

ARE WOMENFOLK A RELIGIOUS MINORITY FROM A RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE? A BUDDHIST APPROACH

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The prime aim of this paper is to discuss whether women are a truly religious minority from a religious perspective and how Buddhism looks at it. When some religions exclude women from their hierarchies and rituals the inevitable implication is that females are inferior. Therefore, the position of women has been a subject of considerable interest in recent decades. It seems that feminism has evolved even within religious institutions against that inferiority. Such developments within religious institutions seek to achieve gender equality. However, the position of women in the main religious traditions of the world needs to be revisited because women have traditionally been regarded as inferior to men both physically and intellectually. In Christian countries, the issue of the ordination of women has been a controversial topic, and some Churches face the prospect of dissension, and even schism on this question. The position of women in Islam and Hinduism has been the subject of considerable discussion and controversy. This could be a result of the patriarchal system of those religions. In contrast to main religious traditions, Buddhism maintains a reasonable attitude towards women in the contemporary world where the woman is accorded with respect and rights. From a Buddhist perspective, the woman plays a significant role in the religious, social, economic and political life. This reappraisal has touched the question of the position accorded to women in the main religious traditions of the world. Buddhism accepts human potential without concerning any gender discrimination as male and female. This becomes evident in the way the Buddha conceptualized women as being equal to men in his four-fold division of the Buddhist community as monks (*bhikkhu*), nuns (*bhikkhuni*), male devotee (*upāsaka*), and female devotee (*upāsikā*). This is a library-based study; therefore, the data for this study were collected from the primary Buddhist teachings and secondary sources.

Keywords: Buddhism, Women, Gender Inequality