soteriology, a theory of liberation seeking to liberate humanity from suffering. The Buddha was critical of conventional views and thoughts regarding the status of women in the society. The earliest Buddhists clearly held that one's gender like one's caste or class, presents no barrier to attaining the Buddhist goal of liberation from suffering. Women have potentialities to be fully enlightened to pursue the path of Dhamma, the righteousness, leading to the ultimate goal of Nibbana.

It is urgent need of time that literacy and awareness programme on buddhist values should be promoted from the very primary school and the grassroots community level not limiting them in the practice of normal rites, ritual, liturgics and stereo practices at the temple and shrines. There is no possibility of eradication of gender discrimination by just giving lectures on the importance of gender equality. It is necessary to create situations and circumstances to help people realize the innate significance of practice of gender equality in real life situation.

In her Research paper, Dr. Venerable Dhamma Vijaya writes, "The Buddha praised the female sex, both young and old. He stood up for Queen Mallika's infant daughter, whose birth had disappointed father king Pasendi". The Sigalovada Sutta speaks about the Buddha that He had shown a great concern for laywomen. The Buddha had urged husbands to protect and respect their wives for celestial conjugal lives. The Buddha on numerous occasions, repeatedly criticized and challenged hostile attitudes toward women both in religion and in society

Suitable extracurricular activities at school support strongly the development of the Buddhist values. It will be wise to give a

due place to the Buddha's teachings in primary and secondary level school Curriculum. It will be fruitful to launch varieties of appropriate activities at the community level. Active participation of people in general, in such programs and functions should be encouraged, that help boost the attitude of honoring male and female each other with no discriminatory touch and feelings at all.

Both men and women should learn the sense of togetherness, the mutual understanding, mutual recognition, mutual co-operation and peaceful coexistence practically, by applying Buddhism in real life situations. One should not forget that mother or family is the first school where children start learning things, which have greater impact in their future way of looking things and their attitude towards life.

Dr. Venerable Dhamma Vijaya in her research paper says that attitudes toward women, prevalent throughout Buddhist History were always ambiguous and contradictory. She writes about the belief that women are as capable as men in achieving Buddhism's highest goals, was less popular than the attitude that women are less capable than men. Her opinion is that it requires first to get rid of intolerable contradictions between views and practice. She said that it is important to mandate and institutionalize gender equality, building it completely and thoroughly into the very fabric of Buddhist life and its institutions. To mandate gender equality in all basic ethical guidelines of the tradition, it is important to correct any institutional non-compliance, whether deliberate or inadvertent.

I hope this book will be quite interesting and useful to know about women's status and position during the Buddha's contemporary period and the periods before, which led the Buddha to form his own views and ideas, and make efforts to bring revolutionary reforms and transformation for the benefit of both men and women.

*- Mr. Deva Kaji Shakya*

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# Introduction: A brief historical survey

## **Buddhist Feminism and Various Schools of thought**

Regarding spiritual and social status of women, if we turn the pages of history to know clearly the situation prevalent from the early time to the modern days, it will enable us to know how they were defined in terms of men's needs and their perspective. They are particularly evident in Greek philosophy and in Judeo-Christian theology. The work of Aristotle provided the example that rational soul is not present in slave as well as in women that they are morally unstable and so need care and control. Only man is the image of God as asserted by Saint Augustine and women are partial being only. Men are committed to reason and authority whereas women linked to sensuality and physical nature. The attitude that woman is flawed, blemished and second rated citizen, is still found even in this 21st century modern day world.

The nomads' life style in the third millennium BC was with the characteristics of patriarchal system. Women equally sacrificed with their husbands at Vedic altars but they were treated like slaves during the period between 1500- 500 B.C. The nomadic Chou invader around 1100 B.C. spelled out and expressed women's low status in the interpersonal relationship from the lowest family at the base of the social pyramid to the reigning emperor at the apex saying that a hen does not announce the morning. The Shang dynasty from 1800 to 1100 B.C. might have been matrilineal and matriarchal as there were female shamans and cults of mother goddesses – His Wang Mu.

Alexander, the Great, his Greek successors, the Persians, the Indo Scythians and Imperial Indians brought sterner codes for women. Women were under new protection and were treated as mere chattel desiccations. From the third millennium B.C., formerly agricultural people moved into warmer and wetter areas as their own lands dried. These patriarchal nomad tribes brought their own Gods. Men treated women as slaves and they depreciated the values of the partners who had sacrificed equally with their husbands. Younger women, forced to marry, could not enjoy the opportunities to have education. Because of this, they were forbidden to perform rites and rituals too that had to be learnt, which used to take twelve to sixteen years. Around the second century B.C., cruel laws of Manu demeaned women. The ritual of forced self-killing (sati paratha) was imposed upon child brides to be burned alive along with their husbands' dead bodies. The custom of Purdah also came into vogue with the coming of Muslims in India.

The apparent exclusion or marginality of women in traditional theory is simply an instance of injustice. In Carole Patina's view, women's marginalized position within social and political thoughts does not just involve an issue of content or omission. For the traditional theory, women pose a problem and this attitude is founded on frameworks of women's subjugation.

Women were thought and described to be man's opposite and they were treated in relation to men only. Man was the subject and absolute but **woman was considered 'not man'**. Men linked to rationality and **civilization** but **women were right opposite to men as the non-rational or irrational**. **Rousseau considered that women should be educated to please and compliment men for their benefit.**



Bernadette Masala sums up odd on the part of males with traditional thinking that when men are oppressed, it's tragedy but when women are oppressed, it's a tradition. Feminist thinkers point out repeatedly the traditional Feminist attitudes, which accepted and confirmed women's subordinate position in social and political life either explicitly or implicitly. The traditional theory takes for granted women's subordination and assumes that this is not a centrally significant topic for social and political thought and discussion.

Such type of attitude towards women contributed enormously to bring forth different theories and principles, that defended women's status, position, rights and things concerned to the progress and prosperity, which help change their lot. The baseline definition of feminism lies in pointing out the discrimination, subordination, oppression, inequality, injustices etc. on the part of women and the strong advocacy of women's right against those. The main aim of modern feminism is to raise vehemently the voice against the attitude of excluding women from prestigious position held only by males themselves, marginalizing and trivializing women's power, capacity and the significant role they could play to contribute to family, community, society and country, if provided the opportunities in social and political life. Thiele says that it is common knowledge among feminists that social and political theories for the most part still are written by men, for men and about men.

The word 'Feminism' is used in the broadest sense to refer to the advocacy of women's rights based on a belief in the equality of sexes. It refers to everyone, who is aware of and seeking to end women's subordination, expressed in different ways for different reasons. Feminism has originated in the perception that there is

something wrong with society's treatment of women. Women are in disadvantaged positions, so there is advocacy of opportunity for both men and women with equal political and social rights. There has been a tradition passed through generations of male exploitation of women and therefore feminism is a strong campaign to eliminate subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices against women.

Now we see different types of principles and schools of thought developed through the courses of time regarding women's rights, their demands and efforts to bring changes in women's luck and their participation in various ways in the structures of family, society and nation building and construction. One of the ideals put forth for women is Liberal Feminism which advocates gradual, continued, strong and forceful reform in the thinking, attitudes and ways of treating and dealing with females in family, community, society and nation with the maximum use of modern day science and technology in the means of communication, print, audio visual media, literature, music, drama etc.

Liberal Feminists speak of human nature that fundamentally, both male and female are not different. Women are as much the same as men and no gender differentiation exists at all in any field and activity; therefore, there must not be any kind of discrimination based on sex. They should treat women on equal basis. Men should change their attitudes for good that women can do and should be able to do what they do, only that they should provide equal opportunities to the latter. Females also should develop awareness among themselves that they should voice for equal opportunities and against any kind of negative behaviors towards them, that discourage to move ahead. Liberal Feminism does not plead for radical and

revolutionary change, that creates waves of opposition and struggle, for and against one another. Naomi Wolf says that access to opportunities should be available to both males and females based on their qualities, qualifications, abilities, interests and needs, and there must not be any places for the questions of gender preferences.

On the other hand, Radical Feminists feel real challenges against them from men's world. They vehemently reject liberal soft corner and orientation towards the public world of men. They very strongly advocate and give positive values to womanhood rather than supporting a notion of assimilating women into the arenas of activities of men, who knowingly or unknowingly oppress them with masculine superior feeling. Radical feminists stand firmly for their genuine cause and reasons paying special attention and focus on pains and sufferings not only physical but also mental and psychological, which are clearly visible as a prejudicial consequence of social order characterized by gender inequalities, oppression and domination prevailed over the females in family, community, society and the nation. Systematic organization of male supremacy like patriarchy, subjugation and subordination of females as second grade citizens has been deeply felt by radical feminists in cultural practices, customs and traditions, job opportunities, facilities and other material and spiritual gains too, which led them to wage war against men, whom they feel main enemies.

Stacy saw and spoke of historical continuance of sexual oppression. Patriarch is crucial in part as a counter to the politics of radical left in 1960s and 1970s, which either ignored sexual inequality or deemed it of secondary importance. Elizabeth Grosz terms feminism of difference, historically continuous and clear-cut difference between men and women. Radical Feminists'

feeling of ontological difference and opposition lie in essential, intrinsic differences, male domination in a social structure, as the consequence of some in-built male propensity. They oppose that male and female difference inevitable given by nature, at least as so established historically that it deeply embedded throughout society.

Marxist /Socialist Feminism views overthrow of capitalism as a necessary precondition to dismantling male privilege entrenched within it. The main enemy in this form of analysis is a class system, which created division between men and women. Underlying sameness between men and women seemed to be oppressed by men and men oppressed by capitalism. The matter of fact is that the interest of men and women is not crucially different. The dependency of women upon men and ensuring dominance of male in the society has evolved as the norm and is accepted and justified as law of the society in all cultures and during all times.

If we think from the Buddhist point of view, we cannot find any kind of difference between male and female except that in biological, physiological and physical built up, and the structure which we see outward. However, the truth is that there is individual difference among both males and females naturally. As the matter of fact, regarding their potentials and abilities, which have been the true earnings of their Sanskaras, merits and values accumulated from the past lives, the indiscriminating result of the effective working of the universal Law of the Cause and Effect as taught by the Enlightened One, applies equally on both sexes.

Therefore, gender discrimination is the creation of the distorted mentality of males handed down in the way of practice

as tradition and culture for generations. Sex discrimination is the negative consequences of prejudices against women in male dominated society, and due to women themselves not being able to respond to the situation properly in the most appropriate way. Owing to such a situation there has been the deep-rooted negative impact spread over all the arena of human activities. We do not and cannot see the discrimination but the true impartiality in the act of the nature.

Kim Gutschow in the *Buddhist Spirit* expresses that in the enlightened mind, there is no male or female, and in the Buddha's speech, there is no far and near. The Buddha had repeatedly pointed out that gender is not an obstacle on the path of enlightenment. Treating of men and women on equality basis is the real spirit of philosophy and principle of the Buddhism for the benefit of the entire human world. This fundamental teaching of the Buddha should be propagated everywhere around the corners of the world to make people realize gender equality, if we really want to eradicate problems risen out of gender discrimination. This point should be taken into mind seriously by those who have kept themselves busy in the campaign to work for women's right against the discrimination.

# Analysis of Women's position and status in Buddhist Perspective:

## Buddha Advocates Feminism

It will be appropriate and not out of context to refer to a legend to write down a few lines here on attitude, respect and love expressed towards women by primordial Buddha, DipankarTathagata. In the context of the importance of Dana i.e., Offering in Generosity, people remember legendary Guintha Nakin, the dignified, illustrated and devoted buddhist woman, who offered Dana of 'pure and unbroken grains of rice' to Deepankar Tathagata. It was a long cherished noble wish of Guintha Nakin to offer Dana to the Buddha and she prepared offerings by herself with pain and labour for months. The legend says that Deepankar Buddha in His alms round, went first straight to Guintha Nakin to accept her offerings instead of going to king Sarbananda, who invited the Buddha for the Sangha Dana. The king took months to construct the ' Dana Saala', the site of offerings of different types of grains and other things to the Tathagata. The king made his subjects of the town engaged for the purpose for a long period. This is the most illustrious example, how Deepankar Tathagata recognized Guintha Nakin's selfless sacrifice and unshaken faith, obviously, it is the respect and honour for a woman's dedication and devotion..

