

**DOES THE TERM BHIKKHU REFER ONLY TO MONKS?
A CRITICAL OBSERVATION ON THE APPLICATION OF TERM
BHIKKHU IN THE SUTTA-S WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE
COMMENTARIES AND SUB COMMENTARIES**

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Introduction

Bhikkhu the term is simply rendered in to the English as monk. Also, in some places explanations such as 'those who renounced from the household life and entered into the celibate life (*āgāriyaṃ anagāriko*) and 'those who beg' (*bhikkhatīti bhikkhu*) can be found as the renderings of the term.

Disciples of the Buddha are categorized into four parts as *Bhikkhu*, *Bikkunī*, *Upāsaka* and *Upāsikā*. Here terms *Bhikkhu* and *Bhikkuni* are used in a specific sense to denote special types of celibates. There is hardly however, evidence for the term to have been intended for those who entered *sāsana* as monks. *Pabbajjā*, attaining into celibate life is a term to refer to the incidence of converting one into the order of monks. So also *pabbajitas* (those who entered into *pabbajja*) are differentiated from the laity (*gihi*). Thus, *Pabbajjā* signifies renunciation from household life and the clothing as a celibate. In examining the *Suttantapiṭaka*, in more than 75% of *sutta*-s targeted population has been named as *Bhikkhū* and this is a frequent statement used by the Buddha in addressing the assembly gathered to listen the *Dhamma*. The Buddha's addressing five ascetics just before their ordination is in my point of view also a strong evidence for that the *Bhikkhu* was common to monks and laity dedicated in practice. Thus with a close observation it is possible to make a most probable conclusion that the Buddha had preached those discourses not only for monks but also for enthusiastic laity.

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This paper mainly focuses on examining the meaning of the term *Bhikkhu* and its common usage for both monks and ardent practitioners.

Methodology

Different contexts of the usage of the term *Bhikkhu* are expected to analyze with reference to the *Suttanata* and *Vinayapitaka*-s and the meaning of the term and applied context are hope to elaborated deeply associating commentaries and sub commentaries of the particular text. Lexical sources are also analyzed critically in examining the derivation and general meaning of the term.

Discussion

Etymologically the term *Bhikkhu* has derived from the root \sqrt{bhaj} to wish, to share, to partake. (Monier Williams, 2005, p.756) which means, someone who begs ones needs. The term *Bhikkhu* has been used by the Buddha to introduce his disciples too. In analyzing the *Suttapitaka* this is the frequent statement used by the Buddha to address the gathering who summoned to listen the *Dhamma*.

"*Tatra kho bhagavā bhikkhū āmantesi – ‘bhikkhavo’ ti. ‘Bhadante’ ti te bhikkhū bhagavato paccassosum.*" (M.N I,p.1)

Commentary explains the reason for this address as, "While other gods and humans are gathering, why does the Buddha address as *Bhikkhū*, because of the seniority, Excellency, neighborhood and well arrangement. Preaching of the Buddha is common for complete gathering (fourfold community). In the assembly, *Bhikku*-s are senior. They were born first, there are excellent." (Saṃyuttanikāyaatṭhakathā II, p.1)

Anyway, the argument made here is that, by using the term *Bhikkhu* did the Buddha indicate or denote only the monks? Or does the term *Bhikkhu* specifies monks? In analyzing the some contexts of the *Suttapitaka* the Buddha addresses some people as *Bhikkhus* before they enter into the order

as a member of this dispensation or before his *pabbajjā* (renunciation). The most obvious example that can be quoted in this context is that in granting the *Ehi bhikkhu upasampadā*, the Buddha address the particular person as *Bhikkhu* before his arrival or renunciation. *Āṅgulimālasutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya* denotes that, "The enlightened one, the sage of the great compassion, the teacher of the world with its gods, addressed him with these words come *bhikkhu*, and that was how he came to be a monk." (M.N. II, p.100)

Here it clearly mentions that, the Buddha addresses to the *Āṅgulimāla* that, come *bhikkhū* just after he understood wrong doings that he has committed, knowing his intention of freeing form renouncing from evil but before he wear the robe. The Particular incident clearly indicates that attaining into the order is not important to be a *Bhikkhu*.

Other point which need to be examined on this standpoint is the *Jatāsutta* in the *Sagāthavagga* of the *Samyuttanikāya*, here it explains that,

Sīle patiṭṭhāya naro sapañño, cittaṃ paññañca bhāvayaṃ;
Ātāpī nipako bhikkhu, so imaṃ vijaṭaye jaṭaṃ

(the person who established on the virtue, wise developing the mind and wisdom, a *Bhikkhu* ardent and discreet he can disentangle this tangle.)

In this verse firstly it uses the term *naro* (person) and secondly it uses the term *Bhikkhu* (monk) which means that, the person who practices aforementioned qualities should be known as the *bhikkhu*. In other words, it indicates that no need to be renounced from the house hold life to acquaint himself as a *bhikkhu*. In commenting on this point Ven. Buddhagosa elaborate that in his *Visuddhimagga* which is respected as the magnum opus on the interpretation of Buddhist fundamentals that, "*Sāmsāre bhyaṃ ikkhatīti bhikkū*" (one who sees the fear of *samsāra* he is called *bhikkhu*). Thus, anyone who realize the real nature of the existence and work with real intention for the final emancipation he should be known as a monk.



Apart from these, any many place of the Pali canon it explains that one should endowed with certain qualities to become a monk.

Conclusion

Terms *pabbajita*, *samaṇā sakyaputtiyā* and *āgārika* these term specify the person who has renounced from the household life, but the term *Bhikkhu* had been used by the Buddha to denote *Bhikkhu*, *Bhikkhuni*, *Upāsaka* and *Upāsikā*.

Key words : *Bhikkhu*, *Suttapiṭaka*, *Vinayapiṭaka*, *Aṭṭhakathā*

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