

## A CONTEMPORARY EXPLORATION OF BUDDHIST NUNS FROM A FEMINIST POINT OF VIEW

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Buddhism is considered a religion of non-discrimination, and it provides an excellent platform for gender and empowerment. However, the development and perception of women within Buddhism, especially nuns, has been susceptible to cultural factors resulting in sex discrimination. In recent decades, the Buddhist feminist movement has grown to address these issues. Within this trend, the present paper highlights the mutual dynamics of Buddhist doctrine and feminism in addressing the concerns of oriental Buddhist nuns in Myanmar and other countries. Fundamentally, Buddhist feminism recognizes that although the basic teaching of Buddhism affirms that women and men possess the capacity for enlightenment, the decline of the Bhikkhuni order in many Theravada Buddhist countries over centuries exemplifies how patriarchal influences have sidelined women's roles within the Sangha. Nonetheless, the more recent trend of the revival of Bhikkhuni ordination in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Western countries indicates a change in gender hierarchy. Hence, this paper investigates the achievements of feminists in addressing the defining issues of women's liberation in a Buddhist context. Feminists in Buddhism further reformulate the revival of ordination rights to women and address the systemic exclusion of women. In specific terms, the examples taught by Ayya Khema, Bhikkhuni Dhammananda, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, and DawKetumala show how Buddhist nuns have emerged to the occasion as spiritual leaders although they faced oppressive gender roles. Beyond ordination rights, the empowerment of Buddhist nuns is also reflected in their increasing involvement in social work, education, and meditation teaching. Nuns are leading social justice initiatives, promoting mental health, and offering spiritual guidance to both lay and monastic communities; thus, extending the boundaries of traditional roles ascribed to them. This paper expects to argue that equality between men and women is sought after in Buddhist feminism. It is concluded that Buddhist feminism, as well as the empowerment of women in Buddhism, is quite an effective approach to the examination of women's place in Buddhism today. The study illustrates the struggle towards gender equality and the struggle to create a positive change in the community, as women practicing Buddhism strive for attention in the monastic and lay order structure.

**Keywords:** Feminism, equality, empowerment, patriarchy, Buddhism