In the prologue of the Epic, **The Light of the Ten thousand fold World System**, Sujatha Hettiarachchi Nadarjah, the author described how a **mother blessed son, who took her on his back to safety swim to the shore against the mighty strength of ocean storm and tide. She uttered the following sweet words as blessings to her son, who had exhibited nature and characteristics of Boddhisattva, the Buddha to be.**

*You one day a Buddha be to row  
Aboard your raft of Dhamma true and firm  
A countless number of wanderers  
Who wrecked are in samsara's stricken sea.*

In Lalitvistara Sutta, Mahamaya Devi's womb, where Boddhisattva Siddhartha (the would be Buddha) resided for ten months before appearing in the human world, had been described as a shrine named 'Ratna Vyuha', the spotlessly clean, pure and most sacred site. The Buddhist treatise depicted Mahamaya as the ideal exemplary woman, who was perfect in all sense in discipline. She had been practicing moral precepts for eon and was able to be the mother of Future Buddha.

Mahabrahma and other devas (deities) approached and offered prayers to Swetaketu Boddhisattva to appear in the human world for the benefit and wellbeing of the whole universe. The Boddhisattva made a thorough review of the world and made five great observations (Panchamahavalokana) of the time, the continent, the country, the family, and mother to be and her life span. Mahamaya Devi was the most blessed woman, who gave shelter to the would be Buddha in her womb to secure for herself the most honoured and revered place in Trayatisa Bhuvan after seven days of the Buddha's birth. To pay debt as a son to mother and express gratitude of extraordinary kind for the extremely significant and highest noble deed, it is said that the Buddha visited the Trayatisa Bhuvan to give sermons on Abhidhamma to his mother.

Yasodhara, known as Bimba Devi so named after her rosy complexion, Bhadda Kaccana and famous Rahula Mata, the former wife of the Buddha as Boddhisattva Siddhartha Gautam, was a woman with self- pride and honour, who stayed home and did not come out to receive Shakyamuni, the Buddha, during the first visit to Kapilvastu after His enlightenment. She thought that

the Buddha himself would come in person to see her, if it was true that she had perfectly observed and maintained the Sheela (moral values) and lived in a way as the Buddha did. The Buddha with his psychic power could understand very well what she had in her mind and went straight into her room as a gesture of honour to her feeling and thought. Yasodhara was a symbol and model of great woman who could bring up son Rahula in a way as desired to tread the path shown by the Buddha. The following stanza pays tribute to her:

*“Great as mother and wife,  
Sustaining Rahul’s life.  
Revealed to her the mighty past  
Singled for the giant’s task.  
She was the foremost among nuns who could delve deep  
into the past.”*

It is quite interesting and glorifying for women to note here that the Buddha spoke highly the significance and importance of offerings of Kshira (milk rice porridge) to him by Sujata, the lay- woman devotee on the day, when he would be enlightened during night- time. That Bhojana dana (offering of rice porridge) revitalized and circulated energy and enthusiasm in Boddhisatva Siddhartha’s emaciated and weak body and it caused the sound state of mind leading to Enlightenment ( Sambodhi Labha) that very night.

The Buddha always gave a due place to women and He never drew a line of discrimination between male and female. He did not accept the invitation of Licchavi princes for lunch because the Buddha had already given the words to accept the Bhojana offered by courtesan Ambapali. The princes murmured among themselves that they lost to Ambapali and she won what she wanted wholeheartedly to offer Bhojan Dana to the Buddha and Bhikkhu Sangha. It was a great sacrifice of a woman that



Ambapali rejected the princes' offer of gold coins in exchange for, to let the Buddha visit them for lunch. She experienced the immeasurable bliss, when the Buddha accepted her Dana of Amravana for the use of the Buddha and the Bhikkhu Sangha.

The Buddha came into rescue and showered the rain of compassion and loving-kindness to women like Kisa Gotami and Patachara, who were in the state of mental distress and imbalance as the consequence of the loss of their loved ones. The Buddha gave them sermons clearly and practically on the harsh reality of impermanence of life. The Buddha used his psychic power (Riddhi Bala) to make Khema and Sundari Nanda realize, how things change and never remain the same, i.e. each moment is new. To teach them practically a lesson on impermanence of life, with the supernatural power, the Buddha created a beautiful woman and transformed her gradually, moment to moment from youth to adult and then to the old frail body bowing downwards with wrinkles and total gray hair. They saw and they realized, how things changed and their all vanity and pride of beauty disappeared. They were totally changed personalities, who could comprehend true meaning of spiritual life of renunciation.

The Buddha founded Bhikkhuni Sangha on par with Bhikkhu Sangha (Holy Order). It was a brand new democratic concept at the time, when women remained all the time in the very within of four walls of residence, their activities being limited to household chores, giving birth to children, bringing them up, providing services to husbands and other members of family. Early or child marriage was in vogue, which blocked the path to women to move forward to progress and prosperity with no opportunities to gain knowledge and information on various things, even, they were not allowed to worship and visit temples. It was because of the Buddha's dispensation, women, at least, got chances to come out of doors and chant Buddhist verses at temples. The establishment of Bhikkhuni Sangha was a

kind of revolutionary change in the prevalent situation that time. There were many challenges to face- dogmatic, conservative thinking and attitudes, rigidity and orthodoxy for the Buddha. Even Bhikkhus and lay Buddhists felt difficulty to accept the new change. Changes in attitudes and ways of dealing towards women were not easy at all, even today, what to talk about the past?

The question of safety and security always appeared on the surface to draw the attention of the concerned, regarding the women's position and status. At that time the conditions and situations were not favourable for women, which the Buddha was fully aware of, therefore, he took much time to reach the decision in women's favour as in the case of approving of the establishment of Bhikkhuni Sangha. Taking into serious consideration of prevalent situation, the Buddha developed many rules and regulations as per the need of time for the welfare of men and women, which help bring peace, harmony and happiness among them. He categorically pointed out duties of husband and wife, parents and children, master and servant, teacher and pupil and duties towards friends and neighbours.

The Buddha had the distinctive approach while delivering sermons, instructions and treating the circumstances that arose new and with his Kausal Upaya (skillful way), he tackled them efficiently and effectively. His ways were different and on the spot, the Buddha dealt with the problems in suitable ways.

Regarding women's position, the Buddha took special attention to devise his sermons skillfully as suited to demand, situation and necessity. The Buddha never ignored the women's interest, abilities and their spiritual elevation. It was the Buddha's compassion that He permitted Bhikhuni Sangha to be established although he took much time to decide. It was only because the Buddha had to ponder over pros and cons of his decision, considering the social built up, tradition, culture and religious attitude of that time.

Even the terms and conditions of *attha garuddhamma* for women laid by the Buddha to join the *Bhikkhuni Sangha* should be taken positively as it was with the good motive of the Buddha. The delayed decision of *Bhikkhuni Order* was only because of the Buddha's consideration for women's safety and security, and total benefit of *Bhikkhu Sanga* and welfare of women and it is not justified to take the Buddha's attitude otherwise.



*Maya Devi Dreams of Bodhisattva entering her womb*



*Sujata offering Khir Bhojana (Rice Porridge) to Bodhisattva Siddhartha who was on insight meditation*

# Therigatha

## Its significance in the Buddhist Literature

Therigatha is a poetry anthology in the Pali Language about the first Buddhist women. It can be regarded as psalms of sisters, Theris (the elders), feminine Gatha, the verses on the Buddha's women disciples, a Buddhist scripture. Therigatha is the ninth book of the Khuddaka Nikaya and it contains 73 poems of 522 stanzas in all, in which the early nuns recount their struggles and accomplishments along the road to Arhantaship. Seventeen of seventy-three poems contain references to conversion.

Therigatha, the epithet, bore the Dhamma achievements of the disciple nuns of Shakyamuni, the Buddha's time. It sets the most ancient examples of women's writings, unmatched for their quality of personal expression and the extraordinary insight they offer into the lives of women. Therigatha contains a number of passages reaffirming that women are equal of men in terms of spiritual attainment. A number of verses that seemed to address the issues might be of particular women.

The importance of the collection of life experiences expressed direct by the contemporary Bhikkhunis of the Buddha is greater in the sense that it reflected the thoughts of the time, when the society had its characteristics mainly of androcentric views and attitudes. In fact, Therigatha expresses freedom of women, which exposes the humanitarian aspects, the Buddha had been emphasizing for their enlightenment and realization of the realities of life. The Buddha gave sermons on the treatment of both men and women equally and he never discriminated them on biased basis of gender, caste and creed, social status or standing or region, culture and tradition.

Therigatha is central to studies of women in Buddhism. Many Theris retreated from the mundane world, taught, meditated and brought others into the path. A theme of spiritual and social freedom dominates in Their Gatha (verses). A Theri had been overwhelmed with the sense of spirit of freedom in the following utterance of the verse.

*“I’m free, totally free in freedom  
From those three hideous shapes:  
My grindstone, my pestle  
And my hunch-backed husband.  
I’m free from birth and death-  
My ties to life are broken.”*

Reacting to the taunt of Mara, the personification of evil, that women’s intelligence was not enough to attain liberation, the nun Sona said, “How should the woman’s nature hinder us, whose hearts are firmly set, who, ever move with growing knowledge onward on the path?”

It is clear from her argument that male and female are irrelevant designation and men are no more adept at spiritual practices than women are.

The Therigatha describes how a Theri named Sumedha vehemently voiced for her decision to lead the life of renunciation. She strongly opposed the proposal of her marriage and spoke in favour of renunciation and its fruits, the transience of material wealth and social position, and delusiveness of sensual pleasure.

The Buddha let ordination of women from Mahaprajapati Gotami and Yasodhara to Prakrit, the low caste and untouchable woman of Hindu faith and religion. Purnika, the daughter of Anathapindaka’s maid also got her due position in the Buddha’s Dispensation. She expressed, “Sin will not be washed away by taking a bath in the river. If taking a bath will wash away sins,

then for fish, tortoise and toads, living creatures and amphibians, heavens are reserved for them.” The Buddha said that women had wisdom in addition to their faith and devotion to the Buddha.

Dhammadina is also an example of a nun who possessed extraordinary ability to expound the Buddha’s teachings clearly. She was the Theri, whose perfection and potentialities manifested at the very moment, when she found her husband Visakha transformed a different personality of the spiritual height of Anagami. At the very inspiration of Visakha, she sacrificed her possessions, vast material wealth and everything, and chose to renounce household life for spiritual gain of higher stage. Therigatha contains such stories full of inspirational messages to be emulated for women of this modern age too, who wanted to be role models of spiritual awakenings to guide others.

Theris of the Therigatha were not the imaginary creations but real historical figures who lived during the Buddha’s Dispensation. The Gatha gives the biographical sketches of Bhikkhunis, with the valuable messages, depicting the real pictures. Therigatha beautifully depicts the lives of Theris, how they underwent the varying conditions, which helped the transformation of their hearts for happy, fruitful and peaceful living, spiritually a kind of new birth as nuns, radically different from the previous ones.

Therigatha really, is a beautiful poetic creation, which related Sufferings and Salvation of nuns and their endeavour to reach the state of tranquility and peace, i.e., Nirvana. The Therigatha leaves indelible stamp on those, who go through the verses. The situations and sufferings the Theris underwent were of different kinds but those were the consequences of the contemporary social structure, systems, attitude and disorder. Theris mentioned in the Gatha were the frustrated and pessimist household women, who were able to rejoice lives after their

renunciation and ordination. After renunciation, the Theris could experience hope and energy with the achievement of spiritual vitality, in the very within of their mind. They got benefitted from the learning and practice of the Enlightened One's teachings.

They said that they were in real sense, true followers of the Buddha, who never treated them as objects but as daughters with compassionate love. The Buddha gave them the opportunities to choose either the domestic or the life of renunciation and they found there was not any kind of obstacle on the road to elevation, spiritually. They triumphantly echoed their spontaneous expression, saying that they were happy because they were detached from materialistic desires and wants. They exhibited their strengths, powers and abilities with their senses, fully under control.

The Scripture, composed more than two millennia ago, related the stories about well famed and the most honoured Theris, with often heart throbbing honesty and beauty, revealing deeply the human side of those extraordinary women. The Therigatha really serves as an inspiring reminder of potentialities of women, which to follow as an access to insight.

Therigatha clearly presents the fact, how women without doubt could come on a par with men in achieving highest spiritual stage of Arhanta. The scripture provides the fine and lucid examples of the Buddha's attitude towards women and, the position and status reserved for them in the philosophy of Buddhism.

Anne Bancroft, a Christian feminist, is of the opinion that a woman could attain Arhantaship and she saw nothing inherently inferior, in a woman's mind although the wandering life might be difficult for her.

Another Christian feminist Jenice D Wills says that the Buddhist Texts elevate and grant nuns more esteem and at the same time to the laity in general too.

Diana Paul says that the Mahayan attitude to women is much more positive than the Theravada and it needs no further consideration.

Lily de Silva argues that Buddhism continued the improvement of the position of women, which the Upanishads had already affected in Vedic Society.

To conclude we can say that Therigatha has a powerful message for today. Women's struggle for liberation has been going on for a long time and it points to the fact how those brilliant Theris had succeeded in attaining liberation. Modern day women may derive inspiration from those Theris.



*Yasodhara paying the highest respect to Shakyamuni, the Buddha*



## **Biographical Sketches of some of the renowned Theris (Nuns) of the Buddha's time**

It will be quite relevant here to go through some of the very short biographical sketches of the nuns, the true followers of Dhamma and righteous living. The Buddha gave them the positions they deserved and appreciated deeply, how they possessed the talents and abilities to reach the culmination of Dhamma stage with clear understanding, after having gone through the experiences of sufferings of harsh realities of life.

### **Mahaprajapati Gotami**

For The Buddha's Foster mother, Mahaprajapati was the suitable epithet with the meaning, mother of the great offspring and Gotami was the clan she belonged to. She became Bhikkhuni at the age of eighty with the spiritual strength of Sheela (moral virtues), Samadhi (Concentration) and Prajna (intuitive or discriminating wisdom).

When she wanted to offer Chivara (Yellow robe) in Dana to the Buddha, He gave advice to Prajapati Gotami to earn more merits by donating it to the Sangha (the Order of monks), which signifies the higher importance of monks' community than the individual monk is.

At the request of Mahaprajapati Gotami, the Buddha delivered a discourse, "Be conscious of things, which conduce to peace and not to passion, to veneration not to pride, to wishing for little, not to wishing for much, to seclusion and not to love of society, to the exercise of zeal not to sloth and to contentment not to querulousness. That is Dhamma and that is Vinaya, and the teaching of the Master."

She attained the highest spiritual stage of Arhanta possessed fully with Catupatisambhida (the fourfold analytical knowledge and extraordinary strength of performing miracles.) She attained Arhantaship after hearing Samkhitta Sutta. Reared and brought up in her lap, Shakyamuni, the Buddha repaid the debt due to her foster mother as a son, by Ordinating Prajapati Gotami and founding Bhikkhuni Sangha as per her wish.



*Bhikkhuni Ordination by Shakyamuni Buddha to Mahaprajapati Gotami*

to lead life of renunciation under the Buddha's teachings. She fulfilled it and resolved to enter Nibbana before Shakyamuni Buddha would attain Mahaparinibbana. Venerable Radhika Abeysekera quoted Mahaprajapati's words: "Buddha, Hero, homage to you. Oh! The best of all beings, you released me and many other beings from pain. All pain is known: craving as the

The Buddha declared that Venerable Bhikkhuni Mahaprajapati Gotami was the foremost in seniority and experiences among the female Maha Arhantas of the Noble Order, Bhikkhuni Sangha. Mahaprajapati Gotami's only lofty aim was

cause is dried up. The noble eightfold way has been developed. I had attained Cessation of sufferings. I had indeed seen the Blessed One; this is the last body; journeying on from rebirth to rebirth has been eliminated; there is now no renewal existence for me.”

Mahaprajapati Gotami could earn the miraculous power of performing extraordinary deeds (Riddhi Bala) because of continued acts of merits in her previous births since the days of Buddha Padumttara to the last existence. She had religious awakening to realize her approaching nirvana.

The Buddha asked Prajapati Gotami to display her Supernatural power before attaining Nirvana, to cast away the doubts on attaining enlightenment by female disciples in His teaching.

Before entering Nirvana, she uttered her last words, “Lamentation leads only to Mara’s domain, is therefore in vain. All conditioned things are impermanent; they end up in separation; they cause endless agitation.” The Buddha said that Prajapati Gotami had been like a big tree trunk to the Bhikkhuni Sangha and she was calmed (entered Nirvana). The fact is that there is no word so sacred as “mother”, in the Buddha’s own words: “Mother unique, None can gainsay, Nursing August Babe going far in Aryan Way, undying bliss that got from Sage.” As a tribute to her, the Buddha took part in her funeral procession.

## **Dhammadina**

In the **Chullavedalla Sutta**, Dhammadina answered a long series of questions related to the aspects of the doctrines and practice. The questions were put before her by former husband Visakha, who was a prominent merchant and lay Buddhist teacher. The Buddha said, “Bhikkhuni Dhammadina is free of all forms of cravings, either of the past or the future or the present Skandhas (aggregates). Dhammadina was the foremost Bhikkhuni in expounding the doctrine.”

What's a woman to do when her once-contended husband suddenly decides to leave her and become a disciple of the Buddha? This is what happened to Dhammadina, a woman of 6th century BCE, born in respectable family of Rajgriha, who eventually became a nun and a respected teacher of Buddhism. The conversation between Dhammadina and her husband Visakha is recorded in Pali Sutta pitaka, the Culavealla Sutaka (Majjihima Nikaya 44).

Visakha posed profound questions related to the five aggregates, which are objects of clinging. Visakha's first question to his former wife and nun Dhammadina was related to self-identification. She replied the question referring to the five Skandhas ("the aggregates of clinging"). She said, "We cling to physical form, sensations, perception, discrimination and consciousness and we think these things are "me". The Buddha said, They are not a "self".(The Cula - Saccaka Sutta).

The conversation between Dhammadina and Visakha was related to the Buddha's teachings that Human existence is made up of five aggregates, "the bundle" (skandha) of material body, feelings, perceptions, predisposition of karmic tendencies and consciousness. A person is only a temporary combination of these aggregates, which are subject to continued change. No one can remain the same for any two consecutive moments. There is no independently existing self or soul. The denial of permanent soul is linked to chain of causation how ignorance in previous lives creates the tendencies for a combination of aggregates to develop, which cause the mind and senses to operate sensation, leading to craving and clinging to existence. Such a condition triggers the process of becoming, the only cause of renewal of cycle of birth, old age, disease and death, effect being rebirth without transmigration. The cycle of birth and death is the causal chain, a connection made between one life and next rather than a permanent being that moves from life to life.

The self-identification arises from the cravings that lead to further becoming (Bhava Tanha). Self-identification falls away, when that craving ceases and the practice of the eightfold path is the means to end craving.

The interesting conversation continued until Visakha's final question related to the last stage of Arhanta, which according to Dhammadina, is beyond his ability to understand as he was in the stage of Anagami only.



*Dhammadina answering the questions put up by her former husband Visakha*

On his final question, Dhammadina answered and explained that the other side of pleasure is passion; the other side of pain is resistance; the other side of neither pleasure nor pain is ignorance; the other side of ignorance is clear- knowing; clear knowing is release from craving; lastly, the release from craving is Nibbana. Self and sufferings are synonymous and they were caused by clinging or craving to the five aggregates.

It is a mistake to view any or all of the aggregates possessing “self”. In another way to say, possessing any or all the aggregates

as being is the “self”. Buddhism says, “No self; no problem.” Aggregates affected by clinging does the “self” arise.

The Buddha said, “Dhammadina, the nun, is a woman of discerning wisdom. She is free of all forms of craving, either of the past or the future or the present Skanda. Referring to Dhammadina, as mentioned in Dhammapada, Treasury of truth, as the Buddha uttered, “That one, who is free of everything, that’s past, that’s present, yet to be who nothing owns, who is unattached, that one I call a Brahmin true.”

To quote from Dhammapada, the Buddha explained to Visakha that he, who does not cling to aggregates, that are past, future or present or who is free from moral intoxicants and attachments, him I call a Brahmin (i.e., an Arhanta).

## **Uppalavanna**

She was regarded as the foremost amongst the Bhikkhunis of the Buddha’s time. Uppalavanna Maha Theri was renowned as the foremost for psychic power like Venerable Mogallana. The interesting story goes like that Uppalavanna whose beauty was compared to the beauty of lotus flower, when came of age, proposals for marriage came from all quarters to the harassment of her father. He did not want to offend by not giving her in marriage to any of them. Therefore, the only solution for him was to ordinate her in the noble Order of Bhikkhuni (Nun). She became nun and was in charge of the convocation room, where the nuns assembled for the confession of lapses.

While tending the lamps of the room, she observed and found out, how the light sustained by the wick and the oil. She became Arhanta by her insight into Karmic Forces reflecting deeply on how light went out because of short of the wick or the oil or by a gust of wind.

Uppalavanna reacting to Mara's terrifying words, said, "I have reigned over my all senses and now, I possess four Riddhi Bala (Four psychic strengths). I am liberated of all types of bondages, I am not afraid of you, brother."

## **Khema**

Instances of Arhantas among women are many like Khema, who became fully enlightened even before her renunciation. The Buddha praised her, especially for the depth of understanding.

The name, 'Khema' has the significant meaning of being in the well settled or composed state of mind. Before becoming Bhikkhuni, Khema used to take boast in her beautiful appearance and glamour as the queen, so she felt a kind of fear and uneasiness and was reluctant to appear before the Buddha although she had desire in mind to learn from His teachings. It was because she felt that the Buddha knew her self - conceit as the most beautiful woman in the world with sense-pleasures, indulgences and everything what she had in the innermost of her heart.



*The Buddha gave sermons on "Impermanence of everything" to Khema*

The Buddha saw that the appropriate time had come to make her realize the ultimate truth of impermanence of everything and hollowness of her conceit in physical beauty. The Buddha with His psychic power, created a dazzling figure, an extremely beautiful woman in comparison with her own. The figure gradually grew older until she turned totally the wrinkled face with grey hair and her body brooding very low to the ground. It was the Kaushal Upaya (skilful means), the Buddha used, to teach Khema, who got the deep insight into the law of nature and it left the indelible stamp in her with complete transformation, a different person with the realization of the truth.

Buddha said, “Khema, look at the body, that is afflicted with pain, impure, putrid, discharging impurities upwards and downwards, which foolish persons take so much delight in. Cultivate the mind to get it fixed on an object of meditation so to be able to perceive loathsomeness of the body. Let you be mindful of the thirty- two aspects (constituent parts) of the body; let there be weariness about them; give up attachment to body both internally and externally. Just as the spider follows the web of its own making so also sentient beings with attachments and follow the stream of defilements, which is of their own making.” It cooled her heart as though ambrosial water poured on to her person. With religious awakening, Khema realized, “Oh, this form (body) is impure, it is indeed loathsome. Foolish women relish this impure, loathsome body.”

Fully penetrated in what the Buddha taught practically, almost like lightning, she attained enlightenment as the seed of wisdom had long been ripening and virtues fully matured. She already had purified and perfected herself in virtues as the result of the accumulation of merits in her past lives.

When a poisonous snake killed her only son, the following utterance spontaneously came out of her mouth. It showed



how Khema was able to keep total equanimity at the sorrowful state of mind. She uttered, “Uncalled hither he came, without leave, departed too. Why should I grieve? He went the way he had to tread.” Khema earned fame and praise for her wisdom and possession of insight that manifested at different times and situations.

One night Khema, the Arhanta, went to visit the Buddha but finding Sakka, the king of deities, listening Dhamma sermon, with her psychic power, she wheeled round in the air and disappeared after paying due respect and honour to the Buddha. The Sakka asked the Buddha who she was. The Buddha replied, “She was my daughter Khema, possessed of great wisdom, knowing well what is the path and what is not the path.” The Buddha declared, Khema was, among the female disciples, the most eminent for wisdom.

## **Kisha Gotami**



*Kisha Gotami praying the Buddha to bring life in the body of his dead child*

With the Enlightened one's extraordinary compassion showered on her desolate, grief-stricken and imbalanced state of mind, owing to the death of his only son, Kisha Gotami rose to the state of full realization of the ultimate truth. The Buddha said, "Gotami, one who is intoxicated with one's children and wealth and is attached to one's possession, is carried away by death just as a sleeping village is swept away by a huge flood. Gotami, the impermanence of all conditioned things is not a peculiar phenomenon confined to any village or town or a family but an inescapable fact that concerned all sentient beings including devas, humans and Brahmas."

Kisha Gotami acquired insight into the truth of becoming. She laid the dead body of her child in the charnel ground expressing her newly found knowledge in verse:

*'No village law (Dhamma) is this, no city law  
No law for this clan or for that alone:  
For the whole world - way and the gods in heaven  
This is the law: All is impermanent'*

Realizing the inevitability of death after birth, she asked for the admittance into the Order of Nuns. Mara came and taunted to distract her from Meditating and Practising Dhamma. She addressed Mara as 'friend' and exhibited her fearlessness and equanimity.

She watched lamp one evening and compared the restlessly hissing flames with the up and down of life and death. Thereupon the Blessed one came to her and spoke a short verse: "Though one should live a hundred years not seeing the Deathless state, yet better is life for a single day, seeing the deathless State." Kisha Gotami extinguished all mental intoxicants. Rising to the holiness of Arhanta, she could reach to the state of deathlessness.

She uttered the verse:

*'Nibbana have I realized and gazed  
Into the mirror of the holy norm  
I, even I, am healed of my hurt,  
Low is my burden laid, my task is done  
My heart is wholly set at liberty.'*

Her verse is imbued with deep reverence and gratitude to the Buddha.

Bhikkhuni Kisa Gotami earned praises from the Buddha that she was one of the greatest Theris and foremost nun, who wore coarse garments, one of the ascetic practices.

## **Patachara**

Patachara was one of the most distressed and troubled women who knelt down at the feet of Shakyamuni, the Buddha, to be graced with His mercy and kindness to reach at the height of moral integrity and the stage of Arhanta. The loss of the loved ones and parents deeply hurt Patachara. As the consequence of calamity that fell on her head, she went mad and wandered on the street without clothes on her body. She was the most fortunate one, who received grace from the compassionate Buddha. He let her regain the mindfulness to practise Dhamma and to know the ultimate truth of life. She understood Rules of Conduct and practised full discipline wholeheartedly. The Buddha himself had said that she was the foremost Keeper and preserver of Vinaya among the nuns, the female counterpart of the monk Upali.

Patachara observed the water trickled down the slope and she came to realize the whole of existence that her sons lived short lives, her husband who lived a little longer and her parents lived longest in comparison with her husband and sons. The reality of life she understood was that it was the constant change,

in a never-ending, rising and ceasing that resulted in the thought process to give her the total detachment and emancipation. The true picture of Patachara's life is reflected in the following stanza of the verse:

*By a stroke, she bereaved,  
Of all to whom she was dear;  
Her agony was relieved  
By the Sage, making the way clear.*



*Patachara was mindful after listening to the Buddha's sermons*

The Buddha said, “Patachara, be mindful, it is in vain to be living for 100 years without the right perception of the five aggregates, of their rising and dissolution of conditioned phenomena (mind and body), while it is really worthwhile to live even for a day with full understanding of five aggregates.”

## **Sona**

The Buddha praised Sona as the most courageous and energetic nun with earnest endeavour (Araddha Viriya), who became Arhanta due to her valour, dedication and devotion. She was the one who faced the harsh reality of life and was desperate at the hands of her ten children's behaviour towards her in the maintenance to pull her life. She was downcast and she joined the Order of Nuns at the advanced age, again to experience harassment, undesired treatment and bitter criticism by the fellow nuns. Sona took much time to realize the things properly and perfectly as weaknesses and limitations held her fast. Emotions carried her away easily and memory also fell sharply but she was unmoved. The situation did not deter her from marching ahead steadfastly. She served the nuns devotedly and, practised mindfulness and self-observation with indomitable energy. She was very much committed to achieve what she sought for and at last "Labour omnia vincit", Labour overcomes all obstacles. She got victory and reached the destination. One day she was free from the very last fetter by being able to enter the state of Arhanta.

## **Ambapali**

Ambapali, the generous Nagarbadhu, entered the Bhikkhuni Sangha. She was the royal courtesan of Vaishali, who offered Amaravan to Shakyamuni Buddha in Dana (the noble act of giving), after listening to one of her sons, Vimala Kondanna, the Arhanta's sermons.

Ambapali's beauty was compared to the golden sun rising out of the vast ocean but she stood transfixed forgetting herself, her beauty; she was absorbed in the arresting sight of blissful calm and quiet face of Shakyamuni, the Buddha. She bowed low most respectfully and with melted heart and flowing river

of tears, set her head at the lotus feet of the Buddha, cried with the overwhelming sense of feeling indebtedness for His graceful presence at her grove of mangoes. She took her own body as a meditation subject, reflecting on its impermanence and vulnerability to pain, resulting in the attainment of Arhantaship. She was old enough, that led her make comparison of the former beauty with the present withered state as expressed in the following verse: “My hair was black, the colour of bees, hair ending in a curl. Now on account of old age, it has become like fibers of hemp, not otherwise is the word of the speaker of the truth.” She declared, “All my cankers have been destroyed, now there is no more re-becoming”



*Ambapali was rejecting the Princes' offering of wealth in exchange for the permission of Buddha's lunch at their residence*

## **Sundari (Nanda Theri)**

Sundari (beautiful) or Rupa Nanda, also called Janapadakalyani, half- sister of the Buddha, joined the Sangha not because she was inspired to lead the life of Dhamma but that she found most of the kith and kin of hers had already left household life. She felt it the matter of prestige and pride to follow the son of the Shakya dynasty, who became the Enlightened One.

She felt herself the most beautiful in earth. Therefore, she hesitated to make her presence where the Buddha was delivering sermons to Sangha because he could read what was there in others' minds. But the Buddha called especially her to attend the Dhamma Sabha (gathering for Discourses) and with the Riddhi Bala (extraordinary psychic power) he conjured up a vision of even more beautiful lady of extraordinary kind in comparison to her own.



*The Buddha was applying the skilful means to make Rupa Nanda Sundari realize how beauty is just skin deep and impermanent.*

She witnessed direct how the beauty of that woman faded slowly and grown old and decrepit, turning her into the old wrinkled face with gray hair, sunk eyes and the body scooping with just the remains of skin and bones. All of a sudden, it flashed in her mind, how everything changes and not remains permanent, as the rule of nature. She realized beauty is just skin-deep and meditated deeply on impermanence and foulness of human

body. Rupa Nanda Sundari perceived that the body is a citadel of bones with its structure plastered and filled with flesh and blood. The fact is that body has its nature of decay and death. As a result, she was no more infatuated with her physical beauty and she concentrated in finding out undying real beauty. She exclaimed with joy and expressed, "With my diligence, carefully I examined the body and saw this as it really is- both within and without. Listening to Shasta's Dhamma sermons, a sense of detachment overwhelmed my body and mind, the feeling of no ownership of body to experience tranquility and the supreme state of bliss."

Because she practised deep meditation on the loathsomeness of body and with insight, she could experience the tranquility in going forth into homelessness and became free from the material world of desires. The Buddha said, "My Bhikkhuni disciples derive the pleasures from Jhanic absorption, Bhikkhuni Nanda is the foremost in Jhanic ecstasy. She proved herself the foremost in enjoying the supreme bliss of Nibbana by going into deep meditation, Vipassana." While walking or standing, sitting or lying down, Bhikkhuni Nanda thought of the constitution of the body and she found it, basically, no different from a corpse. Meditating diligently on the emptiness of this sentient existence, Nanda Sundari attained Arhantaship.

## **Bhadda Kundalkesha**

It is very difficult for people in general to know and understand the nature of course of life takes and it is quite unpredictable, how events lead people to different destinations as the results of Sanskara (mental formation), they had accumulated in past lives. Bhikkhuni Bhadda Kundalkesha (One with little ear ring like coils of hair) came from a good family before she entered the life of renunciation of Dhamma. As a sweet girl, she was infatuated with the first sight love with a robber, whom she married without second thought but it reached the tragic



end. She faced the betrayal from the person whom she loved wholeheartedly. She pushed him down the cliff to death as the punishment for his conspiracy to murder her by plundering jewels and ornaments she wore.

Then she felt the enormity of the burden of the sinful act on her innermost heart. She did not want to return to lay life to lead the life of sensual pleasure, possessions and the material world was no longer a temptation for her. She wandered here and there seeking the ways of penance and entered the Order of Jain ascetics.

The teachings of Jain could not satisfy her but she marched on and on, and travelled widely searching spiritual teachers to gain learning and knowledge for liberation for fifty years. With excellent knowledge of religious scriptures and philosophies, she turned a very good debater, threw challenges for discussion to different scholars and she was always the victor.

Then it was time for her complete transformation as the result of good past karma. Bhadda Kundalakesh came to face Venerable Sariputra for debate, which she lost due to her confusion and inability to discern the answer of Venerable Bhikkhu's question- "Eka nama- kin" (What is the One, which has a universal application?). The answer is that all beings depend on food for living. She found someone she had been looking for years and she chose Sariputra to be her teacher but he referred her to the Enlightened One, the Buddha. The Buddha preached Dhamma to her and found that she was the foremost amongst nuns, who grasped the highest truth so fast and deeply, and attained Arhantaship.

The Buddha said that a single verse is better than a thousand verses, which deal with trash, not tending to edification, such as one - Realization of the four noble and absolute truths is the way to deathlessness by hearing which, one is calmed.

# Lay Women Disciples of the Buddha

## Visakha

Proving herself a model Lay Buddhist woman, Visakha earned high esteem and honour for her magnanimous heart as the most generous benefactor of the Buddha's time and the Chief Patroness of the Enlightened One and the holy Order of Bhikkhu on a par with Anathpindaka, who gave Jet Van Vihar in Dana (generous act) to Bhikkhu Sangha. Out of her unwavering confidence in Triple Gem, for the Buddha and Bhikkhu Sangha, she built a large monastic Vihara called Purvaram, the Eastern Park, also called Migaramatu- Pasad. Visakha was a woman accomplished in trustful confidence (Saddha), virtue (Sheela), Charity (Caga) and wisdom (panna). She was also deputed by the Buddha to settle disputes that arose among Bhikkhunis.



*Visakha asking the Bhikkhu to go away because her father in law was enjoying the stale food*

From her very early years, Visakha began to manifest her spontaneous respects to Shakyamuni, the Buddha. She was very much used to visit and pay homage to the Buddha. She got first entry into stage of spirituality, Srotapanna at the age of seven. As a daughter of a very well off family, well-mannered with great dignity and poise, her mind was quite inclined to offering Dana to monks and nuns.

Her father Dhananjaya gave her in marriage to a son of a rich person named Migara. Dhananjaya delivered advice to Visakha to follow the discipline with regard to dealing with her husband, father in law, other family members, relatives and to obey the code of conduct for maintaining economic dealings, taking good care for safety at homes and other important advice that help harmonious household life.

Migara was the staunch follower of the naked ascetic Order and he paid no attention at all to Buddhist monks who stood at the door for alms. Visakha felt sad and saying that he was busy enjoying stale food, she made a sharp comment on her father in law, who ignored the monks with disrespect,. She was hinting that Migara was not doing anything to earn merits at present for future but merely enjoying fruit of past noble deeds, Sanskar, the merits he accumulated in the past. When explained clearly, it flashed in Migara's mind the true spirit of Dhamma and the awareness of the meaning and importance of Dana (the act of generosity and offerings). He felt a great sense of gratefulness towards his daughter in law for arousing Sradha( faith and reverence) in him for the Buddha. Then, he began to regard and address her as Mata (mother), who taught him Dhamma. From then on, Visakha was lovingly addressed Migaramata by others too.

Visakha asked an extraordinary type of boon, to be graced with, for her whole life and the Buddha fulfilled to her

delight. Her innate desire to serve monks, nuns and, Bhikkhu and Bhikkhuni Sangha reflected in her prayer for the boon. The Buddha permitted her that she could regularly provide food and robes to the monks, medicine to sick monks and food to those who were attending the sick Bhikkhu. To nuns also she could distribute outer robes, inner robes to put on during the monthly period and robes for them to take bath in the river. Besides, Visakha had permission from the Buddha to serve food regularly to guest Bhikkhus and outgoing Bhikkhus on tour.

Because of the merits she earned by doing noble deeds, she remarkably lived high age of 120 with ten sons, ten daughters, many grandsons and granddaughters. Even in such an advanced age, she could spare time to listen to the teachings of the Shakyamuni, the Buddha. Buddha, The Blessed One said, “Visakha stands foremost among women lay Buddhists who serve as the supporters of the Order.”

## **Queen Samavati**

Samavati as a young girl, fallen victim to harsh days of hunger and thirst, went in search of food. She reached the place, where food was being distributed to the poor. On the first day, she collected food for three persons, the next day for two and the third day for a single person. On being asked the reason, she related the pathetic story how her father and mother passed away on two fateful days one by one and how she was all alone by herself to feed. Moved by her story, the official, who was in charge of distribution of food, adopted her as a daughter.

Queen Samavati could realize how wonders of Dhamma and intricate karmic forces have deep impact on human life. Samavati as a poor orphan girl, who lost parents in her tender age, faced harsh realities of life with patience and tolerance, not moved at all, remained calm in the state of equanimity. All

alone in the world, she chose to be the adopted daughter of an official who had responsibility of caring and distributing food to refugees. Samavati efficiently helped her foster father in his work of food distribution in perfect systematic way without causing any kind of noise and tumult, which impressed the finance minister of Kosambhi. Owing to Samavati 's noble bearing, Ghosaka, the minister, wished to adopt her as Dhamma daughter and asked the manager of food distribution to consent his demand. The foster father unwillingly and woefully agreed to his demand because he did not want to stand on the way of Samavati's good luck, which made her heiress of a vast fortune with an exalted position in the society.

Really, for ordinary human beings, it is quite mysterious and difficult to understand the play of nature and Sanskar that the charming beauty, loving and generous nature of Samavati attracted and impressed king Udena, who took her to be the third consort. It made no difference to Samavati, whether she was in the house of her parents in obscurity or as a poor refugee, or the adopted daughter of the manager or of the finance minister or the wife of the king. She always had peaceful state of mind and was happy regardless of different situations and circumstances, she underwent. Kind hearted she was, she exhibited her love to everyone equally. Her treatment and behaviour towards servants were also very harmonious.

Khujjutara, queen Samavati's maid, used to get eight gold coins from the latter for buying flowers for the palace but she spent four coins only. **Once it so happened** that after hearing the Buddha's sermons, **she felt guilty of being dishonest** and bought flowers spending the whole amount given to her by the queen. Samavati asked about the larger quantity of flowers than usual, Khujjutara **confessed her guilt and fell on her feet**. She forgave and told Khujjutara to go to the Buddha regularly to listen to the sermons and repeat it to her.

By listening to Dhamma as related by her maid, Samavati was overwhelmed with the sense of joy (pitti sukha). She requested king Udena to pray to the Buddha to visit the palace and give Dhamma Desana (sermon) to her. As per the request, the Buddha sent Bhikkhu Ananda to visit Samavati and give Dhamma Desana regularly.

Again, as the consequence of her past karma, Samavati was the victim of the jealous conspiracy of Magandiya, the second queen of the king. She set fire on Samavati and burnt her dead. The Buddha said that Samavati was truly alive because she wholly lived life of righteousness. The Buddha spoke these verses:

*“Heedfulness – the path to the deathlessness,  
Heedlessness - the path to death;  
The heedful ones do not die,  
The heedless are likened to the dead.”*

She lived free of all sensual desires and hatred, and her radiant soft heart was imbued with four divine values like loving – Kindness, Compassion, Altruistic joy and Equanimity. The Buddha said that Samavati was reborn in the realm of the pure Abode, where she would be able to reach Nibbana. The Buddha declared Samavati as the foremost among lay female disciples who dwelt in loving – kindness (Metta) during her whole lifetime.

## **Mallika**

Mallika, a well - behaved and beautiful girl of sixteen, impressed deeply by the grandeur and sublime peaceful face and expression of the Buddha, the Awakened One, put her offering of all the food she had, in His bowl and prostrated at His feet. The Buddha smiled and told Ananda that the girl would reap the benefits of her gift in no time. In the meantime, king Pasendi was retreating his way through the flower garden, where she was singing melodiously because of her feeling of joy caused by the

meeting with the illustrious sage, the Buddha, whom she did not know at all.

The king fell deep in love and accepted her as the chief queen. She showed behaviour well suited for her position as the queen. She did everything from her level best to draw the king to the path of Dhamma and righteousness, and win him over to the teachings of the Buddha. She was successful in preventing King Passendi from committing the sinful acts of sacrificing innocent animals, birds and even human sacrifice as suggested by brahmin priests to get rid of bad consequences of his dreams.

Once the king asked queen Mallika as to whom she loved the most in earth, expecting that she would point towards himself but on the contrary, she said that she loved herself the most. He was not satisfied with her reply and repeated the question before the Buddha. The Buddha said, if the same question was put to him, he would have answered exactly as the queen Mallika did. The event showed how queen Mallika was prudent, well- judged and intelligent.

Mallika was able to prove herself free of jealousy, when the king brought the second wife home. The Buddha admonished the king not to be disappointed at the birth of a daughter to Queen Mallika. The Buddha said that a woman could be superior to man if she was clever, virtuous, well- behaved and faithful. Further, He said that a woman could become the queen of a great king and give birth to a mighty ruler as the result of her ability in bringing up son perfectly.

Queen Mallika understood very well what the Buddha said that the cause of sorrow is Love. She could explain to the king all these things lucid and clear. She had realized well the significance and importance of the Buddha's teachings, and she lived accordingly. She also inspired King Passendi to follow the path shown by the Buddha.

## Nakulapita and Nakulamata (Father Nakula and Mother Nakula)

They are mentioned together in the Buddhist Texts as being among the foremost lay disciples who were praised by the Buddha himself for their unfaltering faithfulness to each other, their conjugal love, unmatched and of extraordinary stature, absolute mutual trust and above all, their reverence and fully dedicated faith towards the Enlightened One. They expressed their longing to be together again in their future lives. The Buddha said, "Should husband and wife wish to enjoy each other's company in this life and afterwards to meet again in the next, they should cultivate the same faith, the virtue, the generosity and the same wisdom, then they will meet again in their next lives." This could be regarded as the Buddha's most practical sermon to householders on perfect, practical and successful conjugal life for divine happiness.

When Nakulapita fell seriously ill, Nakulamata took care of him devotedly as a wife. The Buddha made a comment before Nakulapita with deep appreciation of her act, "You are truly blessed, householder, in having Nakulamata as a mentor and advisor, who is solicitous and concerned for your welfare. Nakulamata is indeed one of the white clad female devotees who are perfect in virtue, stilled of mind and firmly established in Dhamma."

The Buddha explained the prerequisite for harmonious married life in details in the **Sigalovada Sutta**. Nakulamata and Nakulapita did not **renounce the household life** but they led life in exemplary way **overcoming sensual temptations** and materialistic desires to move **relentlessly towards the path** to emancipation.

We have so many examples of women, who earned reputation as true followers of the Buddha's teachings during the Buddha's contemporary time and very long time afterwards also.



## Renowned Bhikkhuni Sanghamitra

We have so many examples of women who earned reputation as true followers of the Buddha's teachings not only during the Buddha's contemporary time but also very long time afterwards the Buddha's Mahaparinirvana.

Two hundred and eighteen years after the Buddha's Mahaparinirvana (sublime passing away), Asoka, appeared in India as the great emperor, turned extraordinarily a devout Buddhist follower. He with dedication and determination undertook a noble task of merit to spread far and wide the Buddha's teachings by sending Dhamma messengers to different parts of the world. Asoka convened the third Sanghayana (Great Buddhist Council or congregation) with the aim to purge the Sangha of undesirable elements and to take on the proselytization of Buddhism, in view of the strong challenges faced from the Brahminism of Hindu Religion.

Monk Mahendra, Nun Sanghamitra and Charumati were the distinguished personalities who left indelible stamp in the Buddhist history and Buddhists would remember them ever for their outstanding contributions as great son and daughters of Asoka. Mahendra and Sanghamitra shone brightly in Sri Lanka whereas Charumati came to Nepal and married with Devapala, and founded the new town called Devapatan. The credit goes to her for establishing famous Charumati Vihar and many other stupas in Kathmandu and Patan, which as the monuments still exist brilliant.

As per the wish of his father, to undertake important assignment of propagating Buddhism, son Mahendra reached Sri Lanka, worked for and contributed remarkably in the growth and development of Buddhism by giving Dhamma discourses to people there. Sanghmitra also took prabajya (full ordination)

sacrificing materialistic luxurious life and joy, for spiritual elevation, following the footsteps of his brother Mahendra. She sent her son Sramnera Sumana to Sri Lanka along with her brother to strengthen the Buddha Dhamma Mission initiated by Asoka.

After Dhamma listening princess Anola and other 500 women, overwhelmed with the great sense of inspiration in the very within of heart, approached Bhikkhu Mahendra and expressed their virtuous desire to renounce and take Bhikkhuni Prabajya (Higher Ordination). Bhikkhu Mahendra felt need of a Bhikkhuni to ordain them.

Bhikkhu Mahendra and King Devenampiyassa of Sri Lanka after having the intensive Dhamma Discussion, reached conclusion to offer the Higher Ordination to them and it was decided to send for the former's sister Sanghamitra from India for the purpose. The king sent prince Ariththa and other army men to India to request and seek help from Dhamma Asoka.

Asoka had deep consultation with Arhanta Bhikkhu Moggali Tissa Thera, who told him that the Buddha had predicted on the growth and spread of the Buddha's teachings in Sri Lanka after His Mahaparinibbana. Arhanta Bhikkhu Moggali Tissa was happy and he responded affirmatively to the proposal of the mission sent by the king of Sri Lanka. Asoka conveyed the message of request from Mahendra and with his own positive advice asked his daughter Sanghamitra, whether she wanted to go to Sri Lanka for Dhamma undertaking.

Sanghamitra took no time to follow her father's genuine advice gratefully and fulfill the brother's request whole heartedly. The emperor with dignity saw her off along with other ten nuns – Bhikkhunis Uttara, Hema, Pasadamata, Aggimita, Dasika, Aiggu, Pabbita, Malla and Dhammadasi. Other princes like Vidurinda, Sumita and Bodhigupta also accompanied Sanghamitra.

Farsighted Asoka sent with her other skilled people of eighteen kinds like carpenters, masons, painters and ironsmiths to Sri Lanka.

It was in the 12th year of Ashoka's Reign, carrying with her the right south branch of the most revered sacred Bodhi Brikshya (tree) from Boddhi Gaya, which was selected by Asoka himself, Sanghamitra reached Sri Lanka. King Devanampia Tissa planted the sapling of the Bodhi tree at Mahamega vana (Grove) in Anuradhapur with great fanfare. The tree still survives at the same location.



*Emperor Ashoka offering to Sangamitra a sapling of Boddhi Tree to plant in Sri Lanka*

Sanghamitra, profoundly a learned Bhikkhuni, carried out her responsibility and completed joyfully the task of ordaining princess Anola and other 500 women. She created the first of its kind of Bhikkhuni Sangha in Sri Lanka. In due course of time, thousands of women in Sri Lanka took higher ordination as an impact of Sanghamitra's performance in the propagation of

Shakyamuni, the Buddha's teachings and sermons, in and around the country and from there to other parts of the world.

Sanghamitra became instrumental in preaching the Buddha's teachings to people in general and the groups of various strata of society as well. She was able to enhance the status of women with sustained devotion, dedication and diligence. She played an important role in educating people on Tripitaka and she had been able to produce many Tripitakacharyas in Sri Lanka. It will not be exaggerating to say that the credit of solidifying the Buddhist philosophy in Sri Lanka goes to Both Mahendra and Sanghamitra, for which the former laid the foundation.

Sanghamitra became the most famous historical and legendary figure as a nun who contributed remarkably to let spread Buddhism. With her effective Dhamma Discourses, Sanghamitra made women free to be ordained and Buddhism could enter China because of her endeavour. With her devotion and dedication, she could work hard to let Buddhism grow and take deep root in Sri Lanka and from there penetrate in other parts beyond Sri Lanka. With her perseverance and diligence, Sanghamitra reached the highest stage of the Spiritual Gain, Arhanta. After her passing away, her relics was shrined in Chaitya along with Bhikkhu Mahendra's. The Buddhists' world has gratefully recorded the contribution of Sanghamitra because of whom, the Buddha's dispensation in full form has been well preserved in Sri Lanka even today.

Sri Lanka observes Uduvapa Poya Festival on the Full Moon Day of December to commemorate two specific historic events – Theri Sanghamitra Day to celebrate her arrival in Sri Lanka from India to establish The Order of Nuns and also the day to mark her bringing a saplings of the sacred Bodhi Tree from Bodha Gaya and planting it in Anuradhapur. In 1903, the observance of the day revived at the suggestion of Mahabodhi Society of Sri Lanka.

## The Bhikkhus who supported the cause for women's position

It is mentionable here how the noted Bhikkhus in the frontline of Buddha Dhamma Propagation thought about and regard the position of women in the society.

### **Sariputra**

Sariputra, the Dhamma Senapati (General of Dhamma) as he was addressed for his Dhamma Dedication, the most famous chief disciple of the Buddha, foremost in wisdom was named after mother's name, Rupasari. He was also called Upatissa after his father's name Tissa.



*Sariputra paying service to mother by transforming her heart for Sradha  
(Faith and confidence) towards the Buddha*

It was so said, the time was approaching for Sariputra to attain Nibbana (Sublime Passing away), therefore, he wanted to

see his mother, a Brahmin staunch follower of Hindu religion and she had no faith in the Buddha. Sariputra reached Nalaka for the last time to teach Dhamma to his mother and enrich her with Sraddha (veneration and full faith) for Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha so that she could get deliverance from sufferings. The Buddha said that it is not enough, sons and daughters provide just food, shelter and clothing, and take sustenance responsibilities towards parents. It is the inseparable part of Dhamma that they should show the path of Dhamma to father, mother or both if they stray away from the righteous path of Dhamma. Sariputra thought it his duty as a son to seek inner transformation of mother's heart for Dhamma and reverence towards the Enlightened One. Therefore, the Chief Disciple of the Buddha decided to free her mother from wrong views and also to attain his Nirvana in the very chamber, where he was born.

Before attaining Nirvana, Sariputra had been able to liberate himself from debt a son had to pay to mother for her compassionate bringing up. At his deathbed, devas (celestial beings) from heaven came down to his room to provide last minute service and to pay the highest regard and tribute to Sariputra. His mother could witness the scene and she was deeply touched and impressed, how devas from Mahabrahma to Saka (the king of deities) revered her son, Sariputra. He thought it was the most appropriate time to teach and show the path of Dhamma to mother. **The extraordinary situation there created an atmosphere, which helped her realize true Dhamma and great virtues of the Buddha too. She was firmly established in the fruit of the stream entry of srotapanna (the first stage of sainthood) toward Nirvana (the final release from the chain of birth and death). This is an example how the position of reverence had been offered to mother by a son, the first and foremost Bhikkhu of the Buddha's time.**

Another example of Venerable Sariputra's compassion for women was that he brought transformation of heart of Bhadda Kundalakesha, who out of her self - conceit of being well learned of different philosophies, had been roaming to seek a good teacher by throwing challenges to the Dhamma teachers for discussion. It was due to the Sanskar (accumulation of virtues) she earned in previous lives, she had opportunity to come face to face with Sariputra for discussion. After being not able to answer the question from the Venerable, she expressed the will to be his disciple but Sariputra advised her to see and to be graced by the Buddha and to follow the path of Dhamma as shown by Him for the entire benefit of humanity and all the beings of the universe.

## **Maha Moggalana**

Maha Moggalana, one of the chief disciples of the Buddha, noted for the supernatural power and filial piety, came to know that her mother was suffering in the realm of hungry ghosts. Following the Buddha's advice, he was able to rescue her from the woeful state by making offerings to Bhikkhu Sangha on the final day of Varsavasha (three month summer retreat of the Buddha and Bhikkhus),

In the same way, he had been able to liberate a woman, who had been acting in **sinful** ways. He taught her to follow the Buddha's path and **repent past sins** she had committed. The events showed how **leading Bhikkhu like** Maha Moggalana had deep realization of **duty and sympathy** for mother as a son and compassion for **other women also**.

Feminists **should feel pride that Sariputra** got honour and regard as a **mother, who trained the monks** for the fruit of stream – **Entry and Maha Moggalana** as a nurse who led them to the **supreme goal**. **Sariputra like a mother** showed and

guided Bhikshus and lay devotees to the path of emancipation by inspiring them cut through the fetters. Maha Moggalana, like a wet-nurse, nourished the monks' strength and helped them sustain their growth.

Even the great Bhikkhu like Maha Moggalana could not escape and had to succumb to Kamma Vipaka, the relentless and forceful operation of Law of Cause and Effect. He suffered the robbers' merciless attack to death as the consequence of the merciless act of killing of parents in his past life.

## **Aniruddha**

Venerable Bhikkhu Aniruddha was so kindhearted and sympathetic that he helped his sister Rohini cure her skin disease, leprosy. He told to do some meritorious deeds suggesting her to build a refectory for the monks. Further, the Venerable Bhikkhu told Rohini to sweep the floor and fill the water pots every day even while the construction of the Vihara was still going on. Rohini did everything as brother Venerable Aniruddha told her to do. It was the sweet fruit of her service that Rohini got complete cure from the disease with the complexion turning fair, smooth and very attractive, also that she attained srotapatti fruition.

Bhikkhu Aniruddha demonstrated self-restraint and strength of character and it not only did his own good but also brought benefits to women at the situation prone to moral degradation, leading them to hold the path of righteousness. Aniruddha had senses well under his control not to pay any attention to women's allurements and through the strength of his purity, he mastered the situation to prevail upon women positively for their spiritual elevation.



## **Ananda**

Ananda was regarded and well-known as the true Guardian of Dhamma, constant personal attendant and helper of the Blessed One, the Buddha, serving Him with loving deeds, loving speech and loving thoughts like a shadow that does not depart for twenty five years. Among the disciples, the Buddha declared him preeminent with the unique distinction in five qualities that Ananda had heard much of the Buddha's discourses (bahussutnam), had good memories (satimantanam), had mastery over sequential structures of the Buddha's Teachings (gatimantanam), steadfast in study (dhitamantanam) and faithful attendant of the Buddha (upatthakanam).



*Ananda asking water from untouchable girl named Chandalika to quench the thirst*

Ananda, the son of Shakya king Amitodana, became the personal attendant of the Buddha, Aggaupatthayaka, in the 20th year of the Buddha's ministry. Ananda stood out for having the

most retentive memory, most of the sutras of the Sutta pitaka being attributed to his recollection of the Buddha's teachings during the first Sanghayana (The first Buddhist Council).

According to Dhammapada Commentary, king Pasandi asked the Buddha to teach Dhamma to his queens Mallika, Vasabhakhattia and other women in the palace. The Buddha assigned Ananda to teach them. Another commentary said that the women themselves chose Ananda to be their teacher.

It is said that Ananda learnt 82.000 Dhamma Skandha from the Buddha and other 2000 Skandha from other Bhikkhus.

Ananda had demonstrated the great and extraordinary type of sympathy to Mahaprajapati Gotami, the Buddha's foster mother, who intensely desired to renounce home to become Bhikkhuni and she begged the Buddha for the permission for going forth of women from home to homelessness in the Dhamma and discipline proclaimed by the Tathagata.

Because the Buddha rejected Prajapati's request three times, out of compassion and sympathy, Ananda decided to intercede using indirect method asking the question, whether women had ability to gain the fruit of different saintly stages from stream entry to the highest level. As the Buddha answered affirmatively, Ananda appealed Him to give consent to the genuine demand of Mahaprajapati to establish the Order of Nuns. He spoke in favour of Prajapati's genuine demand with humble but forceful **tune and even very respectfully** reminding Tathagata, how she **brought him up** with tender love and affection, and the **meritorious service as the foster mother**. He reminded the **Buddha how Prajapati brought up Siddhartha as her own son and how her son Nanda was handed over to the nurses for Nurshing.**

In response to **Ananda's strong argument**, the Buddha agreed to establish the **Bhikkhuni Sangha**, which inspired

women to lead life of renunciation for liberation from the world of sufferings and for the supreme bliss of Nibbana. Ananda was regarded as instrumental and the creation of the first Bhikkhuni Sangha was credited to him.

One of the stories related to Ananda's nature clearly indicates how he was very much sympathetic towards women. A woman with a desire to have a share of merits in the Vihara built by Visakha, wanted to lay a carpet but could not find a space and she was crying helplessly. Ananda reached the woman to rescue from pain, advising her to lay it at the foot of the stairs so that the Bhikkhus might step on it after washing for drying their feet clean. The woman was relieved of her trouble because of Ananada's graceful gesture.

The famous story of Chandalika shows how Ananda to his true spirit of Dhamma, could graciously pacify and give comfort to the harassed woman from whom he repeatedly asked water to quench his thirst although she hesitatingly refused to offer because she was of low untouchable caste. Ananda with humbleness and gracefulness asked water to drink. To the woman's gratitude, he taught her that human beings are equal and there must not be any kind of discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, social status, sex, region and economic condition.

Ananda appeared to be the scrupulous caretaker with the possession of the a great sense of responsibility that he used to take great concern and care, keeping to safe place the things left uncared in absent-mindedness by people, who visited the Vihara to listen to the Buddha's sermons. It so happened the servant- maid of Visakha forgot to take all the precious jewels back to Visakha, which she had left behind under her care and charge. Before visiting the Buddha to listen to Him, Visakha thought it impolite and inappropriate to be adorned with, and to be in presence of the Tathagata.

In general as a rule, Bhikkhus cannot pick up the things lying about but Ananda took a step exceptional to give special concern for the benefit of people. Ananda collected those uncared jewels to the safe place. When Visakha's maid came back to collect the things, she found them put in safe place by Ananda. As advised by Visakha, she did not take it back to her because Ananda had already touched it.

Visakha was very mindful and she did not want to have the possessions back once held by the Venerable Bhikkhu under his care. Visakha wanted to sell all her jewels but nobody was able to buy those things for a lot amount of money. Therefore, Visakha herself bought the valuables and used the money to make the Purvaram Vihara. Visakha offered it in Dana to Shakyamuni Buddha and his Bhikkhu community.

Ananda was lovingly held as the champion for women's cause and he was instrumental in founding the Bhikkhuni Sangha, the Order of Nuns. He was the most popular among nuns, who gave him due honour as their teacher. Ananda showed the mercy on a woman, who wanted to marry him, by giving sermons on moral living and by bringing transformation in her to lead life of renunciation and Dhamma.

It was quite an interesting question put up by Ananda to the Buddha, how women should be treated. The Buddha said not to look at her direct, if it were to look at her, not to speak but in the situation of urgency to speak, one should have purity of mind thinking of her as **mother or daughter or as sister** as suited of her age .

The Buddha referred Ananda in the following way: "He is a wise man, **Bhikkhu, is Ananda. He knows** when it is the right time for **the Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis** of the Order, for the devout men **and women**, to visit the **Tathagata**. Certain it is that Ananda preaches to a number of brethren, to a number of

Bhikkhunis, to devout men and devout women. They are filled with joy at the discourse, but ill at ease, if he is silent”.

To the question, “What type of Bhikkhu would illuminate Gosinga Wood? put up by Sariputra, Ananda’s reply was, “ Such a Bhikkhu would be the one who treasures and hoards what he has been taught , who learns and knows by heart the ideas and preaches them both to the Bhikkhus and Bhikkhunis, and the faithful laities of both sexes.”

## **Angulimala**

Angulimala was famous in the Buddhist Scripture for the story of his inner transformation from a serial killer into Arhanta due to loving – kindness and gracious blessing of compassionate Buddha. Angulimala Sutra is the protective Verse of blessings chanted to release the woman from the labour - pain during the delivery of a baby.

At the sight of the severe pain being experienced by the woman, the peaceful, blissful and the enlightened Angulimala went to her and chanted the verse with compassion that he had not intentionally deprived a living being of life, since his noble spiritual rebirth and he uttered, “ by this truth may you be well and may your infant be safe !” Owing to the power of the truth in Angulimala’s utterance, the woman had easy delivery and the baby was safe.

## Dr. Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhamma Vijaya and her Research Work on Buddhist Feminism

It is great and a very good news for the upasakas, upasikas and the Buddhist Community of Nepal as a whole that Dr. Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhamma Vijaya, the abbess of Nirvanmurti Vihar, Kimdol, Kathmandu has been accorded with the prestigious title of 'Gantha Vachaka Pandit' by Myanmar Government in the year 2013. It was in recognition of her valuable service to the Buddha Shasana through education and remarkable contribution in the propagation of Shakyamuni, the Buddha's teachings in Nepal and abroad as well. It is also to be noted here that she had got International Outstanding Buddhism Award from International Buddhist Association on the auspicious occasion of International women's Day in 2009.

Nirvanmurti Vihar is the oldest Vihar of Nepal for the nuns. It was founded by Venerable Nun Dhammachari Guruma, who struggled hard, dedicated her whole life as a source of inspiration for other nuns and served the Vihar selflessly. The Vihar reached in a dreadful state of dilapidation and playing a leading role, the most Venerable Dhammavati Guruma of Dharma Kirti Vihar, well aware of their energetic and enthusiastic nature and qualities, and with a great confidence, came forward to put responsibilities of renovation, rejuvenation and reconstruction of the Vihar jointly on the able shoulders of Dr. Venerable Dhamma Vijaya and Dr. Venerable Daw Molini, who has been in Nepal for more than twenty years although she was born in Burma.

Dr. Venerable Bhikkhunis Dhamma Vijaya and Dr. Venerable Daw Molini will be gratefully remembered for ever by the Buddhist community for their outstanding and joint

endeavours to give life and vitality to Nirvanmurti Vihar which is standing outstandingly with dignity as a brilliant example of hard labour, devotion and dedication of nuns and other lay devout buddhists working together for the Buddha Shasana in Nepal.

INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST PROGRESS SOCIETY (FO KUANG SHAN HSI LAI TEMPLE) CERTIFICATE OF ORDINATION	
Date:	DEC 25, 1988
File:	9977
This is to certify that <u>GYAN HEERA TV-ADHAR</u>	
with the Dhamma name <u>MAN SEEN (HSIN SHIH)</u>	
a native of <u>NEPAL</u> born on <u>1954</u>	
was ordained by the <u>VEN. MASTER SHING YUN</u>	
at <u>FO KUANG SHAN TEMPLE</u> on the date of <u>NOV. 27, 1988</u> , has satisfactorily completed all the required training of the Triple Platform Ordination Ceremony at the International Buddhist Progress Society, also known as Fo Kuang Shan Hsi Lai Temple, Hacienda Heights, California, U.S.A. from the period of November 26 to December 25, 1988, and vowed to uphold the precepts for life.	
<p><i>Shing Yun</i> Founding Master of Fo Kuang Shan</p> <p><i>Hsin Ping</i> <i>Hsin Ping</i> Chairman of the Committee Religious Affairs, Fo Kuang Shan</p> <p><i>Hsin Kuang</i> Abbot of Fo Kuang Shan Hsi Lai Temple</p>	
Site Upadhyaya	: Ven. Hsin Kuang
Karma Acarya	: Ven. Tzu Jung
Instructing Acarya	: Ven. Tzu Hui
Witnessing Acarya	: Ven. Tzu Chia
Witnessing Acarya	: Ven. Tzu Yi
Witnessing Acarya	: Ven. Hsin Fang
Witnessing Acarya	: Ven. Yen Yen
Witnessing Acarya	: Ven. Hui Kuang
Witnessing Acarya	: Ven. Yaw Sheng
Witnessing Acarya	: Ven. I Chin



It is the matter of pride for the Nepalese Buddhists that Dr. Venerable Dhamma Vijaya has been able to demonstrate her worth and abilities for the Buddhist causes and

proved herself well deserved for the title awarded to her. It is worth mentioning here that she has wholly dedicated her time and talents to Dhamma, particularly in the sector of education for nuns in Nepal. It is to be noted here that she has made important contribution to Antioch Buddhist Studies Program held each year in Bodh Gaya, India. As written by Dr. Suman Kamal Tuladhar in her article, 'Rising Gurumas in Nepal', Dr. Venerable Dhamma Vijaya has been the Visiting Lecturer in

Dayton University, Willington College in Ohio, and Miramon University in LA in USA. She has been the Resource person for 'Study Abroad' program in India and also the initiator of 'Saving the Young Girls' project in Nepal.

It is praiseworthy how the girls of remote areas of Nepal have been brought to the Nirvanmurti Vihar and how they are given them opportunities to take Prabbajya, to educate themselves on Buddhist Education, to attain formal academic education at various schools of Nepal and to lead life under the wise guidance and close supervision of Dr. Venerable Dhamma Vijaya. It is her noble intention, desires and objectives that her disciples will gradually shine brightly to be able to bear Dhamma responsibilities and take charge of the Vihar in future with their training for life at the Vihar to work for the Buddha Shasana.

What I could see as an observer and upasaka visiting the Vihar is that Dr. Venerable Dhamma Vijaya has farsightedness in earning good community relation by encouraging and motivating people from the locality to take part in Vihar activities and Dhamma performances of Buddha puja and Buddhist rites and rituals.

It has just been a few years back that I am in touch with Dr. Venerable Bhikkhuni and within this very short span of the contact, I have enjoyed many valuable times with her talking, exchanging views and interacting on various buddhist topics, discussing on problems modern day facing, on ways to solve them with buddhist approach, Buddha Shasana and motivating participation in buddhist activities to people in general especially youth. Such a wonderful and fruitful Sharing of Dhamma, ideas and Satsangh (i.e. communication and meeting for good) with Guruma !

Once it so happened and by the way, I told her that I had been translating into Nepali the book, the biography of Most Venerable Master Hsing Yun, the Champion and propounder of



Humanistic Buddhism, and I asked her to write 'A Few Words' for the book.

She was so pleased and accepted to write about her experiences at Fo Guang Shan Temple. Dr. Venerable Dhamma Vijaya wrote, "I have everlasting sweet memory of my stay there at Fo Guang Shan Temple for five years. I am one of the luckiest women from Nepal who had been graced with 'Full Higher Bhikkhuni Ordination' from the great Venerable Master Hsing Yun, who first touched my head for shaving, at Fo Guang Shan Shi Lai Temple, Los Angeles, USA on November 27th 1988. My name was Gyan Heera Tuladhar as a lay woman and my Dhamma name is MAN CHEN after I was ordained by Venerable Master Hsing Yun. Venerable Master explained the meaning of my name which is very significant and meaningful. The word, MAN means fully loaded and CHEN means a boat ready to move or start for the journey. He had inspiring words for me that I should row the Dhamma Boat to Nepal, the birthplace of Shakyamuni, the Buddha to promote Buddha Shasana."

She said that when she heard about the Nepali Version of the book on Venerable Master Hsing Yun being published, her highest respect and honour for him spontaneously overwhelmed her mind. She said that she felt Fo Guang Shan as her homeland where she spent five years learning about valuable and well disciplined monastic life. She said, "I feel great that I can speak Taiwanese fluently. I have been much inspired to learn more and more about Humanistic Buddhism, as our great Master Hsing Yun has taught us."

I am so happy to mention here that Venerable Dhamma Vijaya Gurumaverygraciouslygavemeanopportunitytostudyand go through her Research Paper entitled BUDDHIST FEMINISM thoroughly for which she was awarded most coveted prestigious Dctorate Degree, Ph.D from Magadha University in 2002.

That Research Paper has distinctive features of its own. Its focus was mainly on State of Women, Historical Background and development, the mentalities of contemporary period of the Buddha, the attitude of the Buddha himself toward women and the survey of the reality of how the nuns of the Buddha's time and other periods proved their abilities to achieve Spiritual fruits and stages like that of Arhantas. Her Research Paper is categorically divided into the parts – Introduction, Buddha advocates feminism, Concepts of Modern Feminism, Therigatha, Attitudes toward Renunciation and Liberation, Buddhism and Modern Feminism, The Buddhist Feminine ideals, Ananda and Women, Gotam and Women, and Conclusion.

It has been an impression on me that the Research is an analytical study on women's position and status during The Buddha's time and the periods later. The Research, in my opinion, was a historical survey how women suffered discrimination, disparity, injustice, corruption, hatred and cruel forms of treatment by males at different times and conditions. Females were tortured with lower status and were treated just as sex objects for entertainment of males who thought females as the sources of evils and sins. Females were the victims of male people's attitudes full of biases and prejudices against them and they were barred from even fundamental rights of education. They were regarded as weaker sex making them confined to household chores within the four walls of home and imposing on them the possible restrictions of every kind. They felt insecure as a consequence of patriarchal family system and social structure characterized by male dominance. Men's stern ruling over women pushed them to undeveloped state, which did not actually allow them to come out openly and experience open air world. They were made totally dependent on males, the latter put them in the world of darkness and ignorance. It was an odd prejudicial attitude of that time that when men were oppressed, it was tragedy but when women were oppressed, it was tradition.

Misogynistic texts are found among early Buddhist records. Venerable Guruma writes that what we lack are the corresponding opinions of women against androcentric record-keeping practices. She says that the wrath should be directed not at the presence of misogyny but at the absence of corresponding record of women's frustrations with men. As she said, Therigatha serves as an invaluable counterbalance to convention.

In fact, Shakyamuni, the Buddha was in full sympathy with the women for their hard hit state of affair and came out to revolutionize the mode of thinking and attitudes toward women. The Buddha spoke out that women can be wiser than men and a mother can produce ideal citizens who can change the world for better.

Dr. Venerable Guruma is of the opinion that going through the Buddhist Texts, it becomes clear that it is not the spirit of Buddhism to brand women as the sole source of corruption. Yes, it is true that many times men were called upon to exercise 'caution' in their dealings with opposite sex but it does not mean that women may cause them harm sexually but what it really intended was to admonish them to restrain themselves from the misdeeds against women due to lack of self-restraints on their part .

The Buddha said that the world of sensual pleasures is fraught with evils and if sense experiences are left unbridled, it shatters all bonds of propriety and this should be realized not only by females but also by males.

The Buddha concedes to Ananda that like men, women are also capable of attaining highest fruits of religious life- the stage of Arhantaship. It is true that admission of women into the Sangha was concerned more with the wider problems of monastic organization as a whole because of prevalent situation of cultural and tradiionaal orthodoxy, and religious rigidity which made the Buddha take much time to permit Bhikkhuni Sangha to establish.

In contrast to the texts describing women as snares on a man's spiritual path, we find texts with women teaching men. The Buddha praised the nun Dhammadina, saying that she was the woman of great wisdom and talent, who could sermon her former husband exactly in the same way, if he had to teach him. The Buddha commended many prominent women followers like Khema, Patachara, Sona and so many others in the same manners for their ability to teach Dhamma and for depth of their understanding. Many Theris (women elders), retreated from the mundane world followed the Buddhist Path, won Buddhism's goal and sang their experiences, and also that they taught, meditated and brought others into the path.

Dr. Venerable Guruma writes, "The Buddha praised the female sex, both young and old. He stood up for the infant daughter of Queen Mallika whose birth had disappointed her father king Pasendi". The Sigalovada Sutta demonstrates that the Buddha was also concerned for laywomen and urged their husbands to protect and respect them. The Buddha on numerous occasions repeatedly criticized and challenged hostile attitudes toward women both in religion and in society.

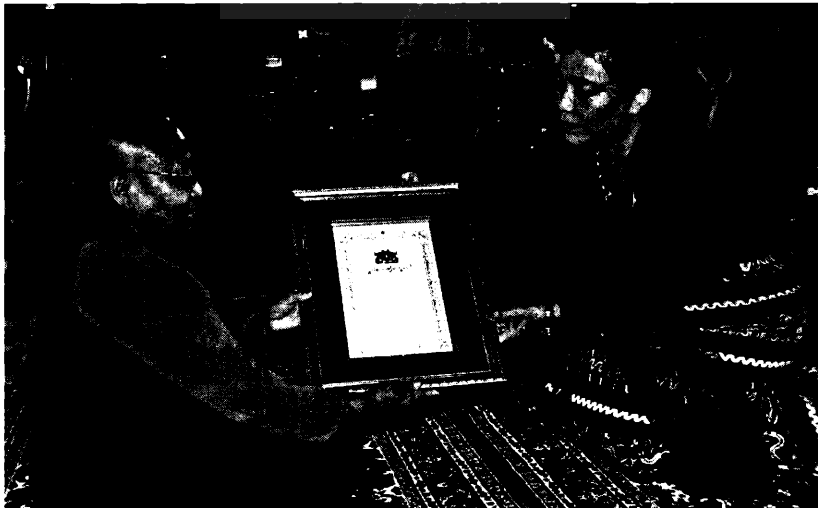
Prajapati Gotami was so inspired from the very within of heart to lead life of renunciation and purity as Bhikkhuni that she did not hesitate to accept the terms and conditions of attha garudhamma (eight rules) to establish Bhikkhuni Sangha. Points should be considered seriously here that these rules came about through necessity as the Buddha was very much concerned for the safety and growth of women at the unavoidable circumstances prevalent that period and it was unlikely that the Buddha personally felt negatively towards women.

Dr. Venerable Dhamma Vijaya concludes her research paper saying that attitudes toward women prevalent throughout Buddhist History were always ambiguous and contradictory.

She writes ,the belief that women are as capable as men of achieving Buddhism's highest goals were less popular than the attitude that women are in fact less capable than men. Her opinion is that intolerable contradictions between views and practice should be removed first. She said that it is important to mandate and institutionalize gender equality, building it completely and thoroughly into the very fabric of Buddhist life and its institutions. If gender equality is to be mandated in all basic ethical guidelines of the tradition, then it is important to correct any institutional non-compliance, whether deliberate or inadvertent.

To conclude I would like to say that this article is just a bird's eyeview on Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhamma Vijaya's Research Work entitled BUDDHIST FEMINISM and, if we dig and go deeper and deeper we will get more and more.

Lastly, I congratulate Venerable Bhikkhuni on achieving the honour of GANTHA VACHAKA PANDIT and wish her best of health, happiness and success in every walk of her life (Published in Nirvanamurti Vihara Bulletine, 2074 Baishakha).





## The list of the distinguished and foremost (Etadagga) Bhikkhunis according to their merits, as declared by the Buddha himself :

1. Mahaprajapati Gotami – The foremost among the disciples, who were of long standing in the Order.
2. Khema – In the possession of profound knowledge.
3. Uppavanna – In the possession of supernatural power.
4. Patachara – Wise and adept in Vinaya.
5. Dhammadina – Skilled in expounding Dhamma.
6. Nanda Sthavira – In abiding in Jhanic absorption.
7. Sona – In diligence and earnest effort.
8. Sakula Sthavira – Proficient in the supernormal power, deva eye.
9. Bhadda Kundalakesh Sthavira–Who attained Path Knowledge quickly.
10. Bhaddakapilani – Who could recall Past existence.
11. Yasodhara (Bhaddakaccana)–Possession of Great supernormal power of recalling incalculable past lives and a hundred thousand world system.
12. Kisa Gotami – On being contended with inferior robes.
13. Singalakamata – Strong Conviction

A Report on One day Seminar Organised by Nirvanmurti Vihar  
Kimdol on the occasion of Women's Day 2017;

## Bhikkhuni Prajapati Gotami's Struggle and Contribution

*"A wise person may not always be a man in all matters,  
A woman, with discerning wit in a given situation,  
May herself also prove to be a wise person."*

*- Bhadrakundalakeshi Theri (Theri Gatha)*

*"What should the woman's nature to do with them (or hinder)  
Whose hearts are firmly set, who, ever move,  
with the growing knowledge onward in the path.*

*-Soma Theri (Theri Gatha)*

To mark the day of special significance, on 8th March 2017, the flexes or banners were displayed at different places in the Dhamma Hall of Nirvana Murti Vihara, Kimdol, Kathmandu. There were the verses, the poetic expressions or sacred utterances of the Buddha's contemporary Theris (the Bhikkhunis). This year's International Women's Day under the title of Buddhism and Women's freedom, was observed with full-fledged function and a Symposium, the theme being "Bhikkhuni Prajapati Gotami, her Struggle and Contribution", at the direction of the Most Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhammavati and at the initiative of Dr. Venerable Bhikkhunis Dhamma Vijaya and Dr. Molini.

W.S. Pereraya, Her Excellency, the ambassador of Sri Lanka, was the Chief Guest on the occasion and the symposium was held with the full spirit, enthusiastic and active participation of the intellectuals, lady- literary figures, researchers and professors. The programme was proceeded with the best wishes message and greetings from Venerable Bhikkhu Dharmamurti



Mahasthvir, the abbot of Anandakuti Vihara. Really, it was the momentous occasion of pride for all women. There was a very useful and enlightening discussion in the Dhamma gathering, on how the Buddha enlightened the contemporary women society to the supreme state of bliss of Nirvana, by giving mental freedom without discrimination between male and female.

In the theme paper, presented by Venerable Kusum, it has been focused that there has been no separate path for males and females in the Buddha's teaching, but only one path to Supramundane attainment and fruitions



In her theme paper, Venerable Bhikkhuni Kusum threw light on the greatness of Prajapati Gotami, who realized the highest spiritual and holy state of Arhanta with Catupratisambhida Knowledge (Fourfold Analytical knowledge) and Riddhi bala (the possession of extraordinary power of performing miracles). Prajapat Gotami attained the highest holy stage due to her strength of knowledge and practice of Sheela (moral values), Samadhi (one-pointedness of mind) and Prajna (intuitive knowledge). It was great that Prajapati Gotami performed the miracles, when the Buddha asked her to display so to impress upon men and women there.

Venerable Viryavati in her paper, highlighted on Mahaprajapati Gotami's most remarkable contribution on the progress and "go ahead" of women. With overwhelming sense of love and affection as a foster mother of Siddhartha, Prajapati Gotami herself personally wove and made ready the Chivara, to be donned by the Buddha and offered it in Dana (the noble deed of giving), to the Enlightened One. King Suddhodana's sublime passing away (parinirvana), Higher Ordination (Bhikkhuni Prabajya) of Prajapati Gotami, eight rules of conditions (Attha Garudhamma), Attainment of Arhanta Marga phala, Gotami's Parinirvana and the Buddhas's participation in her funeral have been well described in Venerable's paper. Prajapati Gotami attained Parinirvana at the age of 120 and during her life period, she demonstrated her virtues and values like sacrifice, Striving, endurance and discipline, which deserve to be emulated, by women of modern day civilization.

"Buddhism, Prajapati Gotami and women's freedom" was the title of the presentation of Associate Professor Urmila Tamrakar. She made start of her paper explaining, when and why International Women's Day observed, and how the Buddha treated equally both men and women in imparting his teachings. Prajapati Gotami's, significant and important role for voicing women's freedom, racial and sexual equality in the Buddha's Dispensation, monks' eradication of affliction and impurities, striving for the bliss of liberation or emancipation and blissful utterances after the spiritual attainments were the special features of her paper.

Theri Gatha is the oldest historical collection of poetry anthology, the first of its kind of women in Pali language, seventy- six Bhikkhunis' expression as their own composition and creativity, regarding their striving for spiritual elevation. In this paper, included the facts, how the Buddha spoke the words

of appreciation for the women, who made tremendous progress in spiritual attainment.

The participants raised many different interesting questions during question-answer session of the programme, which was conducted by Dr. Suman Kamal Tuladhar, the facilitator. Is there Bhikkhuni Association or not? Who is the president, if there is? Is it Garudhamma or Gurudhamma? Do Arhanta Bhikkhunis require pay respect to Sramaneras? Five hundred Bhikkhunis got Arhantahood, all at a time, is it possible? What is the meaning of Theri? These are the questions, which the presenters very impressively and effectively gave the answers.

Dr. Venerable Dhamma Vijaya and Dr. Venerable Molini expressed their noble intention to continue to organize such a programme every year to introduce Buddhist women of wisdom internationally.

Forwarded by *Lochantara Tuladhar.*

Translation : *Deva Kaji Shakya*



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5. Great disciples of the Buddha – Nyanapurnika Thera and Hellmuth Hecker
6. The Buddha and His Teaching – Narada Mahathera
7. Pen Portraits of Ninety Three Eminent Disciples of the Buddha – C. DE Saram
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9. Treasury of Truth – Venerable Weragoda Sarada Mahathero
10. The Dhammapada – K. Sri Dhammananda
11. Digha Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya, Samyutta Nikaya– Dunda Bahadur Bajracharya
12. Buddhajiwan - Chitrawali : Acharya Satyanarayan Goyanka



*Buddha giving Sermons to Mahaprajapati Gotami*



*Nakulmata serving her ill husband Nakulpita*



*Slave girl Khajjutara with queen Samavati, accepting her guilt*



*The Statue of Shakyamuni Buddha, the Enlightened One, at Gaya*



*Vaisali - The Sacred place, where Bhikkhuni Sangha was first established*

## Translator / Author



**Deva Kaji Shakya**

### **Translation of Venerable Master Hsing Yun's Books into Nepali**

1. Epoch of Buddha's Light
2. Humanistic Buddhism - A Blueprint for Life
3. The Everlasting Light: Dharma Thoughts of Master Hsing Yun (4 Parts)
4. Thoughts on Life, Diligence and Harmony
5. Thoughts on Encouragement, Development & Vigilance)
6. Thoughts on Education, Cultivation & Responsibility
7. Thoughts on Nature and the Law of Causality
8. For All Living Beings
9. Bright Star, Luminous Cloud (The life of a simple monk)
10. Environment and Spiritual Preservation

### **Other Translations**

11. What the Buddha Taught-Venerable Bhikkhu Walpola Rahula (Nepali)
12. Bhawana - Ven. Bhikkhu T. Silananda (Nepali)
13. Newar Cuisine - Traditional items - Mr. Raj Kaji Shakya (Nepali into English)
14. Who ordered this truckload of dung ? - Ajahn Brahm
15. Illustrated History of Buddhism - Maha Gandarivana Sayadaw Agga Mahapandita Ashina Janakavivansa
16. Nepal - Russia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NRCCI)  
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### **Original Books**

17. Buddha's Light (English)
18. Buddha Jyoti (Nepali)
19. Home away from Home - Being with my Loved ones (English)
20. Venerable Dr. Anoja, A Visionary Personality (English)
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23. A Theme Paper on Buddhism for happiness and Peace (English)
24. BLIA Nepal Chapter in Action (English)
25. A Theme Paper on Economic Aspect of Buddhism (English)
26. Buddhist Feminism – A Dhamma Journey (English Jointly with Dr. Venerable Bhikkhuni Dhamma Vijaya)



